

## A Solution Of Sorts

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10/07/23

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (In order of appearance):

MARGARET HENRY: 50s, Female - A Leader

HARVIN BARON: 60s, Male - A Leader

HOPE HENRY: 20, Female - Margaret's daughter

ZERLINA: 45, Female - Margaret's chief aid

ELBERT: 45, Male - Harvin's chief aid

CHASE BARON: 20, Male - Harvin's son

NOTE ON CASTING: The female characters can and should be cast diversely with full color consciousness, so long as the role of Zerlina does not become the only character of color and consequently fall into the trope of the magical negro.

SETTING:

The story takes place in a fantastical yet familiar world that has been inspired by the present, mindful of the past, and wary of the future. The play is set at a charming country retreat. The camp is made up of many cabins in a rustic setting, some of which serving as housing for the political dignitaries that often stay here, other cabins used for meeting rooms, screening rooms, a dining room and other such amenities.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS:

United we stand, divided we fall. Hate makes monsters of us all. A country's partisan politics has grown so divisive, and its electorate has grown so angry and fueled by hate, that the country is forced to divide into two smaller nations, with the leader of one party taking over one republic and the leader of the other ruling the second. Amidst the tense negotiations for new borders, and despite all the rancor, an illicit love sparks the need for a desperate solution.

ACT 1

SCENE 1

A charming country retreat. The camp is made up of many cabins in a rustic setting, some cabins serving as housing for the political dignitaries that often stay here, other cabins used for meeting rooms, screening rooms, a dining room and other such amenities.

Currently, we find ourselves in a large meeting room. On an easel is a large map of the country United Federation of States. HARVIN BARON faces the map with a marker in hand, contemplating what changes he wants to make. MARGARET HENRY looks out a large window in the back, while talking into her cell phone.

MARGARET

Hi honey, it's mom. You're probably still asleep. Just wanted to see if you're... feeling any better today. Call me when you wake, ok? If you want... I love you!

She hangs up and turns to Harvin.

HARVIN

Why do you do your hair like that? You know it's not very flattering.

MARGARET

Please don't comment on my looks. Do you not own a mirror? You must know how unattractive you are.

HARVIN

I don't know that. I see myself through my wife's eyes.

MARGARET

Your *ex*-wife?

HARVIN

My *ex*-wife, my next wife. They all think I'm very attractive.

MARGARET

I highly doubt that.

HARVIN

They think what's in my pants is attractive.

MARGARET

Your wallet?

Harvin smiles.

HARVIN

You seem angry. You should be happy.

MARGARET

I don't like you.

HARVIN

Be happy about that. We have that in common.

MARGARET

You don't like you either? I find that hard to believe.

HARVIN

Look, there are many other women I'd rather stay locked in a room with-

MARGARET

Locked in a room is the only way they'd stay.

HARVIN

And even more women who would kill to be stuck in a room with me.

MARGARET

Kill themselves.

HARVIN

My point is, since this is clearly not enjoyable for either of us, let's not waste a lot of time hashing this thing out.

(Pointing to the map)

Let's just draw a line down the middle, you take one side, I'll take the other, we'll be on our way.

MARGARET

You know we're not splitting a cake here.

HARVIN

Of course I know that. I don't share cake.

MARGARET

We are dividing the country in two.

HARVIN

Unless its a fruit cake. Those are disgusting.

MARGARET

The decisions we make today can uproot the lives of millions of people.

HARVIN

You can have all the fruit cakes.

MARGARET

We need to do this in a way that is fair and representative of the people who voted for us.

HARVIN

Who cares about the people?

MARGARET

We are public servants.

HARVIN

Speak for yourself. I am nobody's servant.

Margaret shakes her head in disgust.

MARGARET

Right. You are a malignant tumor. A neoplasm that has metastasized and infected every decent thing about our once great country.

HARVIN

Your knowledge of cancer vernacular is making me nervous. Are you OK?

MARGARET

You're a fat, ugly piece of shit.

HARVIN

Thanks for dumbing it down. Look, is this how you want to start our new diplomatic relationship? By casting insults?

MARGARET

I'm stating facts.

HARVIN

Facts are overrated. It doesn't matter what's true. It only matters what people believe.

MARGARET

Not everyone believes your line of crap.

HARVIN

Enough of them do. Millions, in fact. That's why I won.

MARGARET

You didn't win.

HARVIN

No? I've upset the whole political establishment, done what countless pundits and experts have said was impossible, and now we're dividing the country into two separate nations, one of which will be mine to lead as I see fit. I think I kind of won.

MARGARET

I weep for your nation-

HARVIN

Don't.

MARGARET

Whose leader is a racist, sexist-

HARVIN

Is it too hard to see the map from your moral high ground?

MARGARET

Would-be dictator.

HARVIN

(Shaking his head)

Margaret, what do you want? What can I offer you so that we can get on to what we came here to do? To what we've been tasked here to do! I mean, we're not going to do this all week, are we? This is just a day one thing, right? Cause I can put up with your insults and your masculine hairdo, but the repetition will drive me crazy. If you don't want to divide the country geographically, we can divide it demographically, we can throw darts, we can roll a 20-sided die. Make me an offer, but let's cut this shit up! The sooner we finish, the sooner you are done with me.

MARGARET

You'll forgive me if I take more than a few minutes severing what took centuries to build.

HARVIN

I forgive you. But my son, Chase, is with me on this trip. It's his birthday. He's never been to this part of the country before and I'd like to show him some sights before we head back home.

Margaret turns on him.

MARGARET

This is all your fault!

Harvin nods. He understands.

HARVIN

Oh. I see. I get it. You want to clear your conscience, is that it? Is that what you want? To prove you're not responsible?

(Then, with pride)

You're not! I did this.

MARGARET

You and your party.

HARVIN

No! No, no. Fuck them! I did it alone.

MARGARET

You're all cast from the same mold.

HARVIN

Don't call us all the same. That hurts my feelings.

MARGARET

You're right. You are much worse.

HARVIN

(Genuinely forgiving)

Apology accepted.

MARGARET

With each iteration of you monsters you all evolve into something just a little bit more horrifying.

HARVIN

We'd like to think it was an intelligent design.

MARGARET

And now we have you to contend with. Harvin Baron. The most hideous yet.

HARVIN

That's right. The best of the worst. The fittest to survive! So, if you hope to contend with me, Margaret, you better hope your side has adapted too.

MARGARET

We have you fucken megalomaniac!

Harvin looks her up and down, impressed by the language.

HARVIN

Yeah. I see that. Look at you. Cursing now? Calling me a fat piece of shit? That's not the Margaret I know. I wonder... what did you evolve into?

(Then, pointedly)

Maybe it's not all my fault.

Black out.

## SCENE 2

Margaret and Hope Henry's spacious 2 bedroom cabin. A forlorn and sickly HOPE HENRY, Margaret Henry's daughter, naps on a couch in the main room.

ZERLINA, Margaret's chief aid, enters. She pulls the blinds letting the sunlight enter the darkened room. Hope stirs, though is still half asleep.

HOPE

No! Close them! It's too bright.

ZERLINA

It's past noon. It's time to get up.



HOPE

I don't want to get up. You get up!

ZERLINA

I'm up. I've been up for 6 hours.

HOPE

... 6 hours? You must be so tired. Go back to sleep.

ZERLINA

Hope, it's lunch time. Let's get you dressed. We'll go out. Get you some food.

(Then)

The doctor says you have to eat if you wish to regain your health.

HOPE

What does the doctor know?

ZERLINA

About your health?

HOPE

Maybe I don't want to regain my health.

ZERLINA

Nonsense.

HOPE

Maybe I just want to sleep.

ZERLINA

You can't sleep your life away. That's no way to live.

Hope suddenly starts to cry.

HOPE

(Despondent)

Depends on the alternative.

Zerlina picks up the phone in the room.

ZERLINA

(On the phone)

Can you bring us some coffee? Thank you.

She hangs up.

HOPE

Please go. I don't feel well.

ZERLINA

It's in your head.

HOPE

It's not in my *head*.

ZERLINA

The doctor says whatever is wrong with you, it's up here. You're making yourself physically ill. Your mother is very worried. As am I.

HOPE

You should be. Because I don't see myself getting better. Ever.

ZERLINA

There are some pills you can take. But you need to take them with food. They will make it so you won't feel so blue.

HOPE

What color will I feel?

ZERLINA

Maybe yellow. The color of positivity. Enthusiasm. Happiness. Or green. The color of harmony. Nature. Growth. Or pink. Playful. Young-

HOPE

Or black! The color of death.

ZERLINA

Some associate black with death, others associate it with elegance. Intelligence. Prestige.

HOPE

Then white. The absence of color.

Hope walks away from her.

ZERLINA

White paint is the absence of color. White light is the sum of all colors. White is complicated. As is black, by the way. When it comes to the question: are black and white colors, the answer ironically is not black and white.

HOPE

I lost interest in this conversation.

ZERLINA

Fine. Let's just focus on your health then.

HOPE

I don't care about that either.

ZERLINA

My grandmother once said to me, "If you don't have your health..."

(Then)

She died before she finished that sentence, but I don't like where she was headed. So, we need to get you better. I think the pills really might help.

HOPE

I already take pills.

ZERLINA

What pills?

HOPE

They help me sleep.

Zerlina sees a bottle of pills on the coffee table.  
She picks them up to examine them.

ZERLINA

Sleeping pills?

HOPE

They help me dream.

ZERLINA

These pills are dangerous. They have side effects. Dry mouth. Heartburn. They can make you gassy.

HOPE

That is dangerous.

ZERLINA

They make you constipated. They cause diarrhea.

HOPE

How can you be constipated and have diarrhea?

ZERLINA

They make you loopy and forgetful. When is the last time you took one?

HOPE

I don't remember.

ZERLINA

You shouldn't be taking these. If you take too many of them-

HOPE

You want me to take your pills but I can't take mine? They help me dream!

ZERLINA

The pills I'm talking about will help you be happy.

She starts to cry again.

HOPE

I'm only happy... when I dream.

Zerlina watches her helpless.

ZERLINA

Hope... I can't bear to see you like this. What can I do? I would do anything, you know that. I convinced your mother to bring you on this trip because I hoped it would snap you out of whatever it is that's causing this malaise you've been in for months.

HOPE

I'm afraid this trip has only made things worse.

ZERLINA

Don't you want to get out of this room? There are sights to see and history to explore. We're in a beautiful part of the country-

HOPE

The country is falling to pieces.

ZERLINA

Is that what's bothering you then? The state of our Union?

HOPE

(Correcting her)

Unions. There will be two when we finish here.

ZERLINA

I'm well aware of what's going on.

(Then)

So that's what's got you down?

HOPE

Not exactly.

ZERLINA

Then what?

(Then, gently)

I can't help if I don't know.

HOPE

You can't help.

ZERLINA

Let me try. I've known you since you were a child, girl. You're like my very own. If there's something I can do, I'll do it. Please! Trust me!

Hope hesitates, but after a moment, she faces Zerlina.

HOPE

I'm in love.

ZERLINA

(Surprised)

That is what's gotten you so depressed lately? So sickly depressed?

