

Abortion in Performance: Why Not?

By

Frankie Eisenhut

Submitted to the Department of Theatre and Performance

School of the Arts

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College

State University of New York

May, 2022

Sponsor: Andrea Thome

Second Reader: Jordan Schildcrout

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|----|----------------|
| 3 | Artistic Aims |
| 8 | Research Essay |
| 17 | Technical |
| 23 | Works Cited |
| 25 | The script |

I. Artistic Aims

In 2021, as a rising Senior, not only was I living in a pandemic, but I was at risk to live in a world where I do not have the right to choose an abortion for myself. The summer of 2021 is when my project flourished, and in my mind, the play wrote itself. I've always been interested in the Women's Rights Movement, and I always felt this drive to contribute to the conversation. I never knew how or what to say, but I could write into the movement. I've always written for what I believe in, and express my thoughts and beliefs through theatrical arts.

It was May of 2021, where I was listening to a news podcast, when I heard the news of Texas overturning Roe v. Wade. Not long after, other states began following Texas as well. This frustrated me, angered me, upset me, and writing is the only way I know how to express these emotions. In my mind I kept thinking, 'what if New York is next?', 'what if I'm next?'. I began following details on the abortion ban, speaking about it in society, many were unaware of this law. I began to wonder why- why is this not talked about more often? I researched the historical context of abortion, from when it was made illegal in the 1800s to now. Ruth Barnett is a name

that came up in my research, and she serves as the main source of inspiration for *My Body, My Health, My Choice!*

Ruth Barnett was an abortion provider from 1918 to 1970, practicing a one hundred percent success rate on thousands of women in the United States. After reading her autobiography, *They Weep on My Doorstep*, I was immensely inspired by her work, and I wanted to continue this exploration. I was interested in learning more about her practice, society, and her background. She was a woman who was dedicated to her practice and truly believed in saving the lives and suffering of women who went to her. It was a completely different world at the time, but I saw similarities in the world then to our world now. Through *My Body, My Health, My Choice!* I aim to show these differences and similarities. I want audiences to recognize the similarities and take those into consideration, as the world is changing around us.

This piece is unlike anything I've ever created before, I've briefly explored topics of queer culture, dysphoria, abuse, and women's rights in my past pieces, but nothing this bold. People used to tell me that my work was "too much", and "too heavy", I have now chosen to express the heaviness that lies within my artistry. I am making a bold political statement in *My Body, My Health, My Choice!* My goal is to engage audiences in this ongoing political conversation, and provoke a reaction. I want my audience to feel strongly after seeing my piece, and encourage them to interact with this ongoing social issue.

Throughout my childhood, I've always loved writing and reading, but most of all, I loved reading and writing real stories because I believe those are the ones that matter the most. This is a real story I was fortunate enough to never experience, but as states are overturning *Roe v. Wade*, this is a story that needs to be told. After placing the abortion ban, there are people driving hundreds of miles to find a safe abortion, and there are others who attempt to self-induce

an abortion. Although this is a historical play, this is a current issue that needs awareness and action. I'm writing this piece to increase awareness, and influence others to explore this societal issue through art.

Through this piece, I aim to acknowledge and celebrate the legacy of abortion provider, Ruth Barnett. Barnett was an abortion provider in the 1900s while it was still illegal. Illegal abortions are unsafe, and many have died from an abortion before it was legalized, but Barnett never lost a single patient. She used her education and drive to save women's lives, by providing them an option over their body. In *My Body, My Health, My Choice!*, the character, Jane, is inspired by Ruth Barnett. I made this decision after reading her autobiography, *They Weep on my Doorstep*. I found this piece so provocative and inspiring, that I took pieces from her life and created Jane, while fictionalizing certain parts to create an original character. Although Barnett did not have a smooth career with the criminalization of providing and receiving abortions, she was successful. She didn't have the resources or tools that are used in medical abortions today, but she had the drive to study, which is how she never lost a patient. I also discovered the lack of literature surrounding Ruth Barnett. Other than her autobiography, I found very few writings that related to her work. I was immensely inspired and moved by her autobiography, so much that I wanted to create a piece to commemorate Barnett and her legacy as an abortion provider.

I've used this piece in my graduate school applications, to obtain a Master of Fine Arts in Theatre and Performance. Next Fall, I will be attending Sarah Lawrence College, where I will continue this piece and eventually produce it. I write for my work to be performed, and this is a piece that I would like to see produced. I've learned that there are not many abortion plays, and the abortion plays are never talked about, which I believe is why many are unaware of the abortion ban. I'm writing an abortion play to cause a reaction, whether this be disgust, anger,

frustration etc. I believe that provoking strong reactions will leave the audience feeling strongly on either side of this issue. While writing this play, I have gone through the writing and revisions process, which supports me as I become a Professional Playwright.

This production is unique because it investigates what has changed in the past century if anything has changed. Many abortion plays take place in a time where abortion was legal, so people don't see it as an issue. Today in 2022, it is an issue, and by comparing the past one hundred years, it allows audiences to recognize the issue and perhaps take action on it. In order to do so, I use contemporary language in this piece. I felt that by using a form of old English that I am not used to, I would focus too much on historical accuracy and lose my message that I want to communicate to an audience.

Additionally, I aim to invite diverse casts in this Classical play. In the script, I have noted some gender restrictions to roles, with the majority of the roles open to any gender and race/ethnicity. I believe that it is important to increase diversity within theatre, and this play allows theatres to break the standard that only caucasian people can participate in historical plays, by allowing everyone to participate. This play has historical accuracies, but I believe that this piece should be used to create a new standard in theatre that anyone can participate, regardless of identity. Theater is a predominantly white industry, and it's necessary to create more open roles to include groups that have been previously oppressed. I notice a lot of roles are only open to men and women, which excludes the trans community, and by creating open gender roles, we are allowing everyone of all genders to participate. My characters, Avery and Kira, are in a queer relationship and I did not specify their genders because I want to not only create more open roles, but I also want it to be open for interpretation. Avery can crossdress, if the need is for historical accuracy, or it can be modern and Avery can be recognized as a gender neutral person.

It is my intent to send this play out to theatres and get it produced, and this is a change I would like to see in the industry.

As of May 2022, the Supreme Court is in the process of overturning *Roe v. Wade*. This news broke my heart with my biggest fears coming to life. If *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, this will lead to people fleeing the country, inducing an unsafe abortion, and people criminalized. People decide to have an abortion for many reasons including, health risks, they were assaulted, economic reasons, etc. All of these reasons are perfectly valid for not bringing another life into this world. Additionally, the law states that exceptions will be made to sexual assault cases. However, it is important to note what will “count” as assault in the eyes of the jury. Assault happens when a person is violated, but there is a lot of victim blaming when it comes to assault. Questions like, “why didn’t you just leave?”, or “why didn’t you fight back?”, are brought up with the intent of blaming the victim for not doing more to prevent this incident.

Abortion is an on-going human rights issue in the country. By talking about abortion and portraying abortion, we are opening the conversation up to people who may not even be aware regarding the state of women’s reproductive rights. During this time, it is important to remember victims who have died due to an unsafe abortion. Telling the story of Meredith in *My Body, My Health, My Choice!* Will allow me to communicate the dangers of an abortion and why it needs to be legalized. If a woman wants to get an abortion, she will get one. Criminalizing abortion does not make it go away, but it takes away the funding and safety of the procedure. I aim to portray these dangers, and the complexities that come within abortion, and recognizing abortion as a human rights issue, rather than a choice.

I. Research Essay

As of May 2022, abortion is a main topic in the political conversation again. The Supreme Court is in the process of overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the law declaring abortion legal. Now is more important than ever to be discussing abortion throughout our lives. Creating more theatrical pieces on abortion will help spark this conversation. Past abortion plays include *Abortion* by Eugene O'Neill, *Dry Land* by Ruby-Rae Spiegel, and *Spare Rib* by Winter Miller. All of these plays examine abortion throughout history, from the 20th century to present day, while starting a political conversation with the audience. Each of these plays are unique in which they are all presented differently and received a variety of responses. By examining the historical context of these productions, we are given insight on what worked and what went wrong, while building upon a future of abortion plays. Abortion is not a popular topic in daily conversation, or in theatre. Creating pieces that discuss abortion allows the conversation to open up, and educate others on women's reproductive rights. Abortion should be depicted in performance to encourage societal change in the systematic issue that limits women's choice over their body. By

dportraying abortion through performance, these playwrights have established a political message by educating an audience and arguing for abortion rights.

A contemporary take on abortion, *Dry Land*, by Ruby Rae Spiegel, depicts two high school girls attempting a do-it-yourself abortion. By depicting high school girls in this narrative, Spiegel sets a standard that not every abortion story is the same. Abortion is an individualized experience, and many will choose to get abortions for their own reasons. In this play, popular girl, Amy, gets pregnant and enlists the help of the shy, Ester, to help her with an abortion. This play is an abortion play, with the complexities of friendship and the hardships that come when facing an abortion. The decision to get an abortion can be one of the most traumatic things a person has to go through. *Dry Land* demonstrates this well as Amy experiences physical pain, an emotional roller coaster, and navigating the complexities of friendship as a teenager, longing for an abortion. In an interview conducted by Spiegel's mentor, Lucas Hnath, the playwright explains the character of Amy as:

“There’s this strong cultural narrative of the girl who had sex for the first time, who’s very virginal and was perhaps coerced into sex by an older guy, and then suddenly she’s pregnant. And that’s the kind of character that’s been centered in an empathic narrative of abortion that affirms ideas of purity and all that. And so I tried to work against that model in writing Amy. It was important to me that she’s risky with her sexuality and that she is or has tried to carve out a performative sexual identity for herself that pushes against the idea of female purity.” (Finding Her Way to ‘Dry Land’, Hnath).

Spiegel pushes the envelope of societal conventions by not only writing an abortion play involving teenage characters, but she creates a narrative for Amy, one that needs recognition. The play premiered in New York at HERE Arts Center in a Colt Coeur production in 2014,

directed by Adrienne Campbell-Holt, with an amazing outcome. Reviewers say Spiegel's *Dry Land* is revolutionary, and transforming by examining two very different characters and how they must take extraordinary measures due to how our society views abortion.

The abortion controversy has been a conversation throughout the world for many years. Spiegel utilizes *Dry Land* to bring diverse abortion stories into this conversation. She brings two very different characters struggling with different things to create this narrative of not having the resources for an abortion. At the time of this play, Florida state law required parental consent for a minor to have an abortion. Amy states that she cannot tell anyone her secret, besides Ester, who decides to help her. Abortions are often looked down upon, but especially a teenage abortion. Amy recognizes this, and that is why it is so important to her that no one knows. Studies show specific data on why some teenagers cannot discuss the decision to have an abortion, with a parent:

“One study showed that 22% of teens who did not tell a parent about their abortion decision feared that, if they told their parents, they would be kicked out of the house. More than 8% feared that they would be physically abused because their parents had beaten them before. Of those who did not tell a parent, 12% did not live with either parent and 14% had parents who abused drugs or alcohol.” (LAWS RESTRICTING TEENAGERS' ACCESS TO ABORTION, ACLU).

This data supports Amy's reasons for not discussing her pregnancy with a parent. Spiegel takes this unrepresented story to create the world of the play, including a scene where the uncensored abortion takes place.

Very few theatre go-ers have seen an abortion depicted on stage. Spiegel did not shy away from this, as the script states to show the abortion scene head-on. Many New York theaters

rejected this play, due to the graphic content. Professionals recommended censoring the scene, but Spiegel believed in her vision, "That felt like everything to me. It says something very political. If I'm saying, 'Don't be ashamed of this experience' and then choose to leave it off stage, that wouldn't be right." (Yale grad's acclaimed play 'Dry Land' centers on idea of DIY abortion, Wallenberg). Spiegel utilizes this graphic scene in order to make a political statement on abortion access and rights. Amy did not have the resources for a safe abortion, and this is what an at-home abortion entails.

