

The Dignity Circle

Central Works Production Draft
A full-length play

By Lauren Smerkanich

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ANGELA - Female. 30s to 60s.

JUDITH - Female. 30s to 60s.

SCOTT - Male. 30s to 60s. Judith's husband.

PARKER - Male. 30s to 60s. Angela's husband.

HEATHER - Female. Late 20s to 30s.

KAYLA - Female. 10. Heather's Daughter.

KATE C. - Female. 30s to 40s.

Note: Kayla can likewise be played by any actor other than Heather, or implied.

*

TIME

Present

SETTING

A conference room in a very nice hotel in Sacramento, California. Several very nice living rooms in the suburbs of Sacramento, California. And the Baking Aisle of a Sprouts supermarket. At some point, all of these places at once.

NOTES

Once The Masks are explained as the various attainable levels of The Dignity Circle, they should remain onstage - floating, or to the side, or could they look like a Bakery Display? When onstage, women wearing masks could hold additional masks, giving the impression of even more women.

Scenes should flow one right into the other.

Sprouts can be replaced with any well-known regional grocery chain.

A WOMAN, her face covered by an ornate MASK, enters. She stands, surveying us for a few long moments.

When she takes off her covering, her face is imbued with the same glowing light the mask lent her. This woman is in her element, and she knows it. This is ANGELA.

Beat.

ANGELA

Hi, y'all. I am Angela S.

I work in real estate. I live in Westlake. Sacramento, California.

Welcome.

So.

I have a question for you.

What would you do if - right now - I handed you forty thousand dollars?

In cash.

No strings attached.

I'll wait.

You all seem very nervous.

What if we look at it like a game? What would you do?

Run to put it all in a bank? Very prudent.

Donate it to those in need? Very generous.

Spend it on yourself?

Why not?

What would you treat yourself to with this sudden influx of cash?

A night out with your lesser half, a trip? A new car, a new guest bathroom, a new forehead?

*

*

*

A way to get out?
 It's uncomfortable. Isn't it?
 Asking yourself what you want when you could actually make it happen.
 Why is that?
 I think it's because we've normalized self-denial.
 We say *no* to us before others can say *no* to us.
 Another woman once stood *here* while I was sitting *there* and asked me what I would do
 with forty thousand dollars.
 Do you know what I said?
 "Whatever. I. Want."
 Let me tell you a story about my mother.
 (She's no longer with us.)
 My mother was the most incredible woman I've ever met.
 She never went to college but she was *bright*.
 She had all these thoughts clanging off one another in her head.
 She was a chaos that was beautiful to behold.
 To help the family out with money, she was a secretary at a law firm.
 (She was, this will not surprise you, the only woman in her office.)
 She took me to work one take-your-daughter day.
 And I sat there. And I watched her. And I came apart.
 Here was a woman (my mother) who read everything she could get her hands on.
 Who designed aqueducts for her garden, who smoked stolen cigars.
 Who invented games with pots and pans, and then broke her own rules to win.
 This same woman (my mother) cowed to the men in her office.
 Let them call her *Sweetie*.
 Let them place a hand on her shoulder, on her thigh, on her ass. *
 And that's just what I saw.
 What were they doing when her ten-year-old daughter *wasn't* in the room?
 She took it. She hid. Made herself dim.
 In the car home, I asked why she had darkened her own bright and she told me:
 "Because I can persevere that way. In times of adversity, sometimes the smartest thing to
 do is veil your own light."
 This must sound familiar.
 We're all women of a certain age.
 Who had mothers of a certain age.
 We're used to that sort of thing.
 Do you know someone who lives like my mother did?
 (Before she died?)
 Are you living like that?
 Do you want to be?
 I don't.
 I don't ever want to wound my own brightness.
 I don't ever want to say *no* to myself.
 I don't ever want to hide my chaos to make life more convenient for others.

I am not uncomfortable asking for what I want.

I am not uncomfortable naming what I want.

I want to give you the opportunity to be handed forty thousand dollars.

All you need to do is Devote a fraction of that today and you will walk out of this room several weeks later with a small fortune.

A small fortune that you can do

WHATEVER YOU WANT WITH.

So.

It's your time.

It's your turn.

What do you want?

THE LADY-IN-WAITING

We're in the bakery aisle of a Sprouts.