HOPE

I'm afraid so.

ZERLINA

Oh my dear girl, love is not something to be afraid of. It's wonderful.

HOPE

I'm in love with Chase Baron.

ZERLINA

Holy shit!

Zerlina recoils from the news.

ZERLINA

Chase Baron? Harvin Baron's son?

HOPE

Yes.

(Then)

You mustn't tell mother.

ZERLINA

Tell your mother? Are you insane?

HOPE

I can only imagine what she'd do if she found out.

ZERLINA

How do you and Chase even know each other?

HOPE

We go to the same university.

ZERLINA

Right, of course.

(Then)

And how long have you been together?

HOPE

Been together? We're not together! He doesn't love me!

ZERLINA

Thank God.

HOPE

That's the problem! He'll never love me!

ZERLINA

And that is for the best. You two are from different worlds. You don't belong together.

HOPE

My heart says otherwise.

ZERLINA

Your heart is young and resilient. You will fall in love again.

HOPE

No! I won't!

She starts to break down again, crumbling into a chair.

HOPE

(Crying)

I won't.

ZERLINA

(Concerned)

You're killing yourself.

HOPE

Good.

Zerlina considers her options, then, gently:

ZERLINA

How do you know he doesn't love you?

HOPE

They all hate us. And we all hate them.

(Then)

Six months ago, at mother's behest, I spoke. I spoke out on campus about how horrible a man Harvin Baron is.

ZERLINA

Harvin Baron is a horrible man.

HOPE

I detailed every awful thing he's said, all of the horrible things he's done or done in his name.

ZERLINA

I know the speech. I helped write it.

HOPE

(Trying to remember, but still loopy from  
her pills)

I said, "He's a power hungry despot, like the many evil autobots-"

ZERLINA

(Correcting)

Autocrats.

HOPE

"Autocrats before him. He is no different than Germany's Hitler, Russia's Stalin and Mao Tse-Tung from... Canad-"

ZERLINA

China.

HOPE

“China.”

ZERLINA

(Reading the pill bottle again)

What is in these pills?

HOPE

And after I finished the speech, I looked in the audience, and there was Chase Baron, looking back at me with disdain in his eyes. You could hardly blame him, the things I said about his father.

ZERLINA

As I recall, he’s said some horrible things about your mother. Horribly ignorant things. You’re willing to forgive him such ignorance.

HOPE

He’s hardly ignorant. He’s just getting his facts from his father.

ZERLINA

Is that what you call them?

HOPE

He’s obviously assuming that his father wouldn’t lie to him. I make the same assumptions about my mother. God knows I don’t validate everything she tells me.

ZERLINA

You don’t have to. She’s telling the truth. Harvin Baron is vile.

HOPE

But his son is not! Chase is wonderful. I know him. We have classes together. He’s not like his father.

Hope smiles a little, thinking about Chase.

HOPE

He’s a poet, did you know that? He writes songs. And sings them.

ZERLINA

Is he any good?



HOPE

He sings like a bird.

ZERLINA

What kind of bird? Crows are birds. I wouldn't want to hear them sing.

HOPE

A canary. They can sing, right?

ZERLINA

That's one of the things they're good for.

HOPE

Chase is very talented. And more than that, he's gentle and warm and caring. And he's across the compound not 100 feet from me and he won't even look at me. He hates me!

There is a knock on their door.

ZERLINA

(To the person knocking)

Just a minute.

(To Hope)

That's probably the coffee.

HOPE

I don't want coffee. I want Chase.

ZERLINA

But if Chase hates you, what can be done?

HOPE

All I know to do is dream. Dream that I didn't say the things I said. Dream he wasn't the child of Harvin Baron. Dream that our country wasn't so divided with him on one side and me on the other. Dream that he loves me, instead of hates me as he does.

ZERLINA

That's a lot of dreaming.

HOPE

Maybe if I take enough of my pills, I can dream forever.

ZERLINA

(Re: The bottle of pills)

I'm not giving these back to you.

Zerlina crosses to the door to open it.

HOPE

You have to! I need them! Do you know what it's like to have someone hate you so much?

Zerlina opens the door and ELBERT enters.

ELBERT

Zerlina, you hideous, skank!

Elbert sees Hope.

ELBERT

(To Hope)

Oh. Begging your pardon. I thought Zerlina and I were alone.

ZERLINA

(To Elbert)

You'd mind your manners if you knew she was here?

ELBERT

Doubtful. I know she's here now and I still think you're a heinous, horrible beast.

HOPE

I think introductions are in order.

ZERLINA

Don't waste your time. You don't need to know this piece of-

ELBERT

Hello. My name is Elbert.

ZERLINA

This is Harvin Baron's whipping boy.

ELBERT

I am his Aid.

ZERLINA

Baron has Aids? Wait till his constituents find out.

ELBERT

They won't care. They are loyal.

ZERLINA

Loyal? That's not the word I would have used to describe Baron's constituents. Or Baron for that matter.

ELBERT

Must be frustrating being so politically correct. Always unable to use the words you would have used.

ZERLINA

I'm an educated woman. I have a lot of words at my disposal. I am not confined to the offensive ones.

ELBERT

The offensive ones are so succinct. Like shrill. Bitch. Whore.

Beat.

ZERLINA

Excuse me for a moment.

She crosses to Hope, out of earshot of Elbert.

HOPE

He hates you.

ZERLINA

I know. Why don't you go to your room. This could get ugly.

HOPE

It could get ugly?

ZERLINA

I'll deal with him. And then, Hope... I'll sort out your problem.

(Re: The sleeping Pills)

You won't need these again.

HOPE

How are you going to do that? There's nothing to sort out. You said yourself, what can be done? It would take a miracle.

Zerlina considers this.

ZERLINA

I don't believe in miracles.

HOPE

I'm afraid without one, there is no hope.

ZERLINA

Go to your room. I'll be back later. Don't do anything drastic!

Hope exits to her room. Zerlina crosses to her jacket and starts to put it on.

ZERLINA

Sorry Elbert, I'd love to continue this conversation, but I have to go.

ELBERT

Normally that would make me happy. But I have been instructed to speak with you by Mr. Baron.

ZERLINA

You can speak with me later.

ELBERT

Mr. Baron's not a patient man.

ZERLINA

Fortunately, I don't work for Mr. Baron.

ELBERT

He has a few requirements regarding the joint press conference that's scheduled after business here is concluded.

ZERLINA

(Sarcastically)

I can't wait to hear them. Later.

ELBERT

Assuming there will be two chairs, one left of camera, one right, his preferred camera angle is sitting front face to camera slightly favoring the right side, while avoiding his left hair part, and back and sides of hair and head.

Beat.

ZERLINA

Is there a question there?

ELBERT

Will your boss have a problem with that?

ZERLINA

With Harvin Baron's preferred camera angle?

ELBERT

He also requires the lighting be warm and golden, no red tones please.

ZERLINA

I don't do the lighting.

ELBERT

Will your boss have any lighting requirements of her own that might conflict with this?

ZERLINA

Is this really the thing Mr. Baron should be concerning himself with right now?

ELBERT

Good lighting is important.

ZERLINA

Yes, sure, when you lack form and substance, good lighting is critical.

ELBERT

His lack of form and substance didn't stop half the country from backing him.

ZERLINA

Hardly half.

ELBERT

And do you know why they support him?

ZERLINA

Good lighting?

ELBERT

In part.

ZERLINA

When the lighting is good it's so much easier to tell that one candidate is a woman, heaven help us.

ELBERT

(Continuing)

The people that support Mr. Baron, the white working class people, they come from the same part of the country that I do. The same part of the country that has been forgotten about. Those people have nothing. They certainly have nothing to benefit from maintaining a system of order that keeps them at the bottom.

ZERLINA

Have you ever noticed that when people of color have nothing it's because they don't work hard enough, but when white people have nothing it's because there's a system of order that's keeping them at the bottom.

ELBERT

A system of order that your boss represents.

ZERLINA

I assure you Harvin Baron doesn't give a rat's ass about your people.

ELBERT

He cared enough to talk to them. And do you know what they said?

ZERLINA

Jews will not replace us?

ELBERT

They said, "for those of us who have no political voice and come from places that do not matter, the best thing we can do is try to send in a wrecking ball to disrupt the system."

ZERLINA

Baron didn't disrupt the system. He destroyed it. I hope he's proud of himself. Oh, who am I kidding, he's always proud of himself.

ELBERT

We're going to build a new system. Top down democracy. Put the decision making in the hands of people that know what's best.

ZERLINA

That's not new. It's been around for ages.

ELBERT

A system that works for all the people.

ZERLINA

Not all of the people.

ELBERT

All of the right people. Of which you're not one of them.

She throws him a steely gaze.

ZERLINA

Are you sure you're one of them?

(Then)

Margaret Henry doesn't care what side of the camera she sits on, and the golden lighting will suit her just fine. I have to go, so you need to leave.

She shows him the door.

ELBERT

Go. Go do your evil witch's bidding.

ZERLINA

You really hate her, don't you?

ELBERT

Not nearly as much as I hate you.

He walks out the door, but then turns to her.

ELBERT

I hope that doesn't come as any surprise.

ZERLINA

No, you've made it very clear that you hate me. I just don't know why, honestly. Why do you hate me so much? Is it because I have different ideas of how to make government work? Is it because I'm not as conservative as you? Is it because I am a woman? Is it because I am successful? Or is it simply because I said no to you?

ELBERT

I'm about the only person you said no to.

She considers this. Then, gently:

ZERLINA

Well, you should ask again. Maybe you'll get a different answer.

Elbert eyes her suspiciously. Then:

ELBERT

Do you want to-

ZERLINA

No, go fuck yourself!

She slams the door in his face.

Black out.

SCENE 3

Harvin and Chase's spacious 2 bedroom cabin.

CHASE is sitting in the main room, fiddling with a guitar. He plucks out a melancholy melody.

HARVIN enters. Chase abruptly stops playing.

HARVIN

Chase.

CHASE

Hello father.

Harvin eyes the guitar suspiciously.

HARVIN

What are you doing?

CHASE

Nothing. Just playing.

HARVIN

I didn't know you played.

CHASE

(Proudly)

I picked it up in college. I like to write songs now.

HARVIN

Well...

(Smiling)

We'll have to put you on the approved list.



CHASE

Approved list?

HARVIN

Absolutely. You wouldn't be able to play otherwise.

CHASE

You can't play songs if you're not on the approved list?

HARVIN

We're starting a new government, Chase. It's a very fragile thing. No matter how carefully we carve out the borders, there will undoubtedly be people living in our new home who will want to see us fail. We can't afford to give them a platform.

(Then, with a hint of suspicion)

What's your song about?

CHASE

(Evasively)

...It's not about anything yet. I only just started messing around.

HARVIN

Perhaps you can write us an anthem.

CHASE

An anthem?

HARVIN

For our new home. Something to do with our fight against oppression, maybe. And how the path to glory is built by the bodies of our foes!

CHASE

Wouldn't you rather something more uplifting.

HARVIN

That's not uplifting?