One report indicates that a man even passed out during a showing of *Dry Land* due to graphic content during the abortion scene. The Evening Standard made a public statement regarding this incident: "The man collapsed at about 9.20pm shortly after a scene in which the main character Amy, a high school student played by Milly Thomas, miscarries after taking an abortion pill." (Watts, *Dry Land*: Bloody DIY abortion scene in West End play causes male audience member to faint). This incident caused the show to stop shortly after the abortion scene, before the paramedics arrived. This incident connects to the fact on why so many theatre companies rejected *Dry Land*. Many loved this play, however, they believed it was too graphic and disturbing for viewers. Spiegel was even asked to remove this scene, during an interview, Spiegel touched base on this point by stating, "One company even asked if one of the scenes could be cut. It was the abortion scene, so very pivotal. My philosophy is that I'm trying to show the experience of abortion without shame." Spiegel makes the point that abortion is a human rights issue, where others look down on those who choose to have an abortion. *Dry Land* depicts the complexities and the risks of having an abortion, and the complications that come with it. For example, the play ends with Amy viewing Ester's swimming video, and she begins to cry. This can be interpreted in several ways, perhaps she was crying because she's happy for her friend, or

jealous, or even both. This shows the aftermath of her abortion, and how traumatizing it was for both of them.

Dry Land is successful in reaching audiences in which it doesn't urge audiences to choose a side to abortion, but it presents a story of someone who needed an abortion. Journalist, Kerry Reid, states, "Instead, Spiegel offers a clear-eyed and often funny (despite some of the grimmer notes) portrait of what it's really like to be a teenage girl — in all its messiness and defiance and hard-won triumphs." (Reid, 'Dry Land' a shocking but honest portrayal of teen crisis). Reid is a journalist and theatre critic, who writes for the Chicago Tribune. Reid saw a production of *Dry Land* at the Rivendell Theatre Ensemble, when she wrote this review. She found Spiegel's writing to be effective in creating a concise story that isn't necessarily overly political. This play is political, but it argues for abortion access, rather than arguing for the legalization. My play argues for the legalization, but it is also important to give the story that happens outside of the issue. Spiegel is making a political statement, but also giving a story that isn't political, which is what draws audiences in. As soon as the audience is drawn in, the message can be heard, and audiences heard Spiegel's message on creating abortion access.

A more political take on the topic occurs in *Spare Rib* by Winter Miller. This play follows the Jane Collectives, a group of women who conduct illegal abortions, as well as the women who receive the abortions. Winter Miller is an American Playwright, who writes provocative work surrounding heavy topics such as AIDS, sexuality, and abortion. Abortion is a topic that Miller feels strongly about, so much that she has previously stated, "If I could choose a different profession, it would be to be an abortion provider," she said. "I would really, truly love to offer that service to people." (Mead, Cold Read). Miller provides the humor in this play, along with

the complexities surrounding depictions of an illegal abortion. This is such an important piece as Miller displays the realism of an unsafe abortion, and the education on why abortion rights are a human rights issue. During an interview, when Miller was asked why an abortion play, she responded, “If we don’t talk about abortion—if we don’t continue to talk about abortion, and how many people have had abortions, and how important it is that they remain legal and accessible—then we continue to allow the space for these inhumane events,” she said by phone. (Mead, Cold Read).

The Jane Collective is an underground network that provided abortion services in Chicago from 1969 to 1973. Their tagline was, “Pregnant? Don’t want to be? Call Jane.” A telephone number followed. (Haberma, Code Name Jane: The Women Behind a Covert Abortion Network). Jane was a common name used throughout this network, referring to anyone who can provide an abortion. Not only was abortion criminalized at the time, but most of them were not medical professionals. Additionally, there were back alley abortions being conducted as well. A report states that Sunny Chapman, who became pregnant at nineteen, referred to a back alley abortionist. Chapman states, “I had a conversation with the man on the phone, and just talking to him made me feel completely unsafe,” (Haberma, Code Name Jane: The Women Behind a Covert Abortion Network). *Spare Rib* explores back alley abortionists, when the characters, Harriet and Magaret, are discussing a case where a young pregnant woman turned to a back alley abortion. On page 14, Harriet says, “He told her no abortion unless he could fuck her.” (Miller, *Spare Rib*). Many of these back alley abortions were often brutal and threatening. The operation is not conducted well, and there was usually a man that coerced women into doing sexual favors, in order to get an abortion. The Jane Collective served to protect these women, and provide them with a safe abortion.

Spare Rib is a political play that argues for abortion rights, including accessibility to a safe procedure. This play is more relevant now than ever due to the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Miller portrays themes of women's reproductive rights, misogyny, brutality, and violence in this play as she portrays a historically accurate image of abortion. Miller doesn't shy away from showing the harsh realities of it, like the scene where there is a patient passed out on the hotel bed, after receiving the procedure. Although this is intense, past staged readings of this production have been well received by an audience. The New York Times calls her work "crankingly funny", as she is a professional at adding humor in between these heavy topics.

One of the Lost Works of Eugene O'Neill includes the play, *Abortion*. This play follows main character, Jack, as we soon discover that he cheated on his fiancée, Evelyn, with Nellie and he recently paid for Nellie's abortion. This play offers an interesting point of view because there is a presentation of a young, male college hero that seems like he has everything, he ends up having nothing and committing suicide. This piece was written in 1914, when abortion was still illegal, thus it was very contemporary for its time. When abortion plays are written, it usually follows the narrative of a girl who needs one, whereas *Abortion* follows a man that paid for one. In many illegal abortion cases, it is rare for the man to pay unless he is married to the woman. Women would hide it from everyone, including their lover, and get the operation in private. Although *Abortion* wasn't the most successful show, it carries an important political message.

This piece investigates themes of women's reproductive rights, suicide, and social class. However, this piece was not a success at all. Eugene O'Neill's lost works became lost works because they were received negatively by an audience. This piece wasn't performed until 1959, due to how "taboo" the topic seemed in that time period. In 1914, there was a ban on all abortions, and Planned Parenthood wasn't founded until 1916, so abortion was not a political

conversation at the time. When *Abortion* made its stage debut in 1959 at the Key Theatre, the production eliminated the suicide of the main character, Jack. American editor, Arthur Gelb, saw this production and was fairly disappointed, stating, “What was needed was more shooting, not less” (Gelb, *The New York Times*). While another called this work “reprehensible and shameful” (Broder, 51). For this reason, this play is unfamiliar to many people, as the few who have seen it were displeased.

This play sends a message about social class in this time period. Jack, is a rich college student, and he impregnates Nellie, who is lower class and is considered a “townie”. His decision to commit suicide does not come from his guilt about his mistress’s death, but in order to save his family’s reputation. He feared that Murray, Nellie’s brother, would tell everyone what he’s done and it would ruin his family, relationship, and reputation if this got around. For that reason, he decides to take his life. This play does not portray Jack as a compassionate man that cares for others, he is trying to avoid the shame that would come from cheating with a woman in a lower social class from him. It can also be assumed that due to Nellie’s social class, she resorted to a back-alley abortion. It is never stated in the script, but Murray gives the audience some clues on what really happened to his sister and in 1914, back-alley abortions were one of the only services available at the time. O’Neill is communicating with an audience and portraying a person of low social class that can only afford a back-alley abortion, showing the lack of abortion services available to women.

Despite the negative reviews surrounding *Abortion*, this is an important piece that needs to be revisited today. This piece is more relevant now than ever as we need to examine the historical context of abortion in order to understand why we need full reproductive rights. By banning abortion, we are preventing women from getting the health care they need. Revisiting

this play will allow the open dialogue to happen, depicting the harsh realities of an abortion. In opening this conversation, it's time to revisit the tough tragedies and examine what would happen if abortion was under a ban again.

In 2022 revisiting abortion plays is an essential because abortion is a topic that hasn't aged; we are still debating it, and there are still laws being created to prevent abortions from happening. Abortion is a heavy topic, so no matter what kind of recognition the play received, an abortion play is an important play. Abortion isn't just one topic, it is full of complexities and often bring other important subjects to surface. Recognizing and acknowledging the historical significance and context of all of these plays also allows for theatrical artists to create pieces surrounding diverse stories in abortion. Performing abortion stories allows realism to enter within the theatre, and depict a real story that will sit with the audience. No one takes abortion lightly, but artists work to find light in the topic and use their art to make a difference in society.

III. Technical

As I began writing my abortion play, I had no idea where to start. I felt as if I wasn't qualified enough to write about this topic, and I worried that my message would get lost in the play. Through this process, I received so much support from my Senior Collaborators, as well as my Advisor. I struggled with my own pressure of creating a perfect play in a perfect staged reading. I had many struggles along the way, but I managed to adapt to all challenges throughout the process.

My first challenge came across when I just started writing, which came with the question, 'what do I know about abortion?'. I struggled with finding my own connection to the topic, even though it was a topic that greatly interested me. I began with general research on the history of abortion laws. I chose to set my play in the 1920s because that is a time period that I'm really interested in, and I was curious to explore how abortion fits into this period. I was fascinated by researching topics of queer culture, prohibition, misogyny, and the criminalization of women during this period. Throughout this research, I came across an article on Ruth Barnett, an illegal abortion provider in the 1900s. I was interested in her work because an illegal abortion is an unsafe abortion, yet Barnett never lost a patient, which was rare for women to survive an unsafe abortion. I decided to further research Barnett, and my character, Jane, was inspired by her. I read Barnett's autobiography, *They Weep on My Doorstep*, I fictionalized events in her life, while incorporating elements of her character to Jane. I thought it was important to keep some truth in this character, while also making it my own. From that point on, the main scenes fit into place for me because I knew how I wanted my story to go, I just didn't know all of the details yet.

Research is a big takeaway for me while writing this play, the more research I conducted, the more specific my play became.

Another area of struggle was when it came to producing a staged reading. I've been involved in previous staged readings, but they were over Zoom, so I had to adapt to the guidelines of a staged reading. I write for my work to be performed, so I had initially considered production elements in my piece, including sound and lighting. This process helped me focus on my characters and developing the story, along with the world of the play. In developing these characters, I also found it helpful to work with actors. It was insightful when actors would explain how they perceive a certain character, and it influenced me to explore traits of different characters. In previous productions I've worked on, I never had the opportunity to really sit on a play and focus on developing it. Next Fall, I will be attending Sarah Lawrence College to pursue an MFA Degree in Theatre and Performance, where I will continue playwriting. This process helped my development as a playwright by allowing me to explore all the possibilities within my play, conducting relevant research on the time period, and by getting to know my characters and effectively expressing them in their individual voice.

I often felt stuck on specific scenes, such as the first scene, and the smaller scenes with only two characters. I felt that I didn't know how to further investigate them through the play. I was advised to think of these characters outside of the play, I found this to be tricky because Jane, Roxanne, Kira, and Avery are all abortion providers, in some way, all different from one another. Their lives will always involve abortion, so I began to think about their individual journey to where they are now. One thing that helped me significantly was writing short stories about my characters, before they were providers. This process helped me get to know my characters in a world outside of the play. This also helped me solidify certain themes I wanted to

express such as gender and sexuality, norms within society, and misogyny. I always knew that Avery and Kira's genders were open to interpretation, but I didn't exactly know how to express their gender, while keeping both roles open to any gender. I also wanted to express the complexities of a queer relationship in the 1920s because that was an important area of research in this piece. I wanted to communicate that queer relationships and people have always existed throughout time, but it's important to recognize the system of oppression.