JUDITH, who is very heavily, but tastefully made up, squints at a display of pre-made desserts.

Angela enters with a shopping basket over her arm.

ANGELA

Judith?

Judith turns to look at Angela, struggling to place her.

ANGELA

(gesturing to herself)

Angela. I sold you guys your house a couple of years back. You and Scott.

JUDITH

(remembering)

Oh. Angela.

ANGELA

Judith and Scott. Four bedroom three bath on Irongate.

JUDITH

You remember.

ANGELA

Of course. Great foyer. Fruit trees in the back yard. Get any lemons off those?

JUDITH

Oh. You know.

ANGELA

Maybe closer to November. That's when mine -

JUDITH

I'm so sorry.

ANGELA

What?

JUDITH

I'm late for a party.

ANGELA

Oh! No. I'm sorry - we. Can always catch up another time.

JUDITH

I left the house late. You know how sometimes you *become* late? Traffic? Or...well. It's always traffic. And you have to be there at eight and you're watching the clock on your dashboard and at seven fifty-nine you're thinking to yourself, "I'm still not late yet!" Which is. Momentarily comforting. But you're twenty minutes away and clearly are *going* to be late.

ANGELA

I know that feeling.

JUDITH

That's *not* what happened. Tonight. I left the house *after* I was supposed to be at the party. I didn't plan right and....This?

(she gestures to her face)

This takes time and Scott said we'd bring the dessert. And. I can't decide what to bring.

Judith continues to stare at the dessert options.

ANGELA

Why couldn't Scott pick up the dessert? If you were running late?

JUDITH

Scott never gets the dessert.

(Beat)

Tonight is not going to go well.

ANGELA

What kind of party is it?

JUDITH

Dinner. At Scott's partner's house. Wooing clients.

ANGELA

Can't go wrong with a chocolate cake.

JUDITH
(panicking)

They only have sheet cake in chocolate! Not a sheet! Scott hates a sheet!

ANGELA

Okay.

Here's what we do. Get the blueberry crumble. It's actually pretty good here. I get it for my Open Houses all the time. I have a gift basket in the car. One of those picnic things that people fill with snacks and booze and candles? It's been rattling around in my trunk forever. We put the crumble in the basket. Make it look homemade. Then you scoot to the party and say your crumble took longer than anticipated and sure - you're still late? But not 'cause you mis-judged the time, but because you were putting in the extra effort.

Judith considers.

JUDITH

Scott will know.

ANGELA
(conspiratorially)

Screw Scott.

Beat.

Suddenly, Judith hugs Angela. Angela is surprised, but gives the hug back freely.

ANGELA

Oh. Hey. Hey don't worry about this. We got this.

JUDITH
(pulling back from the hug)

Sorry to. I don't know.

*

ANGELA

Not at all. This party sounds terrible.

Judith laughs.

ANGELA

Would you. Hmmmmm.

JUDITH

What?

ANGELA

Would you want to go to a party that might actually be fun for you?

JUDITH

I don't usually -

ANGELA

Next Saturday. At the Kimpton Sawyer.

JUDITH

That place is -

ANGELA

Really nice. I know.

JUDITH

What kind of - ?

ANGELA

Party? It's like a charity event. Women's empowerment thing. Free snacks and booze.

Beat.

JUDITH

I don't know. I'd have to check my schedule. See if Scott has anything on the calendar for us.

ANGELA

Oh, of course!

JUDITH

And you know - clearly parties tend to make me nervous so! Um. It might just be a lot for me.

ANGELA

I understand that. But - believe me - it's not that kind of party. This group throws very inspiring events. I promise you wouldn't be overwhelmed. And you'd know me, so I can help if you're feeling shy.

JUDITH

Really?

ANGELA

Really. I can pick you up. You'll be my date.

Beat as Judith considers. She smiles.

JUDITH

I'd love to.

The women exit.

We're in a hotel ballroom, at a Crowning Ceremony.

Angela enters, all smiles and business. This time, The Mask she is wearing is entirely gold and glowing. It is unspeakably beautiful.

Judith, face naked of a Mask, watches from the periphery, or maybe she's back in the audience.

ANGELA

Let me tell you how it works. Our Dignity Circle.