CHASE

Something inspiring pride-

HARVIN

(Suddenly concerned)

Gay pride?

CHASE  
(Quickly)

No. No. The other kind.

HARVIN  
National pride. Yes. I like that. You'll write us an anthem.

CHASE  
I don't think I'm good enough.

HARVIN  
Nonsense. You're very creative. You always have been.

CHASE  
Not as much as other artists.

HARVIN  
Baloney. Most so called artists are not interested in creating. Only destroying.

CHASE  
That can't be true.

HARVIN  
Absolutely it is. They'd destroy anything good and decent, if you give them a chance, planting seeds of doubt in otherwise happy people, through their subversive, lying "art."

CHASE  
I didn't know that.

HARVIN  
Hence the list. It's a big deal you're on it.

CHASE  
Thank you. For approving me.

HARVIN  
Do you sing, as well?

CHASE  
I've been told by some folks at school that I sing like a bird.

HARVIN  
Good. When you are done with your song, we will have you perform it for our new countrymen. Sound good?

CHASE

Yes, father.

HARVIN

In the mean time, I have a gift for you.

CHASE

A gift?

HARVIN

Your birthday present.

CHASE

I thought this trip was my birthday present.

HARVIN

Unfortunately, the work part of this trip will take more of my time than I had hoped.

CHASE

We won't get to travel around?

HARVIN

I'm afraid not. Who knew splitting the country into two smaller countries would be so complicated?

CHASE

That's fine. I have my music to work on.

HARVIN

That doesn't mean we can't spend a little time enjoying your present.

He places a case in front of him.

HARVIN

Open it.

Chase opens the case. Inside is a pistol.

CHASE

A gun?

(Then)

Aren't guns dangerous?

HARVIN

Of course not. If they were so dangerous would you be able to buy them off the internet?

(Then)

You need a gun. Trust me. It's dangerous not having one.

Chase picks up the gun slowly.

CHASE

I have to be honest father, it makes me a little nervous.

HARVIN

Nothing to be nervous about. You ever play rock, paper, scissors?

CHASE

Yes.

HARVIN

Does that make you nervous?

CHASE

No. What does that have to do with owning a gun?

HARVIN

A gun is the rock. And as you know, nothing beats rock.

CHASE

I think paper beats rock.

HARVIN

What game are you playing? Paper doesn't beat rock. It doesn't make sense. In what world does a piece of paper beat a rock?

CHASE

Maybe it depends on what's written on the paper.

HARVIN

You control what's written on the paper.

CHASE

How do I do that?

He grabs Chase's gun.

HARVIN

With your rock.

CHASE

Rock, paper, scissors seemed much less aggressive when I was a kid.

HARVIN

You can play with paper if you like. But you won't win. You'll just be stuck with the useless paper. Forced to put on that paper what other people dictate to you. People with rocks. Or... you can pick up a rock of your own. A better rock, and play with that. Then you can do the dictating?

Beat.

HARVIN

Come. I'd like to go outside now and show you how to use this thing.

CHASE

I... have to write my song.

HARVIN

The anthem, yes, I know. You will write that. Later. Right now, I'd like to do some target practice.

CHASE

What will we use for targets?

HARVIN

I'm sure we will find something to shoot.  
Perhaps a bird.

They exit.

SCENE 4

Margaret enters her and Hope's cabin carrying a tray of food. She places the tray down and takes off her jacket. Hope comes out of her room and sees her mother.

HOPE

Oh. Mother.

MARGARET

You're awake. Good.

HOPE

Why aren't you with Mr. Baron?

MARGARET

He wanted to take a break.

HOPE

I'd think he'd be anxious to get it all done.

MARGARET

He is. But among the litany of reasons that make him thoroughly unqualified to lead, stamina tops the list.

HOPE

Just as well. I'm in no hurry to see our country torn apart.

MARGARET

...No. Of course not. Neither am I.

HOPE

Why do it then?

MARGARET

Let's not have this discussion again.

HOPE

I want to.

MARGARET

I want you to eat.

Hope looks over the tray of food.

MARGARET

The food here is not half bad. They have your favorite dessert actually. Cheesecake. If you finish all of this, perhaps I'll bring you some later.

HOPE

I don't want cheesecake.

MARGARET

What do you want?

Hope says nothing.

MARGARET

You used to tell me things. All the time. It hurts me that you don't anymore.

HOPE

I'm not trying to hurt you.

MARGARET

Then tell me what's wrong.

HOPE

I've told you. My country is being torn apart.

MARGARET

I don't believe that's the problem.

HOPE

It's a problem for millions of other people, you don't think it has an impact on me. You have to stop this madness, mother.

MARGARET

Don't you think I want to?

HOPE

You're in the room with him. Alone. No voters. No media. No noise. Surely you two can find some common ground.

MARGARET

Have you met Harvin Baron? Compromise to him is simply a sign of weakness.

HOPE

Then you compromise.

MARGARET

So you want me to be weak?

HOPE

I just want our country to be whole. I just want to be able to talk to... people and not have to worry what side their on.

MARGARET

You don't have to worry.

(Then)

Because if they're on the other side, you'll find you have nothing to talk about.

HOPE

...You really hate them, don't you?

MARGARET

I don't hate them. They hate me. I tried to save them. Show them another way. One that wasn't fueled by fear or ignorance or greed. They wouldn't listen to me. All they heard is what he wanted them to hear. He poisoned their minds. He used their fear and their greed to manipulate them into acting against their best interests. And now, there is no more talking to them. You know that, right? There is no more healthy discussion between people who have different ideas, but the same goals. They don't have the same goals. They want to gather anyone who is different, anyone who questions authority, anyone they're threatened by and take away their life. Their liberty. Their happiness. We don't do that. We don't take those things away. We don't exclude people that are different. Those people on the other side, they don't have the same values that we do.

HOPE

But what if some of them do?

MARGARET

Then they wouldn't be on the other side!

Beat.

MARGARET

I applaud your desire to keep the peace. That's my impulse, as well. But we are too far gone. There is no stopping this train. This is happening. We will be two separate nations. And the likelihood that we will be allies is small. Our goal now is to carve out the best nation we can, filled with people like us, so we can ensure our way of life continues.

HOPE

"Filled with people like us?"

(Then)

Does it drive you crazy that you and Harvin Baron both want the same thing? Maybe you're more alike than you think.

She pushes the food away.

HOPE

I'm not hungry.

She exits back to her room.



MARGARET  
(Calling after her)

Hope. Hope!

Zerlina returns.

ZERLINA

What is it?

MARGARET

She's still depressed. More so now than ever, it seems.

ZERLINA

Did she say why?

MARGARET

She'd have me believe it's because of what's happening to our country.

ZERLINA

Well, it is depressing what's happening.

MARGARET

I think there's something else behind this.

ZERLINA

Look, it's been a very difficult few years. It's taken its toll on everyone.

MARGARET

She used to be such a happy child.

ZERLINA

But we didn't want people to be happy.

MARGARET

What are you talking about?

ZERLINA

You'd always say, "happy people are complacent. Happy people don't vote." We wanted them to be angry.

MARGARET

I want that for the electorate, not for my daughter!

ZERLINA

She's a voter, too.

MARGARET

(Defensively)

And I'm supposed to apologize now for doing what I had to do to protect people from that monster?

ZERLINA

Of course not.

MARGARET

Someone had to respond to the challenge.

ZERLINA

Yes.

MARGARET

Someone had to take up the fight.

ZERLINA

...Isn't there a Nietzsche quote about fighting monsters?

MARGARET

(Snapping)

I don't know, Zerlina! Why don't you look it up?

Beat.

MARGARET

(Calming down)

I'm sorry.

ZERLINA

No, I'm sorry.

(Then)

I simply was... Maybe this is Hope... enraged.

MARGARET

But she's not angry. She's sad. Why is she so sad?

ZERLINA

I don't know. I can try and find out.

MARGARET

You'll tell me if you do?

ZERLINA

...Of course.

MARGARET

There's nothing more important to me than her happiness.

ZERLINA

I know. Let me talk to her.

Margaret exits.

Zerlina knocks on Hope's door.

ZERLINA

Hope? It's Zerlina.

No answer.

ZERLINA

Come out, please. I have good news!

Nothing.

ZERLINA

I think I may have found a solution to your problem.

Hope opens the door. She's been crying again.

HOPE

There is no solution. None, other than the ones that come to me when I sleep.

ZERLINA

You're very dramatic.

HOPE

Give me back my pills!

ZERLINA

You don't need them. You don't need to sleep more than normal.

HOPE

I do!

ZERLINA

8 hours a night should feel sufficient.

HOPE

It doesn't.

ZERLINA

Maybe you have sleep apnea.

Hope is unamused.

HOPE

You know my problems are matters of the heart.

ZERLINA

Sleep apnea can affect your heart.

HOPE

I don't care about sleep apnea!

ZERLINA

Well you should. It's a very serious condition.

HOPE

Why are you talking about this now? Are you trying to be funny?

ZERLINA

Is it working?

HOPE

No.

ZERLINA

Good. Because sleep apnea is no laughing matter.

HOPE

And it has no bearing on me and Chase.

ZERLINA

It causes snoring. That could have some bearing.

HOPE

I don't have sleep apnea!

ZERLINA

Well, you're one of the lucky ones. My father had it. It nearly broke up he and my mother. Till he got a CPAP.

HOPE

A CPAP?

ZERLINA

It's an oxygen tank-

HOPE

I know what it is! Is that your solution? That I wear a CPAP? That will help me find my way into the arms of my love?

ZERLINA

No. After my father got one, he never got laid again.

HOPE

This is intolerable! Do you have a solution or not?

ZERLINA

I do.

Zerlina holds up a small flask filled with some mysterious liquid.

HOPE

What is that?

ZERLINA

It is a homogeneous mixture of two or more substances, therefore by definition, a solution.

HOPE

You're mocking me?

ZERLINA

It is also, I believe, the answer to your problem.

HOPE

That?

ZERLINA

This.

HOPE

What is it? It doesn't look to be a miracle.

ZERLINA

I don't believe in miracles.

(Then)

But I do believe in magic.

HOPE

Magic?

ZERLINA

I heard there lives in this part of the country a gifted shaman.

HOPE

A witch?

ZERLINA

A witch doctor, one who specializes in matters of the heart.

HOPE

You are mocking me.

ZERLINA

Hardly. When you have a cold or infection or disease of some kind you see a doctor. A regular doctor. But when you have problems of the heart-

HOPE

You see a cardiologist.

ZERLINA

(Correcting herself)

When you have problems with love, you see a shaman.

HOPE

(Skeptically)

A witch doctor?

ZERLINA

Love is magic, is it not? Who better to see than a witch doctor?

HOPE

I'm not seeing no witch doctor.

ZERLINA

You don't have to. I have already. I've told the shaman all about you and your problem and in return, was provided with this.

She holds up the flask again.

HOPE

A potion? Is that what we've come to. From politics to potions. What an unusual story this trip will make.

(Mockingly)

Is it a love potion?

ZERLINA

Yes. And no.

HOPE

Which is it?