Additionally, another concern I had were the content warnings. I wanted my content warnings to be appropriate and relevant to the text, so no one in the audience feels unsafe. I believe that this is a strong topic that needs to be discussed, but safety is my first priority. I was worried for how the audience would perceive my play, if my message came through or if it just made everyone uncomfortable. After the showing of my play, I received feedback from my classmates and professors, who all felt that my content warnings were appropriate and that the play wasn't too graphic. I struggled finding the line between sending out a message through my play, without making it too graphic, but with realism. I wanted my play to have some degree of accuracy, but I did not want to make it brutal. For that reason, I chose not to display the operation, but instead display Meredith's feelings on the operation and what happened. This was received well, the audience knew what was going on, but it wasn't a traumatic showing.

Throughout this process, I felt that rehearsals helped me in editing the piece. I would come to each rehearsal with a new or a revised scene that they would read through, and we would have discussions about the scene. It was helpful for me to know what resonated with the actor, and what they thought about their character. I used their feedback not to dictate my piece, but to provide clarity. I always welcomed questions about the play, and these questions were used to help me determine what is confusing or unclear. I would refine these elements and return to

rehearsal with a new scene. I was also the director of my play, so I advised the actors on voice styles and characterization. This was difficult for me in terms of responsibility load, but I knew exactly what I wanted my reading to look like. This was a big learning process for me as I was also on a journey with the actors in getting to know the character and the play.

I found that having collaborators was efficient for my reading. We are in different concentrations, but it helped me knowing that I had the support in creating this piece, and it helped with my workload. We collaborated on ideas of costuming, design, and dramaturgy throughout this process. Initially, I wanted sound and lighting for my reading. I brought in my own props to be occasionally used for specific moments, and I also wanted certain moments to have different lighting and sound effects. I thought these elements would keep the audience engaged and it would support my message in the piece with creating the setting and atmosphere. We had trouble finding volunteers, and we had to adjust and adapt to a new vision for the reading. We could not find a sound designer, so I directed the actors to create their own sound. For example, if the script states that someone is knocking, knock on one of the tables and create sound organically. I also worked on voice projection with actors in rehearsals and before the show. Since there was no sound, they had to speak loud and clear so they were heard by the audience. On the day of my reading, I also had the audience move up close to the stage to compensate for the loss of sound. After receiving feedback, I learned that everyone was heard loud and clear, and that sound wasn't an issue. We also could not find a lighting board operator until a few days before my reading. The volunteer was unable to attend rehearsal, but she came to the show early to learn her cues. I was performing as the narrator for this reading, and the lighting was slightly off cue, but I don't think that had a negative affect on my reading. Additionally, I have mentors and friends who were not able to attend the show but wanted a

digital recording. We found a volunteer at the very last minute to record the show, however, the camera ran out of memory during the show. This volunteer was able to quickly adapt and found an alternate device to record the show. I am in the process of editing all the videos together to create a digital recording of my reading. On the day of my show, I faced a lot of challenges and my show even started late due to technical difficulties, but me and my collaborators were able to adapt and conquer all challenges we faced that morning.

Another success point for this reading was the turnout we had. We had forty three guests attend the show, which was a result of how we marketed the show. I am a double major in Arts Management as well, and I was able to use my skills gained from that major towards this reading. I am proficient in Canva, social media management and marketing, email marketing, and branding. I created a few different posters for this show with the same color scheme of dark brown, and each one has a different tagline. Some of the taglines I used are, “What if Roe v. Wade never happened”, and “Some of our answers are found through prayers, some are found in a speakeasy”. Including these taglines gives viewers insight on what the show will be about in one short sentence. I posted these posters all around campus, sent emails to my professors and mentors, and I advertised on social media. My entire cast helped me out with this, and we all invited our family, friends, and professors to come see the show. I believe that all of these tactics aid in our success of how many people came. The audience matters to me because my play is about an ongoing issue, and I want people to hear about it, and talk about it.

This past semester, I have received numerous support from my peers, friends, family, and mentors. I have big ideas for this project, all of which had turned out to be successful in one way or another, but most of all, I believed and others believed in my vision. I feel prepared to leave college and enter graduate school with this full length play, and work on producing it as a

production. I believe that my experience on my senior project has enhanced my skills and helped me learn to collaborate, take feedback and make revisions, and how to work under pressure. I felt a lot of pressure to produce a perfect staged reading. My reading didn't go exactly how I initially envisioned it, but it was perfect in my mind. My show allowed me to present a work in process and receive feedback on how to continue editing the play, and this process has offered me insight on producing a staged reading, and working with a play.

Works Cited

ACLU. "Laws Restricting Teenagers' Access to Abortion." American Civil Liberties Union, 2022, www.aclu.org/other/laws-restricting-teenagers-access-abortion.

Eugene O'Neill's One-Act Plays: New Critical Perspectives. Place of publication not identified: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Print.

Haberman, Clyde. "Code Name Jane: The Women behind a Covert Abortion Network." The New York Times, The New York Times, 14 Oct. 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/10/14/us/illegal-abortion-janes.html.

Hnath, Lucas. "Finding Her Way to 'Dry Land'." AMERICAN THEATRE, 5 Jan. 2017, www.americantheatre.org/2015/12/02/finding-her-way-to-dry-land/.

Mead, Rebecca. "Winter Miller's Quasi-Comic Abortion Drama." The New Yorker, The New Yorker, 7 Dec. 2015, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/12/14/cold-read.

Reid, Kerry. "'Dry Land' a Shocking but Honest Portrayal of Teen Crisis." Chicago Tribune, 9 May 2019, www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-dry-land-rivendell-theatre-ent-0429-20160428-story.html.

Theater, New York. "Abortion by Eugene O'Neill, Turned into a Play about Race." New York Theater, 20 Aug. 2014,

newyorktheater.me/2014/08/19/abortion-by-eugene-oneill-turned-into-a-play-about-race/.

Wallenberg, Christopher. "Yale Grad's Acclaimed Play 'Dry Land' Centers on Idea of DIY

Abortion - The Boston Globe." BostonGlobe.com, The Boston Globe, 3 Oct. 2015,

www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2015/10/03/yale-grad-acclaimed-play-dry-land-centers-idea-diy-abortion/1LH5txWyDzdwLlwKplXIiO/story.html.

Watts, Matt. "DIY Abortion Scene in West End Play Causes Audience Member to Faint."

Evening Standard, 26 May 2016,

www.standard.co.uk/news/london/bloody-diy-abortion-scene-in-west-end-play-causes-male-audience-member-to-faint-a3111616.html.

MY BODY, MY HEALTH, MY CHOICE!

An original full-length play

By Frankie Eisenhut

SETTING

1927, Chicago.

CHARACTERS

MEREDITH

20s, female, a bit naïve, smart, determined, very loving.

TOM

40s, male, married, well respected, good with his words.

ROXANNE 20s, any gender, mysterious, outgoing, hard working,
passionate.

JANE 50s, female, kind, loving, known as a healer.

AVERY 20s, any gender, gay, outgoing, Kira's partner.

KIRA 20s, any gender, bisexual, Avery's partner.

ANNE 40s, traditional values, Meredith's mother.

TRACY 20s, female, sweet, but naïve.

CONTENT WARNING

This play covers topics such as illegal abortion, misogyny, abuse, and dysphoria, please step out of the theatre at any time, if needed.

ACT I

1. Were You Ready?

(Lights come up as Meredith is standing and making the motel bed, romantic music is playing in the background. There is dim lighting, with barely visible artwork on the walls.)

(Tom enters in a casual shirt with suspenders, trousers, and a hat. He takes off his hat and goes to kiss Meredith)

TOM

Hi gorgeous.

MEREDITH

Hi. I was wondering what happened to you, thought some pretty lady may have stolen you.

TOM

No, no, never, my dear. I was looking for an attendant, but no one was there, so unfortunately no refreshments.

MEREDITH

Oh.. well that's unfortunate.

TOM

It's alright, dear. How was your day?

MEREDITH

It was good! I went to the theater to see a film.

TOM

At the paramount?

MEREDITH

Yes!

TOM

That's my favorite spot.

MEREDITH

Mine too... We should go together!

TOM

Oh how I missed you dear. Your youth excites me.

MEREDITH

I've missed you, Tom. (She embraces Tom)

TOM

You're sweet. (He strokes Meredith's hair) I missed your pretty face, thought about you all day.

MEREDITH

Really?!

TOM

Of course, my love.

(Meredith kisses Tom)

MEREDITH

How was work? Did you misssss me?

TOM

Yes, yes, I always miss you! (Beat) Work was work, would prefer not to speak work matters here.

MEREDITH

Right. Yes. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked.

TOM

You were curious.

MEREDITH

Yes.

TOM

I love your curious mind (Beat) What's on the menu?

(Beat)

MEREDITH

I love our meetings here, truly, but isn't there a little nicer private room we could get?

TOM

Oh Meredith, don't be greedy now.

MEREDITH

I'm not! It was just a thought..

TOM

I'm only joking, dear.

MEREDITH

Right!

(Tom tries to kiss Meredith, as she pulls away)

TOM

Is everything okay with you? You've been off the past few days. (Beat) Tracy giving you a tough time again?

MEREDITH

No, she's fine.

TOM

Well, what's up then?

(Meredith walks away.)

What's going on in that pretty little mind of yours?

MEREDITH

Nothing, I just passed by the consignment in town. They got in a bunch of baby clothes and got me thinking.

TOM

Did it?

MEREDITH

Yeah.

TOM

That's interesting. Why baby clothes?

MEREDITH

Why not?

TOM

I'm not sure I'm following you, dear.

MEREDITH

What do you think of that? Babies?

TOM

Meredith, I have four kids, of course I like kids.

MEREDITH

Right.

TOM

What a silly question to ask.

MEREDITH

Yeah.

TOM

How much longer will you be staying?

I was thinking I would pop this bottle of champagne, and we could talk and relax.

I miss your voice, when you're not around, you know?

You embody everything I want my daughter to be.

(Meredith is silent)

What's wrong, hun? You've been looking blue.

MEREDITH

I'm... sick.

TOM

Oh, what is it dear?

MEREDITH

My stomach.

(Tom thinks he gets it.)

TOM

Oh sweetie, you have nothing to worry about.

MEREDITH

I don't?

TOM

No, my dear. My wife, Miranda, has been through this with the kids. It always passes.

MEREDITH

Right.

TOM

(holds up champagne bottle)

A toast?

MEREDITH

Oh, no... I'm ok.

TOM

You sure?

MEREDITH

Um. Yeah. I'm sure.

TOM

Suit yourself.

(Tom pours himself a drink.)

Is there anything I can get you?

(Meredith shakes her head.)

TOM

This stomach bug must have gotten you, huh? (Pause) Why are you so quiet? Talk to me, my dear, after all, it's just us. (Tom dominantly shifts his body towards Meredith)

(Meredith turns away.)

What's got you?

Come on love, don't be like this.

Meredith?

MEREDITH

(Quietly) Well, I-

TOM

Speak up. What do you need?

MEREDITH

I'm..

TOM

What?!

MEREDITH

Pregnant.

TOM

What?! (A moment) What did you just say?

MEREDITH

I believe I am pregnant, Tom.

TOM

Oh, God... Who- who's the father?

MEREDITH

Well, you. (A moment) You're the love of my life, Tom, it's always been you.

TOM

This can't be happening.

MEREDITH

But it is! And now we're going to have a baby!

TOM

No, no it can't be.

MEREDITH

Yes, yes it is!

TOM

No, you're lying. I could never.

MEREDITH

But you did, Tom. (Pause) Tom?

TOM

(Shaking his head) This is just... you are just...

MEREDITH

I'm... what?

TOM

You just ruined everything...

MEREDITH

Me?!

TOM

You got pregnant and you're blaming me, yes you woman! (Beat) I'm married. Don't you get that?

MEREDITH

Well, it's not my fault you got me pregnant.