But I'm going to need just a little help. *

I'd like to introduce you all to my good friend, Kate C. *

KATE C., a woman comprised almost entirely of the chip on her shoulder, enters. She gives a perfunctory wave. *

Angela leads the crowd in a round of applause. *

ANGELA *

Kate C. came to us with her fair share of real hardships. But, I'm happy to say, the Circle has recently gifted her with both emotional and financial rewards! *

KATE C. *

Yup. *

ANGELA *

So! She's been kind enough to give us a hand today! Kate? *

Kate dons a small, white mask. *

There is a shift in the room - the sales pitch begins to take on a slight air of danger while still maintaining that polite, "We're just ladies who lunch!" feel. *

ANGELA *

You start as a Lady-In-Waiting with a simple initial gift. We call this your First Devotion. *

Kate C. poses in her LADY-IN-WAITING mask, showing off the angles. *

ANGELA

You pay your First Devotion to the woman who thought to include you in our Dignity Circle. We call her The Duchess.

Kate C. then puts on or demonstrates a *
DUCHESS mask. Again, it is clearly feminine, *
but more detailed, or differently colored. *

ANGELA

The Duchesses take the Devotions given them by their Ladies-In-Waiting and each offer their Devotions to The Infantas.

Kate C. demonstrates the silver INFANTA *
mask, working the room. *

ANGELA

And The Infantas, in turn, devote to our Queen.

Angela removes her GOLD QUEEN MASK *
with a demonstrative flourish. *

ANGELA

Do you see how easy it is?
You simply devote your way inwards to the center of the circle.
You're a Lady-In-Waiting on week one.
Then you find two Devotees and you're a Duchess by week two
On your way to Infanta
And then Queen with a payday of forty thousand dollars.
Do you see how it all flows inward? The support? The empowerment?
Women only! *

KATE C. *

I love that it's only women. It feels safer. It feels important. *

ANGELA *

Besides, a circle is such a perfect, feminine shape. *
And there are so many Dignity Circles for you to choose from! Each Circle is based on
how much you have to Devote and how much you'd like to receive as Queen! You can
work with the same group of women several times. I certainly have. But it's always a
lovely gesture to extend the offer to new people. *

Angela puts her Queen Mask back on.

KATE C. *

This is NOT one of those ridiculous marketing schemes. *
You won't end up with a garage full of tupper-ware, knives, or makeup. *

*

KATE C.

*

Or leggings or moisturizers or...I don't know, fucking non-stick skillet!

*

ANGELA

*

Kate!

*

KATE C.

*

Sorry!

*

And who wants to spend their precious time and energy slinging products for some company who ends up making all the money?

*

This is easier. You put some money in, you get more money out. It's just like any other investment.

*

*

ANGELA

*

And you will end up with a multitude of new contacts, friends, and professional relationships.

We meet weekly at Empowerment Sessions to exchange Devotions and to talk. In a safe, supportive space.

*

KATE C.

*

But then there are the parties!

*

Once a month, we have these parties celebrating the women who are about to cash out and make Queen! They're called Crowning Ceremonies!

*

We put the soon-to-be Queens up on a dais -

It's amazing. We get WRECKED. KATE C. *

We let loose a little, sure - ANGELA *

There's endless champagne! KATE C. *

And women just screaming out of excitement! *

ANGELA

We always get more Ladies-In-Waiting at the parties!

So!

Now that you know how it works

Why wouldn't you want to be a part of this?

Why not?? KATE C. *

ANGELA

We all deserve to be celebrated.

We all deserve abundance.

We all deserve dignity.

*

We're in Angela's living room. It is very, very nice.

Judith paces, fizzing with adrenaline from the party.

Angela sits on her couch, relaxed, enjoying Judith's excitement.

That was. JUDITH

I know. ANGELA

Just - JUDITH

I know. ANGELA

So.. JUDITH

What? ANGELA

FUN. JUDITH

Angela throws her head back and laughs.

Honestly, I don't think I've been around that many people who are just - JUDITH

Happy? ANGELA

Yes! In so long. So this was? JUDITH

A Crowning Ceremony. I made Queen today. ANGELA

So how much did you get? JUDITH

Forty k. ANGELA

Seriously?! That's so much - JUDITH

I know. ANGELA

How does it even - JUDITH

I don't always make this much. Depends on how much I want to Devote initially. ANGELA

How long have you been doing this? JUDITH

This is my fifth or sixth circle. ANGELA

So you love it? JUDITH

I'm good at it. ANGELA

What's it like? JUDITH

On the dais? ANGELA

When you're up there? Getting crowned? JUDITH

It's. Freedom. ANGELA

What do you see? Can you tell me? JUDITH

Angela closes her eyes.