ZERLINA

It is a powerful concoction to be used with the greatest responsibility. A potion whereupon if just a drop is placed in a drink or atop some food and that drink or food are eaten, it will turn he who hates you, into he who loves you.

HOPE

(Mockingly)

How wonderful. It is a love potion.

ZERLINA

Yes, it is. But I was forewarned by this shaman that this same potion has a dual purpose, equally if not more powerful, whereupon if just a drop of potion is placed in a drink or atop some food and that drink or food are eaten, it will turn he who loves you, into he who hates you. So you have to be sure.

HOPE

I'm positive.

ZERLINA

You are?

HOPE

Positive I'd have better luck with a CPAP.

She heads back towards her room.

ZERLINA

Hope! This is no joke!

HOPE

It's no joke in that it's not funny. It's one of those cruel jokes though, isn't it? Like: What did the blind, deaf, quadriplegic get for Christmas?

ZERLINA  
(Confused)

What?

HOPE

Cancer. It's a joke like that.

ZERLINA  
It's not a joke like that. It's not a joke at all. I'm not trying to be cruel or funny. The  
potion is real! We need to put a drop of this in Chase's drink.

HOPE

You want me to roofie the man I love?

ZERLINA

I will roofie the man you love!

HOPE

Why? I know you don't approve of him.

ZERLINA

I don't approve of him.

HOPE

Then why potion his food or drink? Why are you helping me at all?

ZERLINA

Because I can't stand to see you so unhappy!

(Then)

You say you love him. You say he's worthy of that love. You say without his love you  
will drown yourself in pills, so you can sleep forever more. And you ask me why? I  
would do anything to keep you safe, and to put the smile back on your face.

Beat.

HOPE

Assuming the potion is real-

ZERLINA

It is.

HOPE

Which I certainly don't believe...

ZERLINA

It is.



HOPE

...Assuming it makes Chase love me, and marry me, so we can live happily ever after, will you be able to live with yourself, knowing that you've tricked a man into having feelings he otherwise would not have had?

ZERLINA

I won't be able to live with myself if something happens to you, and I did nothing to stop it.

(Then)

As to questioning the morality of the potion, that's a question you need to answer. I can pour it down the drain now if you want me to.

Hope considers this. Finally:

HOPE

If I asked Chase if he wanted to marry me, he would say "no," in which case you should pour it down the drain.

Zerlina removes the top off of the flask heads towards the bathroom.

HOPE

But!

Zerlina stops.

HOPE

If I asked Chase if he wanted to be in a mutually loving relationship with a nice, pleasant looking girl, I believe he would say "yes." So in a way, this potion just gives him what he wants.

Zerlina replaces the top on the flask.

HOPE

Assuming the potion is real.

ZERLINA

I believe it is. I believe the shaman. I believe this potion works. And I am prepared to use it straight away for you. But, before I do, I believe the warning the shaman issued is also real. As fast as this potion turns hate into love it also turns love into hate. So you must be certain. You must be one hundred percent sure that Chase Baron hates you.

HOPE

He hates me. Of this I have no doubt!

SCENE 5

Chase sits on a bench somewhere on the grounds of the camp playing his guitar and singing.

CHASE  
(Singing)

I LOVE HER  
BUT I FEAR THAT MY LOVE'S UNREQUITED  
SO I NEVER DARE  
TELL HER I CARE  
CAUSE I KNOW JUST WHAT SHE WOULD SAY  
PLEASE GO AWAY

BUT I LOVE YOU  
I LOVE YOU BUT I KNOW YOU HATE ME  
AND I UNDERSTAND  
I KNOW WHAT I AM  
I'M SOMEONE NOT WORTHY OF YOU  
I HATE ME, TOO

AND ONE OF THE THINGS I HATE ABOUT ME  
IS I DON'T HAVE THE COURAGE TO TELL YOU HOW  
I'M SO MUCH IN LOVE

IT MIGHT BE USELESS  
BUT SO ARE THE MANY EXCUSES I'M USING  
LIKE YOU HATE ME  
MAYBE YOU DON'T  
MAYBE YOU DON'T!

IS THERE SOME WAY  
SOMEONE LIKE YOU COULD JUST  
FALL IN LOVE  
WITH SOMEONE LIKE ME

PLEASE LORD TELL ME  
I'M NOT AS BAD AS I THINK I AM  
TELL ME, WHAT DO YOU SEE

IS THERE ANY HOPE  
I'M LOOKING FOR HOPE

(MORE)

CHASE (CONT'D)

GOTTA FIND HOPE  
JUST PRAYING FOR HOPE

Zerlina enters. She is carrying a tray of food.

ZERLINA

Hello. Sorry to bother you. Do you know if they have a compost pile anywhere?

CHASE

A compost pile?

ZERLINA

I need to throw away all of this food. I didn't want to just put it in a garbage can.

CHASE

I don't know.

(Then)

Why would you throw it away? Is there something wrong with it?

ZERLINA

No. Nothing. It's just my boss, Margaret Henry-

(Then)

You know what, never mind.

She starts to go.

ZERLINA

Probably not wise for me to complain about Margaret Henry to you, young Mr. Baron.

CHASE

I won't tell anyone, if that's your concern.

ZERLINA

No? Not even your father?

CHASE

I don't tell him everything.

Beat.

Zerlina looks Chase up and down, and is disarmed by his innocence and his sincerity.

ZERLINA

I never told my father everything, either.

CHASE

Who was your father?

ZERLINA

No one you'd know. Just a minister.

CHASE

And what did you hide from him?

ZERLINA

Mostly stuff about boys. He had it in his head that I should marry a baptist.

CHASE

And did you?

ZERLINA

I haven't married anyone yet. But I certainly don't limit myself to baptists. Quite the opposite. I've pretty much stopped associating with baptists altogether.

CHASE

Including your father?

Slight pause.

ZERLINA

He stopped associating with me after I left the church.

CHASE

Your father doesn't speak to you?

ZERLINA

Well, he's dead now. But the 10 years preceding his death, no, he didn't speak to me at all.

CHASE

I'm sorry. You must have missed him.

ZERLINA

I did.

CHASE

I imagine you must regret... having left the church.

ZERLINA

No. I regret that my father let that come between us.

Chase lets that sink in.

CHASE

I wonder-

ZERLINA

You ask a lot of questions.

CHASE

Sorry. I so rarely get to talk with anyone... like you.

ZERLINA

Like me?

CHASE

(Innocently)

“Loathsome, misinformed liberals who are ruining the world with their dangerous agenda.”

(Then)

Nothing personal. That’s just what I’ve heard about Margaret Henry supporters.

Zerlina smiles politely, then:

ZERLINA

(Re: The tray of food)

Well, I should find a place to dispose of this. Ms. Henry ordered it, then changed her mind and decided she wanted something else. Shame to put it to waste, but...

(Then)

I mean... I don’t suppose you’re hungry?

CHASE

I’m starving.

ZERLINA

I just as soon give it to you then throw it in the trash.

CHASE

I haven’t eaten all day.

ZERLINA

Good. I hope you’re not a picky eater.

I eat anything.

CHASE

This is a spinach and avocado wrap.

ZERLINA

No!

CHASE  
(Disgusted)

What? You don't like spinach?

ZERLINA

No.

CHASE

We can probably take the spinach out.

ZERLINA

I don't like avocado either.

CHASE

You don't?

ZERLINA

Or things that are wrapped.

CHASE

Let's see what else we have here.

ZERLINA

She grabs something else off the tray.

Do you like a mushroom salad?

ZERLINA

No!

CHASE

Lobster bisque?

ZERLINA

Ugh!

CHASE

ZERLINA  
Asparagus and cottage cheese?

CHASE  
Disgusting! Ms. Henry eats all this stuff?

ZERLINA  
Yes.

CHASE  
Is she on a special diet?

ZERLINA  
What kind of foods do you like to eat?

CHASE  
Oh, I eat anything.

ZERLINA  
What's your favorite food?

CHASE  
Bacon.

ZERLINA  
Bacon?

CHASE  
Do you have any bacon?

ZERLINA  
No! That's horrible for you. You'd be much better off with this asparagus and cottage cheese.

CHASE  
I'd rather eat a soft boiled fetal duck.

ZERLINA  
I actually have a soft boiled-

CHASE  
Pass! I'll just eat the bacon.

ZERLINA

I don't have any bacon!

CHASE

Why wouldn't you have any bacon?

ZERLINA

The World Health Organization said people should stop eating bacon. It increases your chances of getting colorectal cancer.

CHASE

I'd sooner remove my colo-rectum than stop eating bacon.

ZERLINA

How about a nice glass of milk?

CHASE

I'm lactose intolerant.

ZERLINA

It's almond milk.

CHASE

(Shaking his head)

I didn't even know almonds had nipples.

(Then)

I'm good.

ZERLINA

(Frustrated)

Well... that's all I have. Hard to believe there's nothing on this tray that suits you.

CHASE

I know. Usually I eat anything.

ZERLINA

(Frustrated her plan is failing)

I'll keep looking for a compost pile.

She starts to go.

CHASE

I'll have those crackers if no one wants them.

ZERLINA

Crackers?



CHASE

They came with the bisque I suppose.

ZERLINA

You mean these crackers?

She holds up a package of crackers.

ZERLINA

That are pre-wrapped in plastic?

CHASE

Yes.

She thinks.

ZERLINA

Let me unwrap them for you.

CHASE

Thanks!

She sets the tray down on another bench and proceeds to unwrap the crackers and discretely drop a bit of the potion on them.

CHASE

I love a cracker!

ZERLINA

Nothing fits like a Ritz.

CHASE

(Suddenly disgusted)

Oh, those aren't Ritz, are they?

ZERLINA

No! Triscuit.

CHASE

My favorite!

ZERLINA

Here you go.

She approaches him and hands him the crackers.  
He takes them.

ZERLINA

Bon Appetite.

Chase brings one of the crackers to his mouth  
and...

ELBERT

Chase!

Elbert has entered. Chase, startled, lowers the  
cracker.

ELBERT

What are you doing?

CHASE

Just talking.

ELBERT

You shouldn't be talking with her.

Elbert approaches them both.

ELBERT

(Re: The crackers)

Put those down. Mr. Baron is waiting for you in the dining room. He ordered lunch.

CHASE

I'm not that hungry. I'm fine with just a cracker.

ELBERT

He ordered bacon.

CHASE

...Bacon?

ELBERT

Go. Your father is waiting.

Chase places the crackers down on the tray.

CHASE

(To Zerlina)

It was a pleasure talking with you.

ZERLINA

Likewise.

Chase exits.

ELBERT

What do you think you're doing?

ZERLINA

Nothing. The boy looked hungry-

ELBERT

It's not your responsibility to feed him.

ZERLINA

As a Christian, I'd think you'd be happy. Is it not my responsibility to help everyone in need? When we feed others, aren't we feeding Christ?

ELBERT

God helps those that can help themselves!

He grabs the crackers and eats one.

ELBERT

Good day.

Elbert starts to exit.

ZERLINA

Elbert!

Elbert stops and turns towards her. The cracker now completely swallowed.

ZERLINA

Do you still hate me?