(Beat)

TOM

(Laughs) No.. no my dear, I don't believe I did.

MEREDITH

What is that supposed to mean?

TOM

You're good with a typewriter. I never met such a fine young woman that can type the way you do. You're remarkably quick with little to no mistakes on the first try. You're not an idiot, so don't act like one.

MEREDITH

What?

TOM

You're beautiful, yes. But how many men have you been with anyway?

MEREDITH

You're the only one!

TOM

I don't believe that.

MEREDITH

I would never! I can't believe you are accusing me of such nasty things.

TOM

No one's accusing anyone, but if the shoe fits.

MEREDITH

Tom, please try to resonate with me.

TOM

This conversation is over.

MEREDITH

Tom, please, you gotta help me. It's your responsibility-

TOM

-Do not contradict me, Meredith.

MEREDITH

I'm not- I didn't mean to- I was just trying to say-

TOM

You have no idea what you're talking about.

MEREDITH

Tom!!! Would you listen to me!

TOM

You're speaking nonsense! I refuse to believe I am the father, and you're not getting my money.

MEREDITH

I don't want your money! I want you! I need some options, please.

TOM

Options? Use a coat hanger for all I care.

MEREDITH

What do you mean?

TOM

Again with the stupid dialect.

MEREDITH

I don't know what you mean.

TOM

It's easy, just take a coat hanger and stick it up until you start bleeding-

MEREDITH

-WHAT?!

TOM

It seems quite simple, if you ask me.

MEREDITH

I am asking you to help me! We're in this together-

TOM

-Together? You, with a happily married man, who is your boss. You sound sleazy.

MEREDITH

Why won't you leave and marry me? Just like we always talked about?

TOM

(A moment) I only said that to make you happy.

MEREDITH

What?

TOM

I don't love you, I love my wife. And nothing will change that.

MEREDITH

Not even this?

TOM

No. It just adds complications.

MEREDITH

I agree, but you know my situation. Mother needs me to help and I can't help if I'm paying for our baby and-

(Tom slaps her)

TOM

Shut up!!! Shut up. You don't know what you're talking about. (Beat) You stupid woman.

What were you thinking?!

(A moment)

Screwing around like a whore to ruin an innocent man's reputation, his family?

MEREDITH

I'm not- I wasn't-

TOM

Oh, but you were. I saw it right on that childish face of yours. (A beat) I can't believe you would do this to me!

MEREDITH

(Pause) Me?! But what about you? You got me pregnant-

TOM

How do you know it's mine?

MEREDITH

I've told you, you are the only man I've ever been with.

TOM

All you women are such bad liars.

MEREDITH

I swear!

TOM

Talking like a child as usual, classic.

MEREDITH

Please. Tom. You got to help me, I'm terrified-

(Tom shoves and slaps Meredith)

TOM

Shut up. I don't care!

MEREDITH

(holding her cheek)

Tom?

TOM

Shut up, or I will do a whole lot worse to you. Trust me.

(A moment)

Listen to me and listen close.

You are dead to me.

You're not the only cute young girl I've been with, but you are the only misbehaved one.

(Tom grabs a drink)

I just-! Just, leave now, do not ever contact me, no more secret letters, no meeting here, this is finished, and I won't tell anyone about your scandal.

MEREDITH

But Tom-

TOM

Your body, your problem, deal with it. I said I was done with this conversation.

Scandalous whore.

(Tom shoves Meredith out of the room, leaving most of her stuff in there and pushing her to the ground outside. He then spits on her and slams the door shut.)

MEREDITH

My scandal? (Beat) Tom! (She knocks on the door) Tom, would you let me in? We have to talk!

Tom?!

(A spotlight goes up on Meredith as she remains on the ground and begins to cry)

I'm a scandal? I thought you were my future, my forever. I thought this was destiny... a destiny that I chased and chased till I fell outside this room. (Beat)

Was this my destiny? Am I destined to carry around a forbidden baby?

A forbidden, unlovable fetus.

What am I meant to do?

(Lights fade to black)

2. Case 100

(A dim spotlight comes up on Jane. She is wearing a night gown, stretching, getting ready for bed, massaging her feet while rubbing lotion on them. She is surrounded by elegance, maroon

walls, a chaise in the corner, while she is laying on her king sized bed as a vinyl plays in the background.)

JANE

(To herself) It'll be alright dear. (Beat) Just close your eyes. (Beat) It'll be quick. (Beat) I'm a professional. (Beat) What else were you supposed to say?! Sure, I am a professional, but I can never put it in words. (Beat) Today's date is April 26th, 1927, which marks my 100th abortion, at a 100% success rate. (Sarcastically) Great.

(Beat)

Another long day just to be a hero. (Beat) Who am I kidding? I'm not a hero. I'm a doctor, it's what I do. (Beat) I worry too much, I just got to let God's plan lead me.

(Jane puts the lotion in the drawer of her nightstand)

(She then gets up and begins to stretch and take deep breaths)

JANE

And in...

And out...

God. What am I to do?

(Jane gets back into bed, she puts her head in her lap for a moment, before turning off her lamp as the lights go out)

And in...

And out...

3. What Happens in a Speakeasy, Stays There

(As the lights fade up, there is a band playing in the background at a bar in mediocre condition. The windows are covered by newspapers, the room is surrounded by impressionist paintings. The paint on the bar is chipping, along with the wallpaper. Avery is wearing trousers with a matching vest, they are mixing drinks, Meredith enters, looking lost)

(Awkward pause)

AVERY

First time? I'm gonna need to see some identification.

MEREDITH

(Off guard) Oh! Sure. (Shows Avery ID) I guess it's that obvious.

AVERY

Everyone has the same look their first time- scared, lost, looking for a solution.

MEREDITH

A solution is just what I need.

AVERY

Can't find a man?

(Beat)

MEREDITH

(She looks at her ringless finger on her left hand) Guess not.

AVERY

That's all a woman's world is, ain't it?

MEREDITH

Apparently.

AVERY

If only we were born in a different generation. (Awkward pause) Enough small talk, what can I get you?

MEREDITH

Uhhhh a martini!

AVERY

Ever have one before?

MEREDITH

No.

AVERY

Do you know what's in a martini?

MEREDITH

No.

AVERY

Do you care to know?

(A beat.)

MEREDITH

No.

(Beat.)

AVERY

Coming right up.

(Avery begins to make the drink)

(A moment later Roxanne enters with a glass of red wine and sits next to Meredith)

(Awkward pause)

ROXANNE

Rough day?

(Silence)

I feel that... just another slow day, just passing by.

(Silence)

(Holds out her hand) Roxanne, it's nice to meet you.

MEREDITH

(Hesitates but shakes her hand) Meredith.

ROXANNE

I take it you're not a regular.

(Meredith shakes her head) How'd you find us?

MEREDITH

Word of mouth.

ROXANNE

Hopefully not too many. (Laughs at her own joke)

MEREDITH

It was my cousin.

ROXANNE

And you trust her?

MEREDITH

Of course.. Why would you ask such a thing?

ROXANNE

It's important to know the consequences of every decision you make.

MEREDITH

(Takes this in) Yeah.

AVERY

Here is your drink. So nice to see you again Roxanne. I gotta take care of some customers, but I will come back around for you lovely people, enjoy!

ROXANNE

Thanks, here. (Hands Avery money) This one is on me.

(Beat)

(Avery takes the money and exits)

ROXANNE

Why'd you come?

MEREDITH

Trying to kill off internal feelings. (Laughs, slowly becomes a cry)

ROXANNE

Wanna talk about it?

MEREDITH

Not really.

(A moment)

What about you?

ROXANNE

It would've been my fifth wedding anniversary today.

MEREDITH

Oh.. I am so sorry.

ROXANNE

He's still alive.

(A moment)

Divorce.

MEREDITH

What?! How?

ROXANNE

I thought about it, and spoke my thoughts out loud and well, you can imagine the chaos that created in my family.

MEREDITH

I could imagine!

ROXANNE

Are you?

MEREDITH

-No.

ROXANNE

I see. Are you seeing anyone-

MEREDITH

I was...

ROXANNE

If he's not a definite type of man, he's not worth it.

MEREDITH

(smiles) I guess you're right.

ROXANNE

Is there a story to that?

MEREDITH

He's married. (Realizes what she said)

ROXANNE

Oh-

MEREDITH

-Oh my God. I cannot believe I said that out loud, forgive me. I usually don't drink.

ROXANNE

No kidding, you ever have a martini before?

MEREDITH

I thought it would taste so much sweeter.

ROXANNE

(Laughs) First timer gets the married man and orders the wrong drink.

MEREDITH

I didn't ask for your opinion.

ROXANNE

I may have an opinion, but I can keep my mouth shut, and you have my word on that.

(Awkward pause)

Sorry if I came off strong, I just have a strong personality, I guess.

MEREDITH

It's ok. You shouldn't apologize because you're right. I don't get it. Men are supposed to be so special with all their rights and privileges, yet they're awful.

ROXANNE

(Holds up her glass) I'll cheers to that.

(They clink glasses)

MEREDITH

I never met anyone who got a divorce before.

ROXANNE

It was an empowering moment.

MEREDITH

Really?!?!

ROXANNE

Yeah! Fuck that man.

MEREDITH

(Embarrassed)

Oh my gosh.

ROXANNE

Yeah.

(Awkward Pause)

ROXANNE

So... are you here to just grab a drink or what's your story?

MEREDITH

Wandering the streets, looking for a drink, longing for Tom.

ROXANNE

Gee, you must be down bad! Forget him! A fellow named Tom is always a dead beat.

MEREDITH

Dead beat?!

(Roxanne imitates a pregnancy notion)

(Meredith is speechless)

How-

ROXANNE

-Am I right?

(Silence)

(Sigh) I had a feeling.

(Pause)

You give off that ...aura.

MEREDITH

How?

ROXANNE

I see myself in you.

(Beat)

MEREDITH

What?

ROXANNE

Confused, scared, alone, attempting to get drunk enough to have the courage to use a coat hanger.

MEREDITH

I would never!

ROXANNE

You never thought about it?

(Pause)

It's a burden.

MEREDITH

What?

ROXANNE

Womanhood.

MEREDITH

I don't think so.

ROXANNE

No? Not even when you develop curves and begin to menstruate with those god awful cramps? Or when you're pressured to appear an innocent virgin, in order to find a husband? Or the burden of carrying a child for nine months and you suddenly have to cry tears of joy, then push that child out, about the size of a watermelon! Then it's your responsibility to take care and raise that child, all while being the obedient, submissive house wife.

MEREDITH

I guess.. wow. I guess I don't have a response to that.

(Avery enters)

AVERY

Free shots on the house! Drink up. Looks like you may need it.

(Roxanne takes a shot, Meredith does the same).

ROXANNE

It's getting late.

(Beat)

MEREDITH

Yes, it is.

ROXANNE

Won't your mother worry?

MEREDITH

I'll just tell her I was on a date, she'd be thrilled and frankly, probably wouldn't mind if I never came back.

ROXANNE

The burden of womanhood.

MEREDITH

I'll cheers to that.

(They clink glasses, lights fade to black).

4. From One Woman to Another

(Anne is sitting on a couch in the living room. The room is in mediocre condition, and it clearly hasn't been cleaned in a while. Anne is wearing a nightgown and sitting on a chair near the window, gazing out, sipping on red wine, as she looks in distress)

(Meredith enters, stumbling)

ANNE

Where have you been?

MEREDITH

Oh! Mother, I didn't see you there.

ANNE

I've been waiting.

MEREDITH

I was on a date.

ANNE

Girl, don't lie to me.

Do you see this place?!

MEREDITH

I know mother, tomorrow is Saturday, so I was planning on getting an early start.

ANNE

Do you know what time it is?

MEREDITH

I don't need that much sleep.

ANNE

Will you ever learn?