ANGELA

There's that big mirror in the back of the ballroom.

JUDITH

You're in it?

ANGELA

I see me.

JUDITH

How do you look?

ANGELA

Sort of. Well. Golden.

Judith breathes in again, savoring the word.

JUDITH

Yes.

ANGELA

I'm standing up there in front of you. And my hair is blown out and my lips are red and my eyes are happy. I look perfect. I feel perfect.

JUDITH

Oh my God. What else?

ANGELA

Do I see?

JUDITH

Yes.

ANGELA

Women. I'm up there on the dais, and I am nothing but a light and I shine it down on you and it is reflected back on me. And I can *see* you all. Really. For a little while, it doesn't matter how hurt we've been. The divorces. Miscarriages. Affairs. I see all those wounds, but I also see - and this is where I really feel at peace - I see that Devotions can heal.

JUDITH

They can?

ANGELA

That's what we're doing. With the Circles. Because it's more than just the Crowning Ceremonies. We meet weekly at Empowerment Sessions to - sure - exchange Devotions but to. Also to exchange ideas. And support. We are so much more than our disappointment. We're not just our hurts. We will heal.

JUDITH

The money is the cure.

Angela puts her hands on top of Judith's.

ANGELA

We're the cure. The money is. Look, it helps. But *we're* the cure. By acknowledging that we need? And rewarding that acknowledgement with abundance? There's so much healing power in giving to one another.

Beat.

JUDITH

(small)

I don't know how to do that. Heal. Or. Stop. The hurting.

ANGELA

What hurts?

Judith places her hand over her own chest as an indication of where she's in pain.

ANGELA

You know, I saw you when I was up there, too.

JUDITH

You saw me? You could pick me out?

ANGELA

Of course.

JUDITH

What did I look like?

ANGELA

Like me.

JUDITH

I bet that's just 'cause we happen to get our hair blown out at the same place.

ANGELA

No. You were lit up like I was.

JUDITH

I was lit up *because* of you.

ANGELA

It was your own light. But your eyes weren't happy.

JUDITH

It's all been mangled.

ANGELA

What?

Judith gestures widely, indicating everything surrounding her.

JUDITH

I don't feel. Safe. When I'm at. Well. Anywhere.

ANGELA

Why?

Judith gives a small shrug.

ANGELA

Do you feel safe here?

JUDITH

Mmmm. Yes.

ANGELA

Good. You are.

JUDITH

But probably everybody feels this way, right?

ANGELA

Oh, sweetheart. No.

JUDITH

Like I said. It's all.

Judith does something with her hand to indicate a brokenness.

ANGELA

We can fix that. We can make it so that you don't feel like this anymore. So you won't feel like that ever again.
Do you want to join us?

JUDITH

I don't know.

ANGELA

It wouldn't require much. Money or time. Initially.

JUDITH

Before I get involved with - I have to ask Scott. My husband. We tend to make these decisions together.

ANGELA

You do have access to your own money.

JUDITH

I have my own account that Scott deposits into every month.

*

ANGELA

So. It's your decision, really. Not his. And if you join, whatever you do in the Circles? It's for you. Only you.

Beat.

JUDITH

I want to be up there. On the dais. To be like you? I want that so badly.

ANGELA

You will. You'll get it.

JUDITH

And would you be there? To see it?

ANGELA

I won't leave you.

Beat. The two women share that smile that acknowledge a true friendship is forming.

We're in Judith's living room. Her husband, SCOTT, drinks a glass of wine and waits.

Judith enters, drops her keys and purse. Scott's eyes follow her every movement.

JUDITH
Sorry. I know it's late.

SCOTT
Where were you?

JUDITH
At a friend's.

Scott look up at Judith.

SCOTT
Who?

JUDITH
Do you remember Angela?

SCOTT
(trying to place the name)
Angela.

JUDITH
She sold us the house.

SCOTT
Oh. Right. Angela.

JUDITH
We ran into one another. At the Sprouts.

SCOTT
When?

JUDITH
Last week?

SCOTT
This is the first time you're mentioning her.

JUDITH

It's the first time we've spent time together.