ELBERT

More than ever.

SCENE 6

Back in Hope's cabin, she waits patiently.  
Zerlina enters. She's not looking happy.

HOPE  
Zerlina, what took you so long? Did you... potion Chase?

ZERLINA  
I tried.

HOPE  
What do you mean you tried?

ZERLINA  
I tried.

HOPE  
You couldn't get him to eat it?

ZERLINA  
He has the palette of a 5-year old boy!

Hope is confused by Zerlina's outburst.

HOPE  
I don't understand.

ZERLINA  
It doesn't matter.

HOPE  
Of course it matters! This matters more than anything! It's probably the most important-

ZERLINA  
The potion doesn't work!

Beat.

HOPE  
(Taken aback)  
What?

Zerlina takes out the potion from her pocket and places it on a nearby table.

ZERLINA

(Gently)

I'm sorry. It is a sham.

HOPE

(Starting to tear up)

The potion was my only hope. Please tell me you're joking.

Suddenly Elbert bursts in.

ELBERT

Zerlina! I love you!

ZERLINA

...I'm joking.

ELBERT

Do you hear me? I love you!

HOPE

(To Zerlina)

Oh my God! Did Elbert-

ZERLINA

(To Hope)

Yes.

ELBERT

I love you! I love you! I love you! I love you!

HOPE

(To Zerlina, discretely)

The potion is very strong.

ZERLINA

Apparently.

ELBERT

I can't stop saying it. I love you!

HOPE

(To Elbert)

You love her?

ELBERT

More than anything.

HOPE

What do you love about her?

ELBERT

I love everything about her. Her intelligence, her beauty, her talent.

HOPE

Those things are easy to love. What about her qualities that are less desirable?

ELBERT

I love how she challenges my power and authority, and refuses to gaze admiringly in my direction.

HOPE

(To Zerlina)

The potion rocks!

ELBERT

Zerlina, you have changed me to the core.

ZERLINA

...You do seem different.

ELBERT

I am different. I am better. Because of you.

(Then)

I want to spend the rest of my life with you.

ZERLINA

Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

He gets down on one knee and pulls out a ring.

ELBERT

Marry me!

ZERLINA

Good God! Get on your feet, Elbert!

ELBERT

Take this. It's my college ring. It's all I have right now. Hopefully it will do as an engagement ring.

ZERLINA

It's too soon for that.

ELBERT

A promise ring!

ZERLINA

It's too soon for that.

ELBERT

A... purity ring!

ZERLINA

It's...

Zerlina shakes her head. It's not too soon for that.

ELBERT

Just take it, as a token of my love and affection.

ZERLINA

I don't want to take your ring.

ELBERT

But you've given me so much. Is there nothing I can give you in return to earn your love?

ZERLINA

Time. You can give me some time.

ELBERT

I will give you all of the time I have left, however long it should be. The remainder of my days will all be devoted to you, the woman I love.

ZERLINA

(To Hope, discretely)

I think I liked him better when he hated me.

Hope crosses to Elbert.

HOPE

Elbert.

She pulls him aside.

HOPE

I think your love for Zerlina is wonderful.

ELBERT

Thank you.

HOPE

I want to help you earn her love in return.

ELBERT

I want you to help me.

HOPE

How well do you know her?

ELBERT

I know everything about her.

HOPE

Do you know her language of love?

ELBERT

I don't know that.

HOPE

There are five ways to express and experience love. 5 languages! Gift giving, quality time, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch.

ELBERT

I think I'm physical touch.

HOPE

Zerlina is an acts of service type of woman.

ELBERT

What service does she need? I would do anything.

HOPE

There is one thing.

ELBERT

Name it.

HOPE

Chase is sick.



Chase Baron?  
ELBERT

Yes.  
HOPE

I saw him earlier today. He didn't mention anything.  
ELBERT

He doesn't know.  
HOPE

He's sick and he doesn't know?  
ELBERT  
(Then)  
Does he have chlamydia?

...Yes.  
HOPE

Chip off the old block.  
ELBERT  
(Then)  
We should tell him.

We don't want to embarrass him.  
HOPE

Let's not tell him.  
ELBERT

All we need do is give him some medicine and it will clear right up.  
HOPE

Azithromycin?  
ELBERT

Something better. A drop of this liquid. It's tasteless. You can put it on a piece of food, he won't even know.  
HOPE  
(Showing him the bottle)

I will give him this medicine.  
ELBERT

HOPE

That would be of great service to Zerlina.

Elbert crosses to Zerlina.

ELBERT

Zerlina! I will help you clear up Chase's chlamydia!

Zerlina exchanges a glance with Hope.

SCENE 7

Back on the grounds, Chase has returned to his bench, still holding his guitar, though now he's not playing it. He just looks despondently out in the distance.

Zerlina and Elbert enter unseen and hide nearby.

ZERLINA

I have placed a drop of "the medicine" on this bacon. If he eats it-

ELBERT

That will cure him of his chlamydia?

ZERLINA

100 percent.

ELBERT

Good. Because if left untreated chlamydia could damage his sperm and cause scarring in the reproductive tract, which can lead to permanent infertility. He'll never be able to have children!

ZERLINA

You seem to know a lot about chlamydia.

ELBERT

Me? No...I mean, not more than... My father had it... So... He treated it. Obviously.

ZERLINA

Look, don't get into a deep conversation with Chase. Just offer him the food, he'll eat it straight away, and your work is done. I'll hide here in case you need me.

ELBERT

Wish me luck.

ZERLINA

You don't need luck, you have bacon. He loves bacon.

ELBERT

He loves pork bacon. That's turkey.

(Then, off Zerlina's frustrated look)

He might not notice.

ZERLINA

Good luck.

Elbert nods, then approaches Chase, who is still looking quite despondent.

ELBERT

Hello, Chase.

CHASE

(Sadly)

Elbert.

ELBERT

What's the matter?

CHASE

Nothing.

ELBERT

It doesn't seem like nothing.

(Lightly)

You know, it takes more muscles to frown than to smile, why are you working so hard?

CHASE

It doesn't take more muscles to frown.

ELBERT

Sure it does. It's been proven. It's a fact.

CHASE

It's not a fact. It's an a aphorism. An incorrect one.

ELBERT

I heard it takes more muscles to frown.

CHASE

I'm telling you what you heard is wrong! You should learn to verify your information before repeating it as fact because it makes you sound like an imbecile!

Beat.

ELBERT

Do you want some bacon?

CHASE

The fact is there isn't any proof behind the saying it takes more muscles to frown than to smile. Scientists have studied the muscles needed for both facial expressions, and on average, a smile uses more.

ELBERT

It's pork bacon.

CHASE

(Shaking his head)

We don't question the things we hear nearly enough!

(Hopefully)

What if everything we've been hearing is wrong?

ELBERT

What have you been hearing?

Chase shakes his head. What hasn't he been hearing?

CHASE

Gay people are evil. Muslims are terrorists. Mexicans are rapists.

(Getting upset)

Margaret Henry is a murderer. And her daughter... is a whore!

Chase breaks down.

Elbert shakes his head. He looks back at where Zerlina is hiding.

ELBERT

I've called a woman a whore before.

CHASE

Did she sleep around?

ELBERT

It had nothing to do with her. It had only to do with me.

CHASE

I don't understand.

ELBERT

It was easier to call her a whore, than to call myself a coward, which is what I was.

CHASE

What were you afraid of?

ELBERT

Gays, Muslims, Mexicans... women.

CHASE

Do you think everyone on the other side is... bad?

ELBERT

I've fallen in love with a woman on the other side, and I can tell you she's incredible.

CHASE

Who have you fallen in love with?

ELBERT

Her name is Zerlina. She works for Margaret Henry.

CHASE

I can't believe you are so open about it. You can get in serious trouble.

ELBERT

What trouble can you possibly get in for being in love?

CHASE

These are dark times.

ELBERT

I'm not afraid anymore! I love Zerlina! I want to scream it from the rooftops, she makes me feel so alive!

CHASE

I know that feeling.

ELBERT

You do? Then you should know not to suppress it. Suppressed emotions can wreak tremendous havoc on the body, especially an emotion as powerful as love.

(MORE)

ELBERT (CONT'D)

It can make you mentally ill, physically ill, even cause disease.

(Then)

Which reminds me, you need to eat this bacon.

CHASE

(Suddenly)

I love Hope Henry!

ELBERT

What?

CHASE

I love her. I love her more than I can say!

ELBERT

That is wonderful! Chase, I am so happy for you. You love Hope Henry?

CHASE

Yes!

ELBERT

All the more reason you should eat this bacon. You don't want to give that sweet girl chlamydia.

CHASE

What?

ELBERT

Have you told her?

CHASE

That I love her? Are you insane? Her mother is Margaret Henry.

ELBERT

And your father is Harvin Baron. It doesn't matter. You have to tell her! Don't be afraid!

CHASE

You're right. I have to tell her. I have to tell her right now!

ELBERT

After you eat the bacon.

CHASE

After I eat the bacon!

Chase picks up the bacon. He goes to take a bite out of the bacon, when suddenly Zerlina comes rushing in.

ZERLINA

Nooooo!

She tackles him to the ground. The bacon goes flying.

The two slowly get up.

ZERLINA

(To Chase, out of breath)

I'm sorry. You... shouldn't eat bacon. It causes colorectal cancer.

CHASE

I've never met someone who cared so much about my colon.

Elbert pulls Zerlina aside.

ELBERT

But what about his damaged sperm and the scarring on his reproductive tract?

ZERLINA

It's fine. I was wrong. He's healthy. He's actually... perfect.

(Then, to Chase)

Chase, we have to get you to Hope, so you can tell her you love her.

CHASE

But she must hate me, the things I've said about her mother.

ZERLINA

She doesn't hate you. She doesn't hate you at all. Come. I'll explain on the way.

She starts to lead him out, then turns back to Elbert.

ZERLINA

Elbert, I am going to take him to see Hope.

ELBERT

Will you come back?

She thinks about this for a moment, then finally:

ZERLINA

Yes.

She smiles at him.

ZERLINA

I won't be gone long.

She exits.

SCENE 8

Hope is in her cabin. Chase enters, followed by Zerlina.

HOPE

Chase.

CHASE

Hope.

HOPE

Is this a dream?

CHASE

If it is, then it is for me, as well.

He strums a chord on his guitar.

CHASE

(Singing)

I LOVE YO-

Hope suddenly embraces Chase, crushing the guitar between them. She kisses him. Chase, surprised at first, eventually starts to kiss Hope back.

When they part Hope stands there in a blissful trance, as Chase swaggers over to the other side of the room to place his guitar on a chair.



ZERLINA

Are you OK?

HOPE

(Discretely)

I take it the potion worked.

Zerlina smiles.

ZERLINA

(Discretely)

He didn't take the potion.

HOPE

What?

ZERLINA

(Discretely)

He loves you. For real!

HOPE

(Shocked)

Holy shit!

ZERLINA

(To Chase and Hope)

I'll be going.

Zerlina exits.

Hope turns to Chase stunned and suddenly racked with guilt.

HOPE

You love me?