MEREDITH

I'm sorry, I'll do better.

ANNE

Come sit, dear.

(Meredith hesitantly walks over)

Things are tight. I... I was laid off today. I'm going to need some help.

MEREDITH

Oh, no! Mother! I am so sorry! What can I do?

ANNE

Yes, well, I'm looking for work, but I need you to start pitching in more. I'm going to need 70% of your wages now to cover all the bills. And I need help around here. The dishes, cooking, just your presence is needed.

MEREDITH

Of course. (Beat) Will you be alright, Mother? I worry so much for you.

ANNE

Yes. I understand you've been going on these dates, but you need to stay home. It's no good for us, it's not getting us anywhere!

MEREDITH

No good how?

ANNE

Take it from one woman to another. You haven't brought anyone home, so you clearly can't find a man for yourself. Besides, you'll need to brush up on your cooking and cleaning before marriage.

MEREDITH

How can I find a husband if I'm home?

ANNE

I don't know what you do out so late, but it's important to keep you prepared, and now is better than ever. Going out all these late nights do not look good for you. Men look for an obedient woman, one that has a bed time and is just so busy with housework. I've been looking for men, and they all have no idea who you are. Why is that? You go out all the time! Just stay home, make a good impression, just wait till I find one if you can't.

MEREDITH

But mother, what happens when I do get married? What will happen to you?

ANNE

I will still need a portion of your wages. I assume you'll find a husband to take care of you. God knows, I wish I chose the right one.

(Meredith touches Anne's hand)

MEREDITH

I'm sorry.

ANNE

-Please don't touch me. You remind me of him. Just, everything is falling apart, I need help. That is all.

MEREDITH

I understand.

ANNE

For your sake, I hope you never have to understand. Take it from one woman to another.

(Lights slowly fade to black)

5. Abuse. Privilege. Power.

(Lights crossfade to Avery and Kira's bedroom. They are getting ready for bed in their nightgowns, while speaking to one another about their day. Their bedroom is simple, but with elegance; a king sized bed with a large, wooden headboard. There are many photos of them together.)

AVERY

How was your day, my love?

KIRA

It was alright. Another exhausting day. I picked up the papers this morning and I saw Stephen got put in the jailhouse.

AVERY

Really?

KIRA

Yeah.

(Beat)

AVERY

That's ...sad...

KIRA

I guess. Good thing we can keep quiet. (Beat) Right?

(Avery puts their hand on top of Kira's)

AVERY

We will be fine.

KIRA

How do you know that?

AVERY

Jane is a smart woman, she can handle her business.

KIRA

Okay. (Beat) But what if-

AVERY

-Don't start on the what if.

KIRA

(Beat) Thank you, dear. I needed to hear that.

AVERY

Tell me more. What's on your mind?

KIRA

Maureen got a raise. (Beat) Does Jane give raises, you think?

AVERY

(Bursts out in laughter) That woman will never go penniless. Your time will come, don't you worry.

KIRA

I want to be able to provide.

(Beat change)

How was the speakeasy? Meet anyone new?

AVERY

Yeah, this one lady came in. She was clearly new and very young.

KIRA

How young?

AVERY

She looked about 18, but when I spoke to her, she had the mind of a full grown woman.

KIRA

Oh. Wow.

(Beat)

Is that why you look so glum?

AVERY

I think she's pregnant.

KIRA

Oh shit. And she was at the speakeasy?

AVERY

Yes...

(Beat)

AVERY

I think she's in an abusive relationship.

KIRA

Why do you think so? You met her once.

AVERY

I know she's being abused because I saw her marks and bruises. I think she's pregnant because well, I'm embarrassed to admit this but I was eavesdropping on her and Roxanne's conversation.

KIRA

So Roxanne got to her? I believe it. She has those instincts.

AVERY

Yeah, but she was drinking alcohol like water!

KIRA

Jeez. (Beat) Do you think you'll see her again?

AVERY

I hope so. She looked lost.

KIRA

You know, you are so amazing because of your giving nature. This girl is lost, and you want to save her.

AVERY

I didn't say that.

KIRA

No, but you were thinking it.

(A moment)

What else?

AVERY

On top of that, I received a letter.

KIRA

From whom?

AVERY

Mother.

KIRA

Oh shit! How is she?

AVERY

Alright, writing about how she wants to see her little "boy"

KIRA

What's a boy?

(They look at each other and laugh)

Your dear mother just loves your youth, and despises mine.

AVERY

I'm sorry.

KIRA

Don't be. At least we don't have to worry about my care givers.

AVERY

I just wish we could have a normal relationship.

KIRA

How so?

AVERY

We could go to the theater, hold hands... in public, then go to a dinner at my Mother and Father's home, and talk about having kids and our successful careers, then Mother would look at me and tell me how proud she is of me, that her little boy did her justice.

KIRA

(Beat) I know.

AVERY

It just sucks sometimes.

KIRA

It does, but your mother is alive and she loves you and she would be proud of you.

AVERY

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make this about me.

KIRA

This is about you, we're talking about you here. Avery deserves some light.

(Beat) KIRA

We have each other. That's all we need. No crazy or dead mothers, just love.

AVERY

Yeah. Can we talk about you now?

KIRA

What about?

AVERY

We're not broke are we?

KIRA

Goodness no! Are you still thinking about what I said earlier?! (Beat) I just wish we had better wages.

AVERY

You can work more at the Speakeasy, if you would like.

KIRA

It's all the same, it's fine. Listen, I'm going to brush up. How does a deep tissue massage sound when I get back and I'll get those shoulders good?

AVERY

That is exactly what I need.

(Lights crossfade into the next scene)

6. Please Hold

(An open office, there are sounds of a typewriter going, with a phone ringing. Tracy sits at her desk, while typing and answering the phone.)

TRACY

Howards Bank, please hold. (Beat) Hello, Howards Bank, please hold. (Beat)

(Tom enters)

TRACY

Oh, Tom! There's someone that called for you.

TOM

Take a message.

TRACY

Of course. Sir! Meredith is late again.

TOM

Yes, I am aware.

TRACY

What a shame, isn't it?

TOM

What?

TRACY

People that aren't willing to work! As a woman, it's a blessing to work, if you ask me.

TOM

What are you trying to say, Tracy?

TRACY

Just throwing away potential. Like I said, it's an honor to work as a woman, and she's always late, she just takes advantage!

TOM

Yes, yes it is a shame.

TRACY

Isn't our annual review coming up?

TOM

Yes it is.

TRACY

Well, you know I've been coming in early to pick up her slack.

TOM

I appreciate it.

TRACY

Just saying.

TOM

Please get back to work.

TRACY

Yes, sir. (Tom exits, Tracy answers the phone) Yes, Howards Bank. Can I take a message? (Beat)

Great, thank you. (Beat) Howards Bank, please hold.

(Meredith enters, she looks exhausted)

TRACY

Meredith, you're late.

MEREDITH

I had a late start.

TRACY

As you do every morning.

MEREDITH

What?

TRACY

Just get back to work.

MEREDITH

Okay.

TRACY

(Beat) How about answering the phone once in a while, would you?

MEREDITH

Well, usually you do.

TRACY

Yeah, and I'm tired of it. Just do your job for once. (Beat) Howards Bank. (Beat) Whom am I speaking to? (Beat) Yes, please hold.

(A moment)

TRACY

I'm taking lunch, please do not bother me and do some work for once.

MEREDITH

Will do.

(Tracy exits as the phone begins to ring again)

7. Shots Up

(The scene changes back to the speak easy. It is day time, Roxanne, Avery, and Kira are sitting at the bar, each with a shot of vodka in front of them. Roxanne and Kira are in suits, while Avery is wearing a bright red gown. They look exhausted.)

KIRA

What is this one?

AVERY

To saving women!

ROXANNE AND KIRA

(Unenthusiastically) Cheers.

(They all drink their shots simultaneously)

AVERY

Pardon my French, but DAMN.

(Kira and Roxanne laugh)

ROXANNE

Can't take it?

AVERY

It gets worse every time.

KIRA

I'll cheers to that.

AVERY

God, I'm exhausted.

KIRA

Me too.

ROXANNE

Yep.

AVERY

SO are we going to talk about Roxanne's friend?

KIRA

Ohhhhh, a friend.

ROXANNE

No, no. Stop that. It's not like that.

KIRA

Been a little while since you've had a lady friend...

ROXANNE

Yeah...

AVERY

Seriously though, tell us.

ROXANNE

There's nothing I could say that would excite you.

KIRA

Okay, but we're asking you to tell us about her.

ROXANNE

There's nothing to tell! Just drop it.

KIRA

(Beat) Sorry for teasing you like that, but come on tell us! I just want to hear about her.

AVERY

Roxanne, stop being difficult and let loose, for once please.

(Beat)

ROXANNE

Fine, fine. She is a sweet girl, lost, heartbroken, and damaged. What more would you like?

AVERY

Why is she damaged?

ROXANNE

(Beat) She's pregnant. (A moment of silence) Told you.

KIRA

(To Avery) You were right.

AVERY

Of course I was.

ROXANNE

Who cares!!! There is a pregnant girl out there, who foolishly thinks her boss is going to marry her when we all know damn well he's not even considering it.

(Pause)

KIRA

Well... what now?

AVERY

Are you considering it, Roxanne?

ROXANNE

Well, we must!-

AVERY

-Roxanne. You know what Jane will say about this.

ROXANNE

I know.

AVERY

You need to think carefully before you speak. I mean, does she even have the money?!

ROXANNE

I don't know.

KIRA

My God.

AVERY

How much does she know?

ROXANNE

She knows we can help her...

AVERY

Great, that's just- you know what, I'll let you tell Jane.

ROXANNE

Why are you so angry? I did no wrong.

AVERY

Because you don't think! Yes, we are saving lives, but it is costly and risky. (Beat) Women come to us because they need us, and they can afford us.

ROXANNE

I don't know if she can afford it! She might be able to... but we can't just leave her!

KIRA

Avery, what are you saying?

AVERY

This started as a secret.

ROXANNE

And?

AVERY

A secret remains a secret.

ROXANNE

How do you expect to get any customers?

AVERY

Maybe once I get to know someone a little more.

ROXANNE

I got to know her plenty!

AVERY

You met her once.

ROXANNE

Once, and it felt like a lifetime.

KIRA

And you say you don't have a crush.

ROXANNE

I don't! I can't explain it, but I know her and I trust her. (Pause) Anything to say?

AVERY

The damage has been done, what more is there to say?

ROXANNE

Trust me on this one. This girl is getting an abortion, if not us, then who knows where she should end up!

KIRA

That's an awful thought... she might get scammed, or try to do it herself, she might even die.

ROXANNE

Yeah.

AVERY

Yeah. (Beat) Sorry for blowing up on you, Roxanne. I'm just scared.

ROXANNE

We all are.

KIRA

Yeah.

AVERY

Yeah...

KIRA

How did our drinking break get this heated?

ROXANNE

Back to work! Count the money, Kira.

KIRA

On it!

(Lights shift into the next scene)

8. Remember Who You Come From

(Anne is in the kitchen, drying dishes. The kitchen is a small space with rusty cabinets and a small, circular eating table with two seats.)

ANNE

Meredith, come in here!

(Meredith enters.)

MEREDITH

Yes, mother.

ANNE

What has been going on with you? I'm sick of this nonsense! You hardly touch your food or help out anymore. What's wrong with you, girl?

MEREDITH

I'm just sick.

ANNE

With what? The lazy disease? I thought we had spoken about this.

MEREDITH

Maybe it's the flu. I've been experiencing nausea and an upset stomach.

ANNE

And what flu is this? The nine month flu?

MEREDITH

Maybe.

(Anne stops what she's doing.)

ANNE

What/ did/ you just say?

MEREDITH

Nothing.