SCOTT

What's she like?

JUDITH

I don't know. She's fine.

SCOTT

She must be more than fine if you're spending so much time with her.

JUDITH

I'm not spending -
She's nice. She's generous. She's warm.

SCOTT

She sounds great.

JUDITH

She is. I think.

SCOTT

Hey. Come here.

Judith goes to sit down next to Scott on the couch. He puts his arm around her. He hands her a glass of wine. She takes a small sip.

SCOTT

I would do anything for you. You know that?

JUDITH

I know that.

This is a thing they do.

SCOTT

Anything you wanted, I'd give to you. You know that?

JUDITH

I know that.

SCOTT

I love you.

I know that.

JUDITH

You love me.

SCOTT

His arm brings her closer to his body.

You know that.

JUDITH

He kisses the hollow of her throat. She tilts her head back, opening herself up to him. He runs his fingertips from her collarbone to her chin, holding her face in place to better look at it.

You are so beautiful.

SCOTT

He kisses her lips, softly.

We see Scott's fingers tighten on Judith's chin.

Her face begins to drain of pleasure.

I will always take care of you. Always.

SCOTT

She twitches, trying to move her head. She cannot.

I know that. Scott. I know.

JUDITH

(Beat, softly)

You're going to leave bruises.

He releases her. Then exits.

PARKER, Angela's husband, enters with a laptop and replaces Judith on the couch. We're in Angela's living room now.

Parker types, read, types again, absorbed in the work at hand.

Angela watches him. He looks up and notices.

PARKER

Sorry. Be done shortly. Presentation tomorrow.

ANGELA

I figured. You need an assistant.

PARKER

I've had assistants. Still end up doing everything myself.

He squints at something on the computer, sighing, correcting.

She doesn't move. After a beat or two, he notices that she's still standing there.

PARKER

Wanna come here?

ANGELA

I'm not bothering you?

PARKER

Never. Sorry I'm so distracted.

He flips the laptop closed as she curls next to him, waving off his apology.

ANGELA

You should quit.

PARKER

(laughing)

Okay.

ANGELA

No. You should. I've been doing really well lately.

PARKER

I noticed.

ANGELA

Another commission will be in the joint account tomorrow. Forty k.

PARKER

Congratulations.

ANGELA

Thank you. So. Quit.

PARKER

I don't know. That seems. Unwise.

ANGELA

Obviously we come up with an exit strategy.

PARKER

You and I are, at this point, used to a certain lifestyle.

ANGELA

That wouldn't have to change. Between our savings. My continued income?

PARKER

Does that make me...?

ANGELA

What?

PARKER

I don't know. Useless?

ANGELA

I could never think of you that way.

PARKER

Hun - honestly? What would I do?

ANGELA

Whatever you wanted!

PARKER

I've been doing this -

(gestures to laptop)

- for as long as I can -

ANGELA

Did you dream of selling insurance when you were a kid?

PARKER

No.

ANGELA

You hate it.

PARKER

It has given us a very nice life. And I have no idea what I would fill the days with.

ANGELA

But if you quit, you can have the space and time to figure that out.

PARKER

Why?

ANGELA

What?

PARKER

Why the push for me to quit all of a sudden?

ANGELA

I want to see you happy. And if I can help with that - why wouldn't I help?

PARKER

You don't help. You cast spells.

ANGELA

What does that mean?

PARKER

Just that you've always been very good at being very persuasive.

ANGELA

Is that a good or bad thing?

PARKER

For us? I think it's a very good thing.

Beat.

ANGELA

I made a new friend. Through that women's group. Judith. She reminds me of Mom.

PARKER

How?

ANGELA

She's. There's something of steel about her. But. She's spent a lot of time pretending that's not true.

So. I think I am helping. I think I can do good.

Do you think she'd be proud of me?

PARKER

Your mother?

Angela nods.

PARKER

(carefully)

I think. You don't need to spend so much time worrying about that.

ANGELA

Are you proud of me?

This is a thing they do.

PARKER

I am.

ANGELA

Would you do anything for me?

PARKER

I would.

ANGELA

Are you telling the truth?

PARKER

I am.

ANGELA

You'll stand by me no matter what?

I will.

PARKER

She pauses. She leans in. Kisses him.

You should quit your job.

ANGELA

It's a - it's a terrifying prospect.