CHASE

How could I not love you? You're perfect.

HOPE

I'm hardly perfect. I have many flaws. Ask Zerlina. I wear my heart on my sleeve.

CHASE

Now I'll know where to find it.

I can be hard to please. HOPE

You have high standards. CHASE

Pessimistic at times. HOPE

You're keeping it real. CHASE

I'm awkward in social situations. HOPE

Then I won't look so awkward standing next to you. CHASE

There's other stuff, too. HOPE

You're humble? CHASE

So humble! I could go on and on about my humility. HOPE

Why are you trying to talk me out of loving you? CHASE

I just want to make sure you know what you're getting. HOPE

I think I'm getting someone honest, decent, good. CHASE

I tried to poison you! HOPE

Beat.

What? CHASE

HOPE

Well... potion you.

CHASE

I don't understand.

HOPE

I loved you. And I thought you hated me. How could you not hate me? I said such horrible things about your father.

CHASE

I hated only myself for being his son.

HOPE

I didn't know. I assumed the worst, and it tore me up inside. So much so that I was prepared to end it all. What's the positive spin on that?

CHASE

(Thinking)

...You're passionate.

HOPE

I was desperate. Zerlina knew of a shaman not far from here.

CHASE

A witch?

HOPE

A witch doctor, who specialized in matters of the heart.

CHASE

I've heard of such people.

HOPE

The shaman gave us a potion that would turn your hate into love.

CHASE

A love potion? Can that be real?

HOPE

Ask Elbert if it is real.

CHASE

You potioned Elbert?

HOPE

By accident. And I tried to potion you.

CHASE

I don't need a love potion to love you.

HOPE

Can you still love me knowing that I was prepared to do that to you? That I did do that to Elbert?

CHASE

Elbert is the better for it.

HOPE

He hated Zerlina. Now he loves her. He is not himself.

CHASE

He's a better version of himself. Elbert was angry and bitter. Now he's happy. If there is a downside to what you've done, then I don't see it.

Zerlina enters. She is looking pale.

ZERLINA

Elbert has been arrested!

CHASE

What? By who?

ZERLINA

Your father.

CHASE

For what?

ZERLINA

For being in love with me.

HOPE

That's absurd. Since when is being in love a crime.

ZERLINA

Lines have been drawn. Elbert and I are not on the same side.

CHASE

What's the punishment for being in love with someone on the other side?

ZERLINA

Your father considers it treason. The punishment is death.

Black out.

ACT 2

SCENE 1

Harvin is in his cabin looking happier than usual. He is talking with his son.

HARVIN

I think you're going to be very happy with the work I've been doing here. I've done a tremendous job picking out the best territories to be included in our new home. With mountains and plains and farmlands and cities, I've carved out a little bit of everything. Like a sculptor! Chiseling away anything that's unwanted, leaving only the best. Like an artist. Like you. Creating something wonderful.

(Then)

How's it going with your song? The anthem!

CHASE

It's... not done yet.

HARVIN

You've got to finish it. I want to hear it. I want our citizens to hear it. I want you to sing it for our citizens. They are going to be so happy when they see what I've done here.

CHASE

You arrested Elbert?

Beat. Harvin's smile fades.

HARVIN

He is a traitor. That's what you do with traitors. You arrest them.

CHASE

He's not a traitor.

HARVIN

He pledged his allegiance to that woman, that woman who works for Margaret Henry.

CHASE

Elbert didn't pledge allegiance to anyone, he simply fell in love.

HARVIN

Chase, do you understand what we're trying to do here? We have an opportunity to start over.

(MORE)

HARVIN (CONT'D)

To build a nation from the ground up, filled with the right people, the people that will make this nation strong and prosperous. If he's falling in love with her, he's obviously not the right people.

CHASE

So get rid of him.

HARVIN

We are.

CHASE

Deport him, I mean. But don't kill him.

HARVIN

We have to make an example of him.

CHASE

Why?

HARVIN

Because there will be others. We always knew we wouldn't be able to draw these new lines perfectly, with everyone ideologically aligned with us on one side and everyone opposed on the other. There would be stragglers. And if you're soft with these stragglers, then they feel empowered. They feel they can destroy you from within. So we have to be hard with these people.

CHASE

Elbert is not a straggler. He was completely loyal to you. He worked for you. He supported you.

HARVIN

Past tense. He WAS loyal. He supported. He worked. All in the past. The past is history! We're in the present now. And in the present, he IS aligned with her, that woman, who is not loyal to me. She is loyal to Margaret Henry. Elbert is now aligned with Margaret Henry, who hates me. Me? How do you hate me?

CHASE

You hate her.

HARVIN

She deserves it. And so do her supporters. And Elbert deserves it, too.

CHASE

So you're going to execute him?

HARVIN

Yes. I am going to execute him. Absolutely. Tomorrow, right after we sign documents and make official our new nation, we will illustrate our nations' commitment to rule of law, including the law that demands our citizens be loyal, by making a statement of Elbert, a very loud statement, that says if you're living within our walls, we demand obedience.

Beat.

HARVIN

I know you understand this, Chase, I know you do because... you are my son. It can be very lonely being a leader of men because few people will understand the difficult choices you have to make for the greater good. But, when you have a son... Being lonely is no longer an issue. Your son is your constant companion. He is your confidante, your ally, your friend. The one person who thinks like you, who understands the choices you make, who always stands by your side.

(Then)

Women can't be trusted to do that. Stand by your side. Trust me, I know. I've been with plenty of women, all of whom have proven themselves to be disloyal. And weak. All of them. Including your mother. Who I loved. Look, we met at a Russian spa, three weeks later we were married. Talk about a happy ending. But she was weak. Women are weak. Margaret Henry is weak. She doesn't have the strength of character to do what needs to be done. To make those difficult choices.

CHASE

Like executing Elbert.

HARVIN

Like executing Elbert. You understand. I knew you'd understand.

(Then)

You understand, right?

Chase doesn't respond.

HARVIN

I need to hear you say, "I understand." Because... Because I want you to have a good future that you can have faith in. Everything I'm doing is to ensure that good future. But I need to hear you say, "I understand." I need to hear you say, "I agree." I need to hear you say, "You're doing a great job, pop!" I need to hear that. Not because I need validation. I know I'm doing a great job. I am simply trying to put you on a path that will ensure this good future I keep talking about. If you stray off the path, I can't ensure it.

(MORE)



HARVIN (CONT'D)

Your future might not be so good. Do you understand?

CHASE

...I understand.

HARVIN

There was a line in the sand. And Elbert crossed it. So I have to make an example of him.

(Then, pointedly)

The way I would with anyone who crosses that line. Do you agree?

CHASE

...I agree.

HARVIN

Do you think I'm doing a good job?

CHASE

Yes, sir.

HARVIN

Thanks.

(Then)

Margaret Henry doesn't have the balls to do the things we're gonna do.

Chase nods. Then turns to exit.

HARVIN

Don't be upset about Elbert. We always knew we'd have to clean house. Well... the cleansing begins tomorrow.

## SCENE 2

Margaret is in her cabin. Drinking. Hope enters urgently.

HOPE

Mom, I need your help!

MARGARET

This is the first time in months I've seen you not looking morbidly depressed.

HOPE

Please. This is important.

MARGARET

How curious. Because the country is still being torn in two. Unless it was something else that was troubling you.

HOPE

There's something else troubling me now.

MARGARET

Something you're willing to tell me about?

HOPE

Yes.

MARGARET

Because you need my help.

HOPE

Yes! Harvin Baron arrested Elbert.

MARGARET

Elbert?

HOPE

His aid.

MARGARET

Right. Elbert. What a curious name.

(Then)

Why did he arrest him?

HOPE

Because Elbert fell in love with Zerlina.

MARGARET

My Zerlina?

HOPE

Yes. Baron sees their love as a form of treason. A crime punishable by death.

MARGARET

Elbert fell in love with Zerlina?

HOPE

Yes. Can you imagine sentencing someone to die simply because he fell in love?

Margaret considers this. Then:

MARGARET

(Suspiciously)

Does Zerlina love him in return?

HOPE

(Taken aback)

What does that have to do with anything?

Margaret puts her glass down.

MARGARET

What would you like me to do about it?

HOPE

Help him!

MARGARET

Help Elbert?

HOPE

No, help Mr. Baron. Of course help Elbert. You said earlier you wanted to save these people. Here is someone who is in need of saving. You are in a position to possibly save him.

MARGARET

How can I possibly save him?

HOPE

You can talk with Harvin Baron. You are in the middle of negotiations.

MARGARET

We are at the end of negotiations.

HOPE

Have you signed anything yet?

MARGARET

No.

HOPE

Then don't sign anything until he gives you Elbert.

MARGARET

And what will I give him in return? More land? Another territory? One populated with people that didn't vote for him? I should trade those lives for Elbert's?

HOPE

You should do something.

MARGARET

Elbert made his choice. He chose to follow that horrible man. Now he has to live with the consequences.

HOPE

He won't live at all. He is being executed tomorrow.

MARGARET

I'm not sure I understand why you care so much.

HOPE

Because... It's unjust.

MARGARET

You know, Hope, I'm not the first woman to go toe to toe against a despicable man like Harvin Baron. There have been a few now. I aspired to be like them.

HOPE

You are like them.

MARGARET

These women, former first ladies, senators, Secretaries of State, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera and every combination therein, some of these women were the most qualified ever to hold the highest office in the land. All of them were dismissed because they lacked warmth and spontaneity, or they smiled too much, or "I found her irritating so I didn't vote for her." These women spent a life time trying to help people. All people. Even the Elberts. Even after they left public service, these women, they didn't stop. They continued trying to reach people, earn the trust of people, improve the lives of people that were determined to hate them! For no reason at all. You talk about unjust? You want to know what's unjust? That an election between any of these women and those sexist, racist, homophobic pigs they went up against was even close, that's unjust. That after a career spent trying to make our country a better place for children, for seniors, for working class people, at the end of the day, if they're lucky, they're considered "the lesser of two evils." That's unjust! And more often than not, they are seen as equally pernicious, and more untrustworthy. More untrustworthy than someone like Harvin Baron, who every time he links a noun with a predicate, he forms a lie. That is unjust!

(MORE)

MARGARET (CONT'D)

That the media won't report on any of his legitimate, credible and wholly unethical behavior without also reporting on my completely fabricated, unsubstantiated "scandals." That I am compared to him at all. That people I know, people I love feel the need to reference him, when talking about me. They feel the need to say things like, "Does it drive you crazy that you and Harvin Baron both want the same thing? Maybe you're more alike than you think." That is unjust. Cruel and unjust.

Beat.

HOPE

I'm sorry.

MARGARET

Me too. I am sorry, but I can't help Elbert.

HOPE

But what about all of those women you aspired to be? The ones who spent a lifetime trying to help all people. "Even the Elberts."

MARGARET

I'm not those women. Times are different. Things are worse. I had to adapt.

(Then)

And Elbert and the rest of them are beyond saving now. They sold their soul to the devil.

HOPE

They didn't know he was the devil.

MARGARET

(Snaps)

How could they not know?