ANNE

Have you been doing something you're not supposed to?

MEREDITH

No mother.

ANNE

Have you been fooling around with some boy?

MEREDITH

No, mother.

ANNE

You're 22 years old, you need to be married. I worked so hard to provide for you, and this is your one job. Your only job as a woman.

MEREDITH

Of course I have. I'm working on it. Believe me, mother. I really am trying.

ANNE

What ever this sickness nonsense is, remember who you come from, and you better find a way out.

MEREDITH

Yes, mother.

ANNE

Be useful and clean.

(Anne hands her a rag and exits.)

(Light shift into the next scene.)

9. The Coat Hanger Method?

(A spotlight comes on to Meredith, she is in a night gown, looking at herself in the mirror).

*This scene set should only consist of a mirror

(Meredith is combing her hair.)

(She straightens her night gown.)

(She touches her body over her night gown.)

(Specifically, focuses on her stomach.)

MEREDITH

God, help me.

Am I getting bigger?

What will people think when I get big, with no ring on my finger?

How could I be so clueless? I should've taken precautions. I knew the risks, but I thought he was different.

Why did I think he was different? My boss.

(Beat)

I'm. A scandal.

I would love to be a surgeon. Just cut me open. Take me out of this darkness. Take me out of this life.

(Meredith picks up a coat hanger. She examines it. She looks at herself in the mirror. She considers this for a moment, before throwing the hanger off stage)

Time for bed.

(Lights out.)

10. How Far Will You Go?

(Lights come up, Tom is talking on a candlestick phone in an office, while smoking a cigar, he is in the middle of what looks like a very intense conversation).

TOM

Can you just take care of it?

It's a woman, not a trophy. (laughs)

Okay, okay, I'll scrape something up.

I don't care, I just need-

No, no, they don't know.

God no!

You honestly think I, Future President of Howards Bank, would risk my beautiful marriage-

-Yes I am aware I'm an entry level! You got to start at the bottom to work your way to the top.

Whatever. Is this a deal? I cannot let this get out, you hear me?

-Yes, please, I need this position.

-Do you know how exhausting it is? I sit in this office all day, while stupid women roam around, not knowing what to do. I'm thirty years old, I can't take another second of it!

-You don't understand. My life is passing by, I keep thinking my time is coming, but it never is! I want out, I need this promotion.

-A good word? Put in more than a good word about me! I need this, I'll pay you extra, okay?

-Yes, fine, understood.

(Tom angrily hangs up the phone. He finishes his cigar, there is a knock at the door.)

What now?!

(Tracy enters.)

TRACY

Sorry to disturb you, sir. I'm reviewing our time sheets, and it seems that Meredith has missed the last two weeks of work.

TOM

That's fine.

TRACY

Sir? Are you feeling well?

TOM

Today feels like a new beginning.

TRACY

Why is that sir?

TOM

What are your evening plans?

TRACY

(Blushing) Oh, I am just cooking dinner for my mother and father.

TOM

Come dancing with me tonight?

TRACY

Oh I would love that!

TOM

I bet you would. I've always taken an interest in you, Tracy, you're just so obedient and well behaved.

TRACY

Thank you sir.

TOM

Meet me at O'Connors Pub after dinner?

TRACY

How will I know that you'll be there?

TOM

I'm there all night. (Beat) You are dismissed.

(Tracy exits.)

(Tom looks in thought as he finishes his cigar.)

(Lights fade to black.)

11. The Answer

(A nearly empty room with dim lighting and a table with two chairs. Meredith is sitting, Roxanne enters with a bunch of books.)

ROXANNE

(Slides the books over) Here.

MEREDITH

What are these?

ROXANNE

Your answers.

(Beat)

Jane keeps these. Some medical books, past journal entries, past patients, everything.

MEREDITH

Wow... I don't know where to start.

ROXANNE

The diary. Her stories are amazing, besides you wouldn't understand the medical textbook anyway.

(Beat)

Kidding!

(They smile) I find that the real stories are the best ones.

MEREDITH

I prefer fairytales.

ROXANNE

Like the one we're living in now, in our gorgeous castle?

(They laugh)

ROXANNE

I believe that real stories are the ones that matter most.

MEREDITH

Maybe you have a point.

ROXANNE

I usually do.

(They smile)

MEREDITH

How did you get all of these?

ROXANNE

From a close friend.

(Beat)

(Meredith begins to flip and read through the pages)

MEREDITH

And this is a 100% success rate?

ROXANNE

Yes.

MEREDITH

Why don't more people know about this?

ROXANNE

We live in a world where women aren't meant to succeed.

MEREDITH

It just seems so dangerous.

ROXANNE

We live in a dangerous world.

(Beat)

What do you think?

MEREDITH

I think I want to meet this person. I just... I always dreamed of having a baby. Just.. not this way. It's not even a baby! Right..? It's like.. a thing, a bad thing, infecting my body, and I just want to be free.

ROXANNE

Then listen to me, I can set you free. I gave these to you because you remind me so much of myself when I was about your age, and I want to help you. But you must understand the risks, are you willing to accept that responsibility?

MEREDITH

Do I have a choice?

(Beat)

ROXANNE

We're an operation, the four of us. We serve to help women that are lost and in desperate situations due to a fetus. We also know the complications that come with an abortion.

MEREDITH

An abortion. I, I never thought I would have to use that word. A borrr tiooon.

ROXANNE

Jane is a professional. She received an education as a nurse while growing up, which is where she discovered her passion for helping people, more specifically, helping women. She uses her passions and her gifts to save lives, and she does a damn well good job with it.

MEREDITH

Can I meet her?

ROXANNE

I'm going to leave you be to read these books, if you're serious about going through with this, you know where to find me.

MEREDITH

No! I need this. Please. I'm serious. I need you to help me.

ROXANNE

You're really in a dangerous situation, aren't you?

MEREDITH

He hit me.

(Roxanne holds Meredith's hand)

I feel so stupid. I knew he was married, he was my boss! Yet, I still fell for him. I thought we would get married and get a house together, but all I got was spit in my face, and red marks on my cheek. I hate him! I love him, but I hate him, I hate this. I just, I want this to be over! I'm living a fucking nightmare. Please.

ROXANNE

I understand. You're not the only one. (Beat) Would you believe me if I said I got my first abortion at 15?

(Beat)

Yeah. It was a boy at my school. I had a liking to him, but he took advantage, as they usually do. I met Jane at the bar and well, long story short, she saved me.

MEREDITH

I want to be saved.

ROXANNE

Then we'll save you. I promise. But think about this. Trust me. This will either make you or break you. (Roxanne gets up) I'll see you soon.

(Roxanne exits)

(Meredith becomes lost in the books, flipping through the pages, reading as quick as she can)

(Lights fade to black)

12. Did You Forget?

(Lights up. There is an elegant, maroon operating room with a Gurnee bed. The room is elegant and beautiful, but it seems to be missing something(s). Roxanne, Avery, Kira and Jane are in the middle of an intense conversation.)

ROXANNE

Jane, would you just hear me out-

JANE

-No. No, I cannot hear you! I am a one-woman operation, done. End of conversation.

KIRA

So, what are we then?

(Beat)

JANE

Associates.

ROXANNE

Listen, she needs you.

(Beat)

JANE

As does everyone, apparently.

ROXANNE

What?

JANE

Nothing.

AVERY

I met her, Jane. She's a sweet girl, she's young and alone. You got to help her!

ROXANNE

Won't you even consider it?

JANE

Yeah? Like how you considered my operation when revealing it to a stranger?

ROXANNE

She's a friend.

JANE

Since when do you have any friends? (Beat) Women like us don't have friends. We can't have friends, everyone outside is a threat.

KIRA

Jane, she's in trouble. We ought to help her!

ROXANNE

(Shakes her head)

No, that's not true. She's one of us.

JANE

How would you know?

ROXANNE

She's being abused.

(A moment)

I saw it on her as soon as she walked in. (Beat) Vulnerable, scared, lost, alone, clutching on to her stomach, hoping and praying no one will notice. Then I got closer and I saw the dripping makeup, her bruised cheekbone, a young girl just longing for love.

(Silence)

We got to help her.

AVERY

(Quietly) I saw it too. (Sighs) I didn't want to be the one to bring that up but, Jane, she's drowning. She's stuck in the ocean of patriarchy, her pregnancy is the anchor holding her down. We can help her, we can break this anchor and bring her to the surface.

JANE

Of course I'm going to help her, but you need to realize the consequences.

ROXANNE

Consequences?

JANE

You know the consequences of this. (A beat) You need to be careful. It's risky.

ROXANNE

You can trust me. And you can trust her. I know it sounds crazy, but I knew she was holding in a big secret, and she needed us. That, and the fact I met her at the speakeasy. That is a huge risk within itself.

KIRA

She's right, Jane. It's risky but this is risky, no matter what.

JANE

We just can't risk it further. (Beat) Or you're out.

ROXANNE

I understand, I'm sorry I wasn't cautious. I just knew we could help her.

JANE

You mean me?

ROXANNE

Yes, but I brought her to you.

JANE

You didn't bring me anyone.

AVERY

Not yet.

ROXANNE

I mean, I brought the thought of another patient to you. Think about it.

(Roxanne exits.)

JANE

Thank you. You beautiful people are dismissed.

(Avery and Kira exit.)

JANE

She doesn't understand the consequences, no one does! They treat me like I know nothing about this! I nearly told them that my first abortion was my own. (Beat) I never revealed to anyone that my first abortion was my very own. (Beat) I need a fucking drink.

(Lights crossfade into the next scene)

13. Termination

(Tom's office. Tom sits behind his desk, smoking a cigar while looking over paperwork. There is a knock.)

TOM

(Annoyed) Come right in.

(Meredith enters.)

MEREDITH

H-hi.

(Tom looks at her for a moment before breaking out into laughter.)

TOM

You have got some fucking nerve barging into my office like this!

MEREDITH

We need to talk.

TOM

You want to talk? Sit. Let's talk.

(Meredith sits.)

MEREDITH

I understand you're upset-

TOM

-Upset?! Of course I am you idiot!!! I'm a married man, do you honestly think I had any real intentions on marrying you?

MEREDITH

You said you would.

TOM

You're so clueless, Meredith! I don't want to ever see your face again. Your "baby" problems are your problems, not mine.

MEREDITH

You helped me create this baby! And-

(Tom slaps her.)

TOM

No I didn't. That's not a baby, and certainly not mine.

MEREDITH

I've told you already, I was never with anyone else.

TOM

I don't want to hear it, Meredith.

MEREDITH

Well you got to!

TOM

Listen, if it's not clear already, you're fired. Your privileges from my office have been revoked.

Moving forward, I don't know you and if you try to speak up, you will be held accountable.

Understand?

(Tracy enters.)

TRACY

Sir? Is everything alright?

TOM

Just peachy. This is a private matter, you are dismissed.

(Beat.)

(Tracy exits.)

TOM

YOU are dismissed.

MEREDITH

You are a terrible human being, Tom.

(Meredith exits.)

(Tom throws something at the door in frustration.)

(Lights fade.)

14. A Memory

(Lights up. Jane is sitting at a table across from Roxanne in the speakeasy, they are counting money with wine filled glasses in front of them, it is day time.)

JANE

Did you count Mary's pay?

ROXANNE

Yup, I included it in the total already.

JANE

Great.

(Beat)

I wonder what people do all day long.

ROXANNE

You sound like a hermit.

JANE

Am not!

ROXANNE

You can go outside once in a while, you know? No one even knows who you are.

JANE

I have to be careful.

ROXANNE

Jane, why don't you just live for once!

JANE

I'm sorry?

ROXANNE

We break the law every day, it's just what we do. You can't live your life in fear.

JANE

What if Mary told?

ROXANNE

You say this about all of our patients. Why would she tell?

JANE

To get me busted.