PARKER

I wouldn't let anything bad happen to you.

ANGELA

She kisses him again.

We're still in Angela's living room, but it is later that week. Several women sit about the space, wearing various Devotion Masks. They sit and watch the following passively.

Judith, also masked, has entered and hands a Devotion Mask to Angela, before sitting across from her.

Lastly, KATE C., wearing a Duchess mask pushed up on her forehead, enters and takes the space. It should be clear that Kate C. has had the floor for some time now.

KATE C.

And THEN, this fucking bitch -

ANGELA

Kate.

KATE C.

I'm sorry. This. FINE. This. LADY I WORK WITH. Writes to the COMPANY AT LARGE cc-ing everyone and is like:

(does this lady's voice and it's grating)

"Why don't we go with Marcy's proposal because Kate has really dominated the time in the last few conference calls."

(back to her own voice)

Do you see what she did there? Do you? This is just ONE example of how she demeans me. AND she tried to pull fucking RANK which is rich because I'M HER BOSS. She was just trying to make me look bad or herself look good or you know what? It doesn't fucking matter. She's a cunt and I hate her.

(off Angela's look)

WHAT.

ANGELA

Couple of things.

KATE C.

Here we go.

Angela pushes up her own mask.

ANGELA

We've spoken about this before, Kate C. We do usually try to use female-forward language in the Empowerment Sessions.

KATE C.

Oh for fuck's sake, we've taken back "cunt." Was anyone THAT offended?

Pause. A few of the masked women glance at one another, afraid to speak. Judith offers a mild shake of the head as a "no."

KATE C.

Everyone's fine.

ANGELA

Secondarily. We're trying to create a - calm space. To problem-solve.

KATE C.

See I find that offensive.

ANGELA

And better attain our goals. I'm sorry. Offensive. In what way?

KATE C.

You are always talking about how we're supposed to bring our "true selves" to these meetings. Well my true self isn't fucking calm. She's fucking furious. She's feeling fucking. Slighted.

ANGELA

Okay. I see that.

KATE C.

She's feeling fucking unappreciated!

ANGELA

For all the hard work she puts in.

KATE C.

Yes!

ANGELA

So what do you do?

KATE C.

That's what I'm asking, right? That's why I'm here tonight. What do I do?

ANGELA

Let's open it up to the group at large.

Angela and Kate C. Look out at the assembled group of women. No one responds. For a while.

Finally, Judith let's out a small -

JUDITH

Well.

KATE C.

Who are you?

JUDITH

(pushing up her mask)

Judith K. Homemaker. Valleyview Acres. Sacramento. California.

ANGELA

She's one of my latest Ladies-In-Waiting. Judith? You were saying?

JUDITH

Well. Okay. So. Well. What I'm hearing is that your status within your company was threatened. Diminished.

KATE C.

Yes.

JUDITH

Okay.

I have experience with someone who constantly feels his or her status is being diminished. And this person can be. Hurtful. When they're mad.

KATE C.

It's legitimate to be mad.

JUDITH

I believe that. But you don't want to hurt people. Do you?

Kate is quiet. Angela is watching Judith carefully.

KATE C.

I do sometimes.

JUDITH

That won't make you feel better. It'll just turn into a pattern that will make you unrecognizable.

KATE C.

So what do I do?

JUDITH

You - it's alright that you dump your anger here.
(to Angela)

It's okay that I say that?

Angela gives her a "the floor is yours" gesture.

JUDITH

But then talk to this -

KATE C.

Fucking bitch.

JUDITH

Privately. You talk to her and ask her why she did what she did. And listen. And explain yourself and meet her halfway. But tell her it can't happen again.

KATE C.

And if it does?

JUDITH

I think. You fire her.

KATE C.

Ruthless.

JUDITH

No. Just. Professional.

(looking for approval from the group)

Right?

Kate looks to Angela.

ANGELA

Told you you'd like her.

KATE C.

(to Judith)

You're a homemaker.

JUDITH

Yes.

(genuinely asking)

Is there something wrong with that?

KATE C.

No. But. Is it what you want to be doing?

JUDITH

I've never thought about anything else.

KATE C.

Well. Let's chat about that.

ANGELA

(to the room at large)

Ladies, this right here is why we engage in the Empowerment Session. To acknowledge fury. Untangle knots. Build bridges. And forge lasting connections. So! Let's take care of the business before we indulge in refreshments. Let's get all our Venmo transfers ready to go.