HOPE

...They thought they were doing the right thing.

Margaret laughs, then takes a sip of her drink.

MARGARET

You know, there were some Germans who joined the Nazi party because they thought it would make their country great again. Germany was in the midst of a depression, many Germans were unemployed, frightened for themselves and their nation. They didn't hate Jews. It had nothing to do with the Jews. They simply thought they were doing the right thing for God and Country and their families. History has a word for those Germans.

Margaret leans closer.

MARGARET

Nazis. Intention is important, but at some point you have to take a step back, open your eyes, and recognize that you are on the wrong side of history. And if you don't, then intention is irrelevant.

HOPE

It's hard to take a step anywhere, when you're drowning.

MARGARET

Those who followed that vile man deserve what's coming to them.

Margaret heads to the door.

HOPE

They didn't know!

Margaret turns to Hope.

MARGARET

Well, if his ascendancy is in fact a mandate against political correctness, as he always says it is, then I feel pretty safe to say that Elbert and all of the other people that put Harvin Baron in power... are a bunch of fucking idiots!

She exits.

### SCENE 3

Elbert is in a cabin that is used as a makeshift holding cell. He is chained to a wall. Someone enters.

ELBERT

Who's there?

Zerlina walks into the light.

ELBERT

Zerlina! What are you doing here? It's not safe for you to be here.

ZERLINA

(Near tears)

I'm so sorry, Elbert. I'm so sorry.

ELBERT

Why are you sorry?

ZERLINA

It's my fault you're in here!

ELBERT

Don't be absurd.

ZERLINA

It's my fault!

ELBERT

It's not your fault.

ZERLINA

It is!

(Then, desperately)

But I want to help you.

ELBERT

You need to get out of here before anyone sees you.

ZERLINA

Elbert! I can help you. Please let me help you.

She pulls out the flask of potion.

ELBERT

What is that?

ZERLINA

It's... a love potion.

ELBERT

Are you feeling OK?

ZERLINA

I know it sounds insane. You have to believe me. This is a love potion.

ELBERT

Zerlina-

ZERLINA

The reason why you love me is because you took this potion.

ELBERT

I took it?

ZERLINA

It wasn't meant for you. I swear. It was an accident. We were... I was... careless. I was careless. I was given this potion, this powerful potion, and I was warned. I was warned just how dangerous it could be... But I didn't... I was irresponsible... And you ended up taking it. And now they're going to kill you.

ELBERT

You're saying I love you because of this potion?

ZERLINA

Yes. That is what I'm saying.

ELBERT

Where did you get it?

ZERLINA

I got it from a witch doctor. Hope was depressed. She was in love and had a broken heart, and... I thought it might help. Crazy, I know.

Beat.

ELBERT

(Smiling)

Not really. Love is magic. Who better to help with a broken heart than a witch doctor.

Zerlina smiles at him. Then:

ZERLINA

(Gravely)

This potion has a dual purpose. It turns hate into love. But it also turns love into hate. You took the potion once. I want you to take it again.

ELBERT

Zerlina-

ZERLINA

Maybe if you take the potion again, you will hate me once more. And maybe if you hate me with such conviction, they will see that and let you go. Take the potion. They are going to kill you if you don't.



Elbert considers what Zerlina has said.

ELBERT

I never apologized to you for the things I said.

ZERLINA

You don't have to.

ELBERT

Nevertheless... I'm sorry.

ZERLINA

It's fine.

ELBERT

I remember what I was like, you know. I remember what it felt like to be so angry. To be so scared. Maybe that's the true magic of this potion. It's made me unafraid. Unafraid to love. Unafraid to be hurt. Unafraid to have a different opinion. Maybe that's what this potion does. Or maybe it's different for everyone. I don't know. All I can tell you is that I remember what it was like to be filled with so much hate.

(Then)

Love is so much better. Don't you think?

ZERLINA

Please take the potion.

ELBERT

I'll pass.

ZERLINA

Elbert-

ELBERT

No.

ZERLINA

They're going to kill you!

ELBERT

I don't care! I'd much rather die with love in my heart, then live with hate in my soul.

ZERLINA

And how am I supposed to live, knowing that I've condemned you to this horrible fate.

ELBERT

You saved me. You rescued me. From myself. It's like a cancer. Hate. A cancer born of fear and darkness, and it destroys everything. And you cured me of that.

ZERLINA

They are going to kill you! Don't you want to live?

ELBERT

Without you?

ZERLINA

Without me, but with someone else. You can move on, get married, have kids.

ELBERT

We pass it on to our kids.

ZERLINA

What?

ELBERT

Our hate. We bequeath it to them, like an old family heirloom. Some silver candlesticks, grandma's engagement ring, or perhaps a priceless family recipe. We make it, and then we serve it... to our kids, the way my parents served it to me. Children aren't born with hate. They inherit it. Then they develop it in their schools, it is sanctioned by their leaders, and soon enough, they pass it down to children of their own.

ZERLINA

Please.

ELBERT

If I take that potion, the cycle continues.

ZERLINA

It may save your life.

ELBERT

Will it? I think it would be a special torture that I don't think I could bear. Remembering that there is such a thing as love, and it is better, and for a brief moment I was able to express that love and not be so afraid, and in spite of all of that, every action I take, every word from my mouth because of that potion will be filled with anger and fear and hate. That would be a fate worse than death. I'll pass. I'll stick with love. Quite frankly, I don't know why more people don't choose it. You should give this potion to all of the angry people out there, that will solve some problems.

ZERLINA

There's too many angry people. That's all the potion I have left. Maybe enough for one...  
(A lightbulb)

Or two.

The wheels are turning.

ZERLINA

Oh my!

ELBERT

What?

ZERLINA

I just figured out how to save you.

She grabs the potion.

ELBERT

You figured out how to... How?

She grabs his hand.

ZERLINA

We're going to practice top down democracy.

Elbert understands.

ZERLINA

I have to go.

She goes to leave.

ELBERT

Zerlina...

She turns to Elbert.

ELBERT

Good luck.

She smiles. Then exits.

A moment later she returns and gives Elbert a long kiss.

ZERLINA

I'll see you soon.

She exits again.

SCENE 4

In Hope's cabin, Zerlina walks in, interrupting Hope and Chase, who look to be mid-conversation. Chase has his guitar in his hand.

Zerlina takes out and raises the flask of potion.

ZERLINA

We're going to potion your parents!

HOPE

I know!

ZERLINA

You know?

HOPE

It's so obvious. They'd never let us be together. They hate each other. They want us all to hate each other. But if we make them fall in love-

ZERLINA

Instead of working to divide the country, they will by example unite it.

HOPE

Instead of letting Elbert die for the supposed crime of treason-

ZERLINA

They will laud him. They will extol you all for showing them the answer was always love.

HOPE

(To Chase, pointing to the flask)

This is the solution. This is our chance to... manifest our destiny.

It becomes clear to Zerlina that Chase is not yet fully onboard with this plan.

ZERLINA

Chase? If we're to do this, we have to all be in agreement. I won't do this on my own. They're not my parents. What do you say? How do you vote?

Beat, as Chase considers the choice. He takes the potion from Hope. He turns it in his hand. Finally:

CHASE

I cast my vote for love.

Hope hugs him.

Zerlina takes the potion from Chase and then grabs a bottle of champagne.

ZERLINA

I'll take care of it. You two don't need to do anything. Don't worry. Everything will be different tomorrow.

Zerlina exits, potion and champagne in hand, leaving the two young lovers behind.

CHASE

I hope she's right.

HOPE

She is.

CHASE

My father wants me to switch schools... to one that resides in "our country."

HOPE

They won't be able to keep us apart. They won't want to.

CHASE

And if things are not different?

HOPE

Then we'll run away. We'll go some place peaceful and beautiful with fields upon fields of flowers.

CHASE

What will we do?

HOPE

We'll make love in a field.

CHASE

On the flowers? What will we do the second night?

HOPE

We'll make love in another field.

CHASE

You know, I'm allergic to pollen.

HOPE

The third night, we'll make love in a pasture.

CHASE

I'm also allergic to grass.

HOPE

The fourth night-

CHASE

The fourth night, we'll have to stay in and tend to all my hives.

HOPE

That's a shame. I could make love to you in that pasture till the cows come home.

They kiss.

CHASE

I need to go back to my room in case my father comes and starts wondering where I am.  
But I'll find you tomorrow.

HOPE

Please do! And soon we won't have to hide our love. We'll never hide again!

She opens the door for him, then quickly closes  
it.

HOPE

Fuck! My mother is coming! Hide!

He tries to hide in the mini fridge.

HOPE

Not there!

She points to a wardrobe.

HOPE

The wardrobe!

Chase hides inside. Then points to his guitar on the other side of the room. She quickly runs and grabs it shoving it inside with him.

HOPE

I'll try to get rid of her.

Hope shuts the door of the wardrobe, inadvertently playing an ominous chord on the guitar. A moment later, Margaret opens the door.

MARGARET

Do you have a minute?

HOPE

Now is not a good time.

MARGARET

You're still mad at me. Aren't you?

HOPE

...Yes.

MARGARET

Well, I'm not leaving till we sort this out.

HOPE

I forgive you.

Margaret enters the room. She is carrying a small to go box. She turns to her daughter.

MARGARET

I said some things I regret.

HOPE

You called a whole swath of the population a bunch of fucking idiots.

MARGARET

That was one of the things.

HOPE

You said Elbert deserved what's coming to him.

MARGARET

He doesn't.

(Then)

I'll talk to Harvin. I'll see what I can do.

Beat.

HOPE

Then we're good.

MARGARET

We're not good. You're still mad at me.

HOPE

Mother, I'm not.

MARGARET

I can tell when you're lying. I can tell when you want me to go.

HOPE

I don't... I'm not mad at you.

MARGARET

I come bearing gifts.

HOPE

You don't need to get me anything.

MARGARET

It's a peace offering. And it's not just for you. Maybe I want some too.

She opens the box to reveal a slice of  
cheesecake.



HOPE

Is that cheesecake?

MARGARET

God knows I can't eat it all myself. Have this with me. I'm not leaving till you at least try some.

HOPE

(Reluctantly acquiescing)

I'll get some forks.

Hope goes to her kitchenette and retrieves two forks.

Margaret heads to the fridge.

MARGARET

Mind if I grab a beer?

HOPE

You're paying for this room.

She grabs a can from the fridge, pours it in a glass. She then examines the empty can.

Hope starts eating.

MARGARET

Have I ever told you about Stephanie Papello?

HOPE

Who is Stephanie Papello?

MARGARET

My first bully.

HOPE

No, I don't think you've ever told me about her.

MARGARET

We were in the 6th grade together.

HOPE

6th grade? I'm sure she was a real menace.

MARGARET

You'd be surprised. She was a very... unpleasant girl.

HOPE

*Unpleasant* bullies are the worst.

MARGARET

One day at the cafeteria I must have said something that upset her-

HOPE

Did you call her unpleasant?

MARGARET

-Because she picked up a can... a coke can and she crushed it with her bare hand right in front of my face. I was terrified. For weeks I lived in fear. Then, one night, I was having dinner with my parents at a local pizza place and I realized something very important. Something that totally liberated me.