ROXANNE

You saved her life! Why in the world would she want to get you busted!

JANE

Like I said, I have to be careful.

ROXANNE

There's other ways to be careful.

JANE

What would you know anyway?

ROXANNE

I'm going to ignore that rude remark. Just trying to help, that's all.

JANE

There's nothing you can do for me.

ROXANNE

Fine.

(Beat)

JANE

I've been thinking of writing an autobiography.

(Pause until Roxanne breaks out into laughter.)

ROXANNE

What?!

JANE

I'm serious.

ROXANNE

What would you name it anyway? Jane the illegal abortion doctor?

JANE

No, I wouldn't release it yet.

ROXANNE

That's like a send yourself to jail card.

JANE

It was just a thought.

(Beat change)

ROXANNE

Okay, so from last week we made \$1,000. We're doing well with the speakeasy!

JANE

Okay, well we don't get to keep it.

ROXANNE

I was just pointing out-

JANE

-Tools cost money.

ROXANNE

I know, Jane. I was just thinking that maybe we can start bringing home a little more money.

JANE

It's not about the money.

ROXANNE

-I know. It's just that, not everyone lives like you.

JANE

What is that supposed to mean?

ROXANNE

Not everyone lives an elegant lifestyle.

JANE

I live life the way I would like.

ROXANNE

Do you? (Beat) I mean, you've been running from the law ever since our first encounter when I was just a child. Does it ever become tiring?

JANE

I do what I have to do.

ROXANNE

But why?

JANE

Because I'm a doctor, Roxanne, it's what I do.

ROXANNE

Don't you want a husband?

JANE

(Laughs) You're the last person that should be asking an absurd question like that.

ROXANNE

Don't you get lonely?

(Beat)

JANE

Sometimes. I think a lot, you know. I think about the nausea, the doubt, the panic, then I think about the look on his face, the horror, the disgust. Then that takes me to thinking about the first time I held a scalpel, the bloody screams I cried, the blood, the placenta, the fetus just lying in my very own hands. Then I remember that it's just a memory, one that gives me joy at times, and that's when I come to terms with what I do. Do I get lonely? Yes. But can I do? I love what I do, I can't get distracted. (Beat) I get distracted, then I get summoned to court! If I am caught, I risk losing everything I've worked so hard for. Do you understand? Yes, I'm always lonely, but I'm where I belong, here, not in a cold, dark jail cell.

(Silence)

ROXANNE

Sometimes I think about what brought me here. This isn't a fun life, I wish I wasn't some homosexual that likes to drink and mingle, but-

JANE

-You are what you are.

ROXANNE

I am what I am.

JANE

Listen, I got to prep for Emily, but clean up around here. Maybe put some tape on the window, it's falling apart again.

ROXANNE

Got it.

JANE

Roxanne, thank you for being here.

ROXANNE

What?

JANE

Thank you for helping me.

ROXANNE

(Off guard) Oh! Well, you're welcome, I guess.

(Jane gives Roxanne a hug. Roxanne doesn't know how to react)

JANE

God bless you.

(Jane exits. Roxanne grabs some tape and tries to tape the window for a few moments before the lights fade to black.)

15. Everything Comes With A Price to Pay

(A dark alley with a spotlight on Roxanne, she looks as if she has been waiting for awhile.)

(Meredith hesitantly enters.)

ROXANNE

There you are! Thought the wolves might have gotten you (laughs at her own joke)

MEREDITH

Is this seriously the safest place to meet?!

ROXANNE

Yes.

MEREDITH

I nearly got mugged!

ROXANNE

That's Chicago.

MEREDITH

Ok, fine. I'm ready to do this. How do we start?

ROXANNE

HERE?! We are not doing this here!

MEREDITH

Well, why are we here then?

ROXANNE

They'll be here soon.

MEREDITH

They?

ROXANNE

Don't get so worked up, it'll vanish soon.

MEREDITH

What does that even mean?

ROXANNE

Nothing, just, you need to relax.

MEREDITH

Relax? How can I relax?! I could.. die.

ROXANNE

It's a 100% success rate.

MEREDITH

And what if I'm the unlucky one?

ROXANNE

Would you be able to guess how many women have asked the same thing? Every time. Even now, there's nothing I could say to relax you.

MEREDITH

What? I'm talking about me!-

ROXANNE

-There's nothing to say. No one wants to be here, but here we are, going through hell just to save ourselves and our sanity.

(Long, empty pause)

MEREDITH

Why are we taking a car?

ROXANNE

Privacy and protection reasons. (Beat) Trust me, we don't want to draw attention to our clinic.

(Suddenly, reality hits Meredith as she breaks into sobs.)

Shhh sh, (beat) it's okay. (Beat) You're going to be okay. (Beat) It'll be over soon. (Beat) I promise everything will be okay.

MEREDITH

How?

ROXANNE

Different women, (beat) same stories.

MEREDITH

How many women?

(A beat)

ROXANNE

Over one hundred.

MEREDITH

God... what is this terrible world we live in!

(A spotlight on Avery as they enter.)

AVERY

Hi Meredith. Remember me? From the speakeasy?

MEREDITH

Of course, I do.

AVERY

I'm sorry to do this, but you're in safe hands. Listen, I'm going to guide you, Roxanne will be on the other side. You're going to be in the car for a bit, if you are hungry or thirsty, let us know. We have food and water for you. Kira will be driving, once we get there, we will guide you to the operation room where you will meet Jane, your doctor. Do you have any questions before we leave?

MEREDITH

Don't let go.

AVERY

What?

MEREDITH

Hold my hand.

(Avery holds one of Meredith's hand, Roxanne holds the other, as they guide her off stage.)

(Light shift, the light settles to a dark blue sky color. There are traffic sounds heard for a few moments to the end of the scene)

Act II

1. Are You Ready?

(Lights go up as Avery and Kira enter, holding Meredith, guiding her to the room)

KIRA

I got it from here.

AVERY

Are you sure?

KIRA

Yes.

AVERY

I love you.

KIRA

Remember to breathe.

(Meredith begins taking deep breaths)

I was talking to Avery.

MEREDITH

Oh. Right.

AVERY

I'll see you after, okay? You got this.

(Avery half smiles and exits)

KIRA

(Kira holds Meredith's hands) You are going to make it through. I promise. I'm right here.

Honey? What's on your mind?

(Silence)

I understand you're nervous, but it'll be over shortly, okay?

(Meredith nods)

KIRA

Jane will be here soon. She'll walk you through the procedure and answer any questions you may have. Then it will start. When it starts, close your eyes and do not open them until the end.

Try counting to one thousand, but remember to breathe, most importantly.

(Beat)

MEREDITH

Am I going to die? Please be honest with me right now. I need full honesty.

KIRA

No. And I can say that with confidence.

MEREDITH

Why? Why do you do this?

KIRA

The world can be a scary place. Women are abused, men have all the privilege and power, people die, animals die, we never know what to expect next. There's only one thing we can change, and that's us. We can change how we treat people, and we can fight against the patriarchy that was set up by the Founding Fathers. Society was set to make the rich and wealthy thrive, while everyone else is left to fend for themselves and survive in this broken country, in this broken world. Are you following me?

(Meredith nods)

That's why I do what I do. Illegal? Yes, but do I care? No, because I know what's right. We all have a voice that needs to be heard, and I will fight the system until I die. It's my purpose in this world, otherwise there would be no point to life.

(Beat)

Oh! Sorry, I must have gotten carried away... but you will be fine! I'm here, Jane will be here, Roxanne will be in the operating room as well. (Beat) This is the worst part. The anticipation, and it might hurt, it might feel like you're dying, but I promise you are not going to die.

(Meredith begins to cry and hugs Kira)

MEREDITH

I'm so scared.

KIRA

I know, I know. We got you.

(A beat)

(Jane enters)

JANE

You must be Meredith. (Jane holds out her hand)

MEREDITH

(Hesitantly shakes her hand) Hi.

JANE

(Holds Meredith's hands) Hello dear, I'm Jane. It's nice to finally meet you. (Beat)

You have nothing to worry about. (Beat) I'm a professional. (Beat) What happened to the father?

MEREDITH

What?

JANE

Of the fetus.

MEREDITH

My boss. (Beat) God, this is awful.

(Beat)

JANE

Does he know?

MEREDITH

Yes. He doesn't care, he left me to fend for myself.

JANE

Tell me his name, dear. He will pay.

MEREDITH

Well don't hurt him!

JANE

Baby, I'll only be hurting his pockets.

MEREDITH

How much?

JANE

\$400.

MEREDITH

\$400?! I don't have money like that! Tom would never pay that amount.

JANE

Yet I've heard that phrase a hundred times, and would you believe how many women actually paid me?

MEREDITH

One hundred?

JANE

Six. I document all my cases, and I make sure the man is always accountable.

MEREDITH

If you don't mind me asking, how many times have you done.. this?

JANE

You'll be my 103rd.

MEREDITH

At a 100% success rate?

JANE

Certainly, my dear.

MEREDITH

I read your diaries.. sorry. That sounded weird. But these stories you have, they're amazing.

JANE

I've met too many women like you, in your situation. I'm sorry it's come down to this, but I will take care of you and make sure you're comfortable.

MEREDITH

I never knew such kind people existed.

JANE

Sometimes, the kindest people are the ones that take risks to ensure societal fulfillment.

MEREDITH

And wise.

JANE

I could've had a grand child your age. I think about that a lot. I have so much free time to think about what could have been, but I realized life is too short to think about that. We can only move forward. (Beat) Are you ready to move forward?

MEREDITH

(Beat) I believe I am.

JANE

Let's get started.

(Black out)

2. The Process

(Lights come up as Meredith wakes up in a bed. There is a spotlight on her as she takes in her dark, empty surroundings. There is a sound of a heart monitor)

MEREDITH

Take deep breaths. (Beat) Count up to 100. (Beat) Close your eyes. (Beat) Just relax. How can I relax knowing a part of me has been taken?!

Has a part of me been taken?

I want to believe I'm not a monster, I didn't take another life. I'm not selfish. I want to believe this. But part of me feels missing.

When you opened me up.. I felt the darkness leave. Brown, thick blood, just everywhere. I tried holding my breath. A baby crying just played in my head over, over, and over again. But there was no baby. It was my own tears, my tears fell as the mistake left my body.

There was no heart beat inside me. How can I kill something that isn't alive? There was no heart beat.

(Meredith takes deep breaths. A sound of a pumping heart is heard)

3. Case 110

(A spotlight comes up on Jane, as she is writing inside her journal)

JANE

Today marks my 110th abortion. Another young, poor girl, begging for my help. They're so unique but their emotions remain the same. It doesn't matter how many I do, it always feels the same- defeated, but hopeful, mandatory. I did no wrong. Right?

The media destroys my purpose. It isn't true what they say- in the papers. "Mystery Woman Administers Abortion and Kills Babies" I would never kill a baby. I just remove the fetus and the

suffering of these women. The delinquents call themselves “pro-life” yet, they’re taking a life in the process. How can that be justified?!

The law is injustice and the law will not stop me.

(Jane throws the newspapers as the lights slowly fade down)

4. Back Again

(Tom and Tracy are lying on the messy motel bed. Tracy is in a robe, Tom is shirtless with trousers on. She is lying on him, while stroking his hair)

TRACY

Oh, Tom, this is wonderful. A private getaway.

TOM

I knew you would love it, dear.

TRACY

Oh I really do, Tom, thank you.

TOM

My obedient girl.

TRACY

Of course I am.

TOM

God, you are so beautiful. I love the way the light hits your face and those beautiful locks.

TRACY

I love you, Tom.

TOM

I bet you do. How about we finish up this bottle? It'll be our secret.

TRACY

I love all of our secrets. (Tracy kisses Tom)

TOM

It'll always be ours.