All the women take out their phones and look expectantly to Angela.

ANGELA

Are we all good? And...Devote!

All the women tap their phones and several "Cha-ching!" noises chime from various devices.

ANGELA

Who amongst us does not *live for* that noise? Congratulations on the new abundance in your bank accounts!

The meeting adjourned, the women - masked or otherwise - break in to smaller groups to mingle. Kate approaches Judith.

KATE C.

I'm excited to see who you bring next week.

JUDITH

Who I...?

ANGELA

Your Devotee. For the circle to continue to empower inward, we'll need you to bring a Lady-In-Waiting.

KATE C.

And snacks. No healthy shit.

JUDITH

And then I'll be a Duchess.

Angela hands a Duchess mask to Judith.

ANGELA

You're on your way.

Judith stands center and places the Devotion mask over her face. Her expression is covered, but we know she's ecstatic.

THE DUCHESS

We're back at the Sprouts. The Baking Aisle.

Judith is holding a package of disposable aluminum baking sheets.

She shares the aisle with HEATHER, who is carrying a five-pound bag of all-purpose flour and is staring at the selection of spices, lost in thought.

Heather?
JUDITH

No reply.

...Heather?
JUDITH

Hi...?
HEATHER
(snapping out of it)

It's so nice to see you!
JUDITH

You too. How have you been?
HEATHER
(no idea who she's talking to)

Busy! Which has been a really nice change.
JUDITH

Yes.
HEATHER

Beat. It's awkward. After a second, Judith realizes that Heather has no idea who she is.

It's Judith. From -
JUDITH

HEATHER
(recognition dawning)

Judith. Yes. Hi. From - West Campus.

JUDITH

Yes! Hi!

HEATHER

Hi.

Pause.

JUDITH

You're baking.

HEATHER

Yeah.

JUDITH

I don't. Bake much. These are so much easier. No clean up. Just chuck them away when you're done. Forget all about 'em.

(Beat)

I'm on snacks. For a meeting I have to go to later this week. I have to bring snacks. So. Cookies.

(Beat)

I'm so glad you remember me!

HEATHER

I do.

JUDITH

We were a couple of grades apart. But I remember you from -

HEATHER

Right.

JUDITH

- announcements in the old gym. It always smelled in there.

HEATHER

Sweat from the weight room or -

JUDITH

I thought it was mud.

HEATHER
(overlapping)

Blood.

JUDITH

Blood?? No. Not blood.

HEATHER
(shrugging)

It could have been mud.

JUDITH

Pink shoelaces!

HEATHER

I don't -

JUDITH

You had hot pink shoelaces! They stood out because you always wore all black.

Heather is still dressed in all black.

HEATHER

What's the meeting? You have to bring snacks to?

JUDITH

A woman's group. A sort of. Empowering thing.

(Beat)

How do I look?

HEATHER

How do you mean?

JUDITH

Since you last saw me? Do I look...?

HEATHER

You look the same.

JUDITH
(disappointed)

Oh.

HEATHER

Thinner.

JUDITH
(neutral)

Oh.

HEATHER
Really healthy, actually. You look sort of golden.

JUDITH
(thrilled)

I'm glad to have run in to you.

HEATHER
(lackluster)

Thanks.

JUDITH

Are you alright.

HEATHER

Yes. Why.

JUDITH

Oh. You look sort of. Withdrawn? A little tired.

HEATHER

My daughter has leukemia.

JUDITH

What?

HEATHER

My daughter has leukemia.

JUDITH

Oh, Heather. I'm so sorry to hear that.
I had. I had no idea.

HEATHER

Today's a chemo day. Chemo days are hard. They really take it out of her. And there's nothing to do but sit. I can't sit for too long so I usually give her my iPad and try to get things done. The nurses keep an eye. They love her. Last time? I went home. While she got chemo. I had this idea that I would finally get the dishes done. I hadn't gotten around to the dishes in. They pile up when you have a sick kid and we don't have a microwave we can't afford a microwave sorry dishwasher my brain we don't have a dishwasher.