HOPE

What's that?

Margaret crushes the empty can.

MARGARET

I can crush a coke can with my bare hand. It was an empty coke can, it's made of aluminum, who can't crush that? I went up to her the next day and I said, "I know your little secret" and I picked up a coke can and I crushed it right in her face. "I'm not afraid of you anymore!" I said.

HOPE

What did she do?

MARGARET

She picked up a coke bottle, a glass coke bottle...

HOPE

She crushed a glass bottle? With her bare hand?

MARGARET

No. She cracked me over the head with it. Cut my head wide open! My finger was bleeding, too, cause I cut it on that damn can!

Hope reluctantly lets out a small laugh.

HOPE

Where is Stephanie Papello now?

MARGARET

Prison I think.

HOPE

That's what being a bully gets you.

MARGARET

That or leader of your own country.

(Then)

I don't know why they voted for him. It seems insane to me.

HOPE

These are crazy times. They make people do crazy things.

Margaret looks at her daughter then suddenly  
breaks down and starts to cry.

HOPE

Mother?

MARGARET

(In tears)

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

HOPE

(Confused)

Why? For calling people idiots? It's fine. I mean, it's not nice, but I know you didn't mean it. I antagonized you. I pushed a button, and set you off. You said some things. You lost it for a moment. You're human. You make mistakes.

MARGARET

What if I've made many mistakes? I wish I could say that every decision I've made is right. I don't know that they're all right. But they were all made with your best interest at heart.

HOPE

I know.

MARGARET

When there are enemies at the gate, you have to act fast. You have to come up with a solution, and you don't have time to truly vet it. You just... You act. And you hope it's enough to keep the enemies at bay.

HOPE

Mom. It's OK.

MARGARET

And then you build a wall. A wall around yourself so you can be protected from all of the bad decisions you've ever made.

HOPE

Mom!

Margaret regains control.

MARGARET

Sorry.

HOPE

It's fine.

Margaret wipes away her tears.

MARGARET

I'm going to...

(Pointing to her wet face)

...Take care of this. Give me a moment.

Margaret exits to the bathroom. Hope stands mystified for a moment, then remembers Chase in the wardrobe. She rushes to the Wardrobe, and opens it.

HOPE

Go!

CHASE

Give me a bite of your cheesecake.

HOPE

Go!

CHASE

Just a small bite. I love cheesecake.

HOPE

Chase! We don't have time.

She drags him to the door.

CHASE

Do you still think we should potion your mother? She seems like... she wants to help.

HOPE

Better safe than sorry.

We hear a flush.

HOPE

Go!

CHASE

I love you!

HOPE

I love you, too.

He's gone. As soon as he is, Margaret re-enters.

HOPE

You all good?

MARGARET

I'm good. Thank you. Sorry about that.

HOPE

It's fine.

Margaret's phone rings.

MARGARET

(On the phone)

Hello. Yes. Now? Very good. I'll call you back in two.

(Then, to Hope)

I have to make a call.

HOPE

Everything ok?

MARGARET

It will be.

She heads for the door.

HOPE

Are you coming back?

MARGARET

(Shaking her head)

This will probably take awhile.

HOPE

(Re: the cheesecake)

Then take this with you. Otherwise, I'll eat the whole thing.

She re-packages up the cake and hands it to her mother.

MARGARET

Thanks.

HOPE

Mom... I know this last year has been difficult. But it's going to be better.

MARGARET

I know it will.

Margaret exits.

## SCENE 5

Harvin, Margaret and Zerlina are in the large meeting room, preparing to sign the completed treaty outlining the borders of the two new countries.

HARVIN

What we do today is in accordance with the will of the almighty creator. I believe that. So we shouldn't be sad and lament the end of an era. On the contrary, we should celebrate. Celebrate... the birth of a nation.

Margaret shakes her head in disgust.

HARVIN

It is, after all, God's will.

MARGARET

I thought we were here to serve the will of the people.

HARVIN

It's the will of some of the people.

MARGARET

The majority?

HARVIN

Since when does the majority rule?

Zerlina steps in between them. She is holding a tray with two glasses of potioned champagne.

ZERLINA

Margaret, Mr. Baron, I know you both are anxious to conclude your business here.

HARVIN

Absolutely!

ZERLINA

Might I suggest before we do that, we raise a glass and have a toast.

Harvin signs the document.

HARVIN

Too late! I've already signed. Margaret?

He holds out the pen for her.

MARGARET

(Ignoring him)

Zerlina? What were you saying?

ZERLINA

We raise a glass-

HARVIN

Oh, for crying out loud!

ZERLINA

And toast to the future of these two great nations.

HARVIN

Fine. Let's make it quick.

Harvin and Margaret each grab a glass off the tray. Zerlina picks up a third un-potioned glass for herself and raises it.

ZERLINA

May they be prosperous. May they live in peace. May their leaders lead with wisdom, strength and integrity, and always seek the ways of righteousness, justice and mercy. Let them act responsibly with a keen interest in not only protecting the citizens within their borders, but the global community, and the planet, as well.

HARVIN

Global warming is a myth. The planet's been doing fine for going on 6000 years.

ZERLINA

Most importantly, may they be guided by love and compassion for their fellow man and woman. May God shed his grace on these two new republics, and all those who reside within.

HARVIN

Bottoms up!

Margaret and Harvin bring the glasses to their lips, but before they can drink-

BANG!

A loud gunshot is heard. All three react and look to where the shot came from.

ZERLINA

What was that?

Harvin looks at his watch.

HARVIN

(Coldly)

Probably Elbert.

ZERLINA

What?

HARVIN

I'm surprised, too. I thought they were going to hang him.

ZERLINA

They weren't supposed to execute him until later today!



HARVIN

(Coldly)

I guess they jumped the gun.

ZERLINA

No!

Zerlina runs out in the direction of the gun shot.

HARVIN

I don't know why she's so upset. I just reduced my country's carbon footprint by one.

MARGARET

What the hell is the matter with you? You're killing your own people now?

HARVIN

You run your country your way, I'll run my country mine.

MARGARET

You keep killing your electorate, you're going to have a hard time being re-elected.

HARVIN

What makes you think I'm going to hold elections?

Harvin's phone rings. He answers it.

HARVIN

(On the phone)

Hello? Yes. Nearly done.

Harvin walks to the other end of the room to take his call.

Zerlina re-enters. She is pale. She approaches Margaret.

MARGARET

I'm sorry about Elbert. There was nothing I could do.

ZERLINA

(In shock)

That wasn't Elbert. Your daughter just shot and killed Chase Baron.

Beat, as Margaret takes in the horrifying news.

ZERLINA

Did you hear me? She shot and killed Chase Baron.

MARGARET

(In shock)

That... That wasn't my intent.

ZERLINA

(Confused)

Wasn't your intent? What does that mean?

Margaret doesn't respond.

ZERLINA

What does that mean?

MARGARET

(Fighting emotion)

I found out she loved him.

ZERLINA

What did you do?

MARGARET

I couldn't have it. Harvin Baron is abominable.

ZERLINA

His son was not.

MARGARET

I couldn't have it!

(Then)

I heard tell of a shaman in this part of the country. A witch doctor with expertise in matters of the heart... I bought a potion. It turns love into hate. I put a little on her cheesecake.

ZERLINA

(Realizing, stunned)

You poisoned your daughter.

MARGARET

(Correcting)

Potioned my daughter.

ZERLINA

Is there a difference?

MARGARET

(Suddenly, on the offensive)

Did you know she loved him?

ZERLINA

Yes.

MARGARET

And you didn't tell me?

ZERLINA

I was afraid of what you might do.

MARGARET

What did you think I would do?

ZERLINA

...I didn't think you'd do this.

Baron gets off the phone and returns to the group.

HARVIN

Are we done? I'd like to get my son and be on our way.

(Then)

Margaret, did you sign the damn papers yet?

Zerlina approaches him.

ZERLINA

Mr. Baron-

Harvin hands his pen to Zerlina.

HARVIN

Would you give her this, so she can sign the God Damn agreement.

ZERLINA

Mr. Baron, there is something you should know. Something happened. Something horrible.

A pale Hope enters. She is holding a gun.

MARGARET

Hope, come here.

Hope doesn't move.

MARGARET

Hope.

Harvin notices the pistol Hope is holding. It is the gun he gave to his son.

HARVIN

(To Hope)

Where did you get that gun?

Hope still looks blankly into space.

HARVIN

That gun belongs to my son. Where did you get it?

ZERLINA

Mr. Baron, I have some news about your son.

HARVIN

(To Hope, his fear mounting)

Where is my son? Where is my son?

Hope says nothing.

HARVIN

(Calling offstage, panicked)

Chase. Chase! Chase!

Harvin Baron runs off in the direction of the gunshot!

Beat.

Zerlina turns to Margaret.

ZERLINA

You have blood on your hands, Margaret.

MARGARET

(Defensively)

And Harvin Baron doesn't? His followers, they don't have blood on their hands?

ZERLINA

(Pointing to Hope)

You put blood on her hands. Do you know what you've done to her? It's a fate worse than death. Do you know what you've done?

MARGARET

(Rationalizing)

We will be rid of them, Zerlina. All of those despicable people. Neo-Nazis, white supremacists, misogynistic bastards, who are worthy of every ounce of our loathing. We will be rid of them!

ZERLINA

This has consumed you.

MARGARET

I'm done trying to help people that are determined to hate me!

(Then)

I hate them. I hate HIM for making me hate. For making me do hateful things. You don't hate him?

ZERLINA

Not more than I love her.

She points to Hope.

MARGARET

He is a monster.

ZERLINA

"Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster."

Margaret's walls are now fully up.

MARGARET

Give me the pen.

She takes the pen from Zerlina's hand. Then goes to sign the document.

Zerlina approaches Hope, who is now wrestling between her trance and fighting back tears.

ZERLINA

Hope. Can you hear me, child? Hope.

HOPE

(Fighting tears)

...I can't stand him. I can't stand him!

(Then, tortured)

But I remember loving him. I don't understand. Is this a dream? What did I do? Please tell me it's just a dream.

Beat.

Finally, Zerlina takes from her pocket the bottle of sleeping pills she took from Hope earlier.

ZERLINA

It can be.

She hands Hope the pills.

Margaret finishes signing the papers.

MARGARET

Hope, let's go.

Hope walks towards her mother.

Upstage in silhouette, we see Harvin holding his dead son. We hear his cries. "Chase. My son! Chase!"

Margaret starts to escort her daughter out. She then turns to Zerlina.

MARGARET

For what it's worth, I didn't want her to kill him. I just wanted her to hate him.

ZERLINA

Where did you think that would lead?

In another part of upstage we see a silhouette of Elbert, preparing to be hung by a hangman.

ZERLINA

You people stoke the fires and then are surprised when everything burns. This is where it leads!

Harvin Baron cries over his dead son.

ZERLINA

This is where it leads!

The hangman pulls his lever and Elbert is hung.

ZERLINA

This is where it leads!

Black out.

The End.