(Beat)

(Tom pops open the bottle and drinks directly from the bottle)

TRACY

Tom?

TOM

Yes, my love.

TRACY

(A beat) Would you- Would you ever consider leaving your wife?

TOM

For you?

TRACY

...Yes.

TOM

I think we could make it work.

TRACY

Really?!

TOM

Yeah! Why not?

TRACY

Oh that would be so wonderful. I would absolutely love that!

TOM

I bet you would.

TRACY

I feel like a school girl again. I always imagined just growing up and marrying a handsome, successful rich man.

TOM

Tracy, to be honest, you give me so much of what I never received. (Beat) You ask me how my day is going, you give me compliments, you love me. (Beat change) Yes, it is true, I do love a good steak, but sometimes I want to be asked the questions, (beat) you know?

(Beat)

TOM

-How's your sister been doing?

TRACY

Not so great, the infection is spreading.

TOM

God. I'm sorry, Tracy. Let me know how I can help. But, I just- I really admire how compassionate you are.

TRACY

Of course. I know my sister may not have much time left, but I try to make it as less painful as possible.

TOM

Where is she staying?

TRACY

With me, my mother and father.

TOM

Your father makes a decent living, doesn't he?

TRACY

He's a janitor at a school.

TOM

No kidding.

TRACY

Tom to tell you the truth, I don't have much. I know how I can come off to others- snobby, arrogant, full of myself. We don't have much, which is why I was put off to work. We can't afford any help for my sister, so she just stays with us.

TOM

How much is it?

TRACY

What are you asking me?

TOM

The surgery. How much?

TRACY

\$900

(Tom writes a check and hands it to Tracy)

TRACY

Oh Tom, I can't accept this.

TOM

Consider this a gift from me to your family.

TRACY

You are so generous. (She hugs and kisses Tom) Tom, I love you so much, I want to marry you!

TOM

Anything for you, my dear.

TRACY

But are you sure? Won't you need this money?

TOM

I am on my way to becoming a successful businessman, I'm not worried about the money.

TRACY

I feel so guilty taking this from you.

TOM

Don't. I would give you the world if I could.

TRACY

Then give me the world and leave your wife.

TOM

In time I will.

TRACY

But why are you waiting?

TOM

Right now just isn't the best time.

TRACY

But why not?!

TOM

(Stern) I said in time I will.

TRACY

Oh. Okay. I get it.

TOM

You in the mood for something to eat?

TRACY

Yes, I'm starving! Where will we go?

TOM

I know a spot.

(They begin to get dressed before walking off stage as the lights fade to black)

5. I Had an Abortion

(Lights up, Meredith and Jane are standing next to each other, facing the audience. There is red lighting to reflect the mood. There is a painting of a uterus behind them, with a table center stage. There is a coat hanger in the middle of the table. There is a spotlight on Meredith, Jane, and the coat hanger.)

JANE

I had an abortion.

MEREDITH

I had an abortion.

JANE

I was seventeen.

MEREDITH

I just turned twenty two.

JANE

I thought I was in love.

MEREDITH

I thought I was in love.

JANE

He was never capable of loving me.

MEREDITH

He was never capable of loving me.

JANE

I didn't know how to do an abortion.

MEREDITH

I never heard of an abortion.

JANE

I did research.

MEREDITH

And I wondered.

JANE

Is it possible?

MEREDITH

Is it possible?

JANE

I cannot have a baby at seventeen.

MEREDITH

I'm not married.

(In unison, they take a look at the painting behind them for a moment)

JANE

An abortion is one of the most traumatizing thing a person can go through.

MEREDITH

And I went through with it.

JANE

It was painful.

MEREDITH

There was blood everywhere.

JANE

I had to bleach my bathroom.

MEREDITH

And I thought,

JANE

Help me out of this nightmare.

MEREDITH

Help me out of this nightmare.

JANE

I was neglected.

MEREDITH

I was abused.

JANE

I had no rights over my uterus.

MEREDITH

I had no rights over my uterus.

(Jane and Meredith face each other.)

JANE

It almost took my life.

MEREDITH

It almost took my life.

JANE

It was an agonizing blessing.

MEREDITH

It was torture.

JANE

A baby I did not want.

MEREDITH

A baby I wanted so bad.

(Beat)

JANE

I'm no criminal.

MEREDITH

Am I a criminal?

JANE

It can't be.

MEREDITH

It can't be.

JANE

Or is it?

MEREDITH

Or is it?

(The lights fade down)

6. What Has Changed?

(The lights shift as the scene changes to Meredith's kitchen. She is wearing an apron with oven mitts on, she is taking a turkey out of the oven. The table is set for two.)

MEREDITH

Supper is on the table!

(Anne enters with a work jacket on)

ANNE

Wow, this looks amazing! I am so shocked.

MEREDITH

Why is that, Mother?

ANNE

I didn't know what I was going to do with you. I mean... this place looks wonderful! (A beat)

Say thank you.

MEREDITH

Thank you, I've tried to get better.

ANNE

Well whatever it is, it's working.

MEREDITH

Let's eat.

(Meredith and Anne sit down and begin to eat)

Do you... like it?

ANNE

You see, this is how you cook a homemade meal. Wonderful. This is going to look great for potential men!

MEREDITH

Yeah.

(Silence)

How is your job going?

ANNE

It's okay. I've just been delivering parcels all around the city. It's exhausting, I don't understand how men can do this constantly!

MEREDITH

May I ask a question?

ANNE

Of course. What is this regarding?

MEREDITH

Why can't women get treated like men?

ANNE

Because we're not men. We're built differently. Women were made to bear children, we are fragile. Whereas men were made to fight and fend for their families.

MEREDITH

That's ...sad.

ANNE

Oh no need to think like that. It's just the way the world works. Why would you want to get a real job anyway?

MEREDITH

To find purpose?

ANNE

Your purpose is to bear children, not work.

MEREDITH

Right.

ANNE

Have you been looking for a new job yet? You know my wages aren't enough to cover anything.

MEREDITH

I understand, Mother. I've been going around the city and looking, I'm looking for receptionist work.

ANNE

Excellent! I'll tell you it's a lot better than delivering parcels all day.

MEREDITH

I think I would like to travel for my job.

ANNE

(Laughs) What? You want to sail the Pacific Ocean and save the animals?!

MEREDITH

Maybe... is that such a crazy idea?

ANNE

You crazy girl! Don't put more eggs in your basket than God has given you.

MEREDITH

I know...

ANNE

Well I'm very proud of you. This is just the meal I needed after today. You've proved yourself to be worthy and I'm glad to be your mother.

(They finish eating)

I'm going to wash up. Don't forget to tidy up and turn off the lights when you're finished.

(A long beat)

I'm glad you've turned things around for yourself, Meredith.

MEREDITH

Thank you, mother.

(Anne tries her best to smile, then exits)

(Meredith puts her head in her hands and quietly cries before cleaning up)

(Lights fade to black)

7. Pay up, son

(A small, elegant room. Jane is standing with Avery, Kira and Roxanne. Tom is sitting on a chaise, looking pale in distress)

TOM

Why am I here?!

AVERY

You got a girl pregnant!

TOM

No I didn't!

ROXANNE

You beat her, you know exactly what you've done.

TOM

I committed no crime.

KIRA

This is ridiculous! How could you be so heartless?!

AVERY

You are an incredibly selfish man-

JANE

-Silence.

(Silence)

I'm not sorry to bring you here. You owe us \$400.

TOM

\$400?! For what?!

JANE

The fetus.

TOM

Okay...

JANE

Pay up.

TOM

(Breaks out into laughter) No way. This is an abortion clinic! Oh my god. You can bring an innocent man here and question him all you want and fill him up with lies, but you are so going down for this!

JANE

And what will happen to you?

TOM

Nothing, it doesn't involve me.

JANE

We have proof.

TOM

You're bluffing.

JANE

We know about your arranged meetings at the hotel. I called and they recall seeing you there multiple times with a young girl. (A beat) Actually, a bunch of young girls. They don't even remember Meredith that well.

(Silence)

TOM

So what? Are you threatening me now?

JANE

Not a threat, a fact. We know you're married.

TOM

You leave my wife out of this!

KIRA

Miranda, isn't it?

AVERY

And those cute children you have, what are their names again?

TOM

You people are sick.

JANE

Maybe, but not sick enough to get a young girl pregnant, beat her, and leave her.

TOM

This just isn't right. You people are trying to ruin my life!

JANE

You did this all yourself. Pay up, son.

(Silence)

ROXANNE

She said pay up.

TOM

I am backed into a corner here! This is cruel- I am innocent! Innocent! This is about a simple woman- one who can't even cook or clean or care much for her appearance! I'm not sorry that she got pregnant, it is not my fault. She should've taken precautions, and that's the damn truth.

JANE

Tom, you are a monster. Who got her pregnant? You. You did this, and you will be held responsible.

TOM

I refuse!

(Beat change)

JANE

(Slams her hand on the table) Now!

(Silence. Everyone is fixated on Tom, who hesitantly takes out a check and fills it out)

JANE

Thanks for your business. (A beat) Now please for all of our sakes, get the fuck out of here.

(Tom angrily exits)

(Black out)

8. Pregnant?

(Tracy is alone in a night gown in her small, simple bathroom. She is on the toilet with her head down)

TRACY

Oh God... could I be p-pregnant?

No, no way.

But did we? Oh gosh. How long has it been since my last menstruation?!

Oh my.. its been months! But how many months? (Beat change) God, what am I to tell Tom?

He'll never want me after. None of this is going according to plan!

It was always supposed to be marriage first, then a house, then children. How I have ruined this narrative.

(She begins to cry)

What am I meant to do?!

(Lights shift into the next scene)

9. Renovation

(A small clinic. Avery is wearing a purple gown, as they are sitting behind a receptionist desk, Roxanne is filling up a nurse's cart. Meredith enters)

MEREDITH

Oh my... would you look at this place!

AVERY

Look who arrived!

ROXANNE

What do you think of the upgrade?

MEREDITH

It's beautiful, breath taking.

ROXANNE

Care for a tour?

MEREDITH

Oh I would love to, but I came here on more specific matters.

ROXANNE

Oh? Pray tell.

MEREDITH

Is Jane around? It's probably best if I speak with her.

ROXANNE

She just finished an operation, she'll be out shortly. How have you been doing? You haven't returned my letters and I haven't seen you.

MEREDITH

I've been occupying myself.

ROXANNE

How so?

MEREDITH

Well for one thing, I discovered I really enjoy cooking. And baking. Mother has been so proud, so it's been an easy home lately. I've been looking for work- I was in the area, decided to stop in.

ROXANNE

What a lovely coincidence.

(Beat. Jane enters with Kira)

KIRA

Meredith! It is so nice to see you.

(Kira hugs Meredith)

MEREDITH

You as well.

JANE

How are you honey?

MEREDITH

To be frank, I've shed so many tears, but I'm trying to move on.

KIRA

We're here for you.

JANE

And how do you plan to move on?

MEREDITH

My reason for being here. I want a job. Here, I have years of office experience. (Meredith hands Roxanne her resume) You need me.

MEREDITH

Well! Look at this!

JANE

You've gotten confident.

MEREDITH

I walked in, and as excited as I was to see everyone, this clinic is a mess. Avery looks like he hasn't slept in days and women are coming and going.

AVERY

This is true.

(Beat)

JANE

You're hired.

MEREDITH

Oh thank you! Thank you. You won't regret this, actually, I can start right now.

JANE

You remind me a lot of myself when I was your age.

MEREDITH

How so?

JANE

My first job was at the dentist office. I saw how much they needed help, and I took over the receptionist there.

AVERY

I'm being replaced?

JANE

No! I'm saying, Meredith, you have the same drive as me.

(Meredith smiles)

MEREDITH

How can I help?

END OF PLAY