I start in on the pile of dishes but then my wrists got weirdly tired so I stopped but I don't want to waste the time I have while she's at chemo, so I started to organize her medications. There are. There are so many bottles and times of day and sizes and shapes and color of pill. The inventory grows longer and longer which is frustrating because the net gain seems to be zero? But I organize them all and then I'm hungry and I eat some leftover Thai food and I'm watching a re-run of some sitcom and the worst thing in the world is the television mom is mad about something but she'll forget by the next episode anyway and I guess I fell asleep because the next thing I know my phone has been ringing and ringing and I forgot her I forgot to pick her up from chemotherapy I forgot. She waited. For me. For hours.

I wasn't going to leave her today but. I'm baking her a pie. It's her eleventh birthday soon. Between her treatments and her dad not.

Anyway. I can't give her much. But I can bake her favorite pie.

Pause.

JUDITH

What's her name?

HEATHER

Kayla. It's Kayla.

JUDITH

I might have...I might have an opportunity for you.

We're at another Crowning Ceremony. The Chorus is present - onstage, or in the audience. We are aware they are here and listening.

Angela enters center, wearing an Infanta mask. She is holding a bottle of champagne and a flute.

Judith enters on one side, wearing a Duchess mask. Heather enters on the other. Heather is unsure, decidedly weirded-out by her surroundings.

Judith smiles encouragingly at Heather. Judith and Heather stand sentinel, watching Angela throughout the following.

Angela pushes up her mask and flashes us a smile. The sales pro is back. She sits on the edge of the stage, pure Judy Garland at the London Palladium. She sets down the bottle and the flute. She pours, taking her time, avoiding too much fizz.

ANGELA

(out, to us)

I have a speech I usually do. At these things.
 I talk about you.
 What you need, want, deserve.
 I encourage you to ask for it.
 Unapologetically.
 It can get rowdy.
 I can get rowdy.
 But I think I want to do something a little bit different today.
 Because I can sense you all need something that's
 Softer.
 So let's use this time as we sip our champagne
 Let's use this time to think about support.
 Let's think about how we can best be of aid to one another. Comfort one another.
 How can we benefit off of each other's friendship?
 Let the bubbles roll off your tongue and while they do
 Let me tell you a story about my mother.
 (As many of you know, I lost her some years ago.)

When I was a child, a boy was once cruel to me at the library.
 He said something about my hair or my nose or how I said something or what I said.
 I didn't know how to defend myself
 Being on my own.
 I ran home crying and my mother barely listened to what happened before she marched
 me back to the library and she dressed that boy down. It was terrifying.
 She held my hand in hers the whole time
 And I thought:
 "I'm not on my own. I'm not one. I'm two."
 So.
 If we're having another glass
 (And I think we should. I'll make sure you get home safe and when is the last time you
 treated yourself anyway?)
 Let me challenge you to articulate how
 You might need help.
 It might be vulnerable and frightening.
 But let's try.

Quietly, slowly, The Chorus begins to answer
 the question. We hear "Childcare," "New job,"
 "Divorce," etc. Angela tilts her head, listening,
 and then -

ANGELA

Good.
 Let's think about it this way.
 In this room, you're not just one.
 You're not even just two.
 You are all the women present here.
 You have access to all the advice, all the guidance,
 All the helping hands that will not let you go. Really think on how
 Everyone in this room
 Is open and available to always help others.
 That is why I so actively seek out rooms
 Like this one.
 In this room with all of you?
 There exists everything that I - that we - could possibly need.
 So today. I won't whip you into a frenzy.
 I won't even encourage you to join our Dignity Circle.
 I'll only encourage you to turn to the women
 On your left and on your right and say "Thank you."
 Thank you.

Thank you.

Judith and The Chorus all begin to thank one another.

Angela directs one of her “Thank You’s” to Heather, who nods, then haltingly says “Thank you” back.

We are in Angela's living room.

Angela jumps up nimbly. Judith re-enters with another flute for champagne. Angela re-fills her own glass and then Judith's.

As they clink glasses -

ANGELA

Do you feel good?

JUDITH

I do. Do you think Heather was convinced. She seemed sort of. Icy.

ANGELA

The ceremonies can be a lot. Of energy. Of people. Of booze. Not everyone is comfortable right out of the gate. She'll warm up.

JUDITH

Your speech was fantastic. Truly. It always is. But tonight seemed. I don't know. Like you shared a part of yourself. You gathered us all with a truth.

ANGELA

Thank you.

JUDITH

I don't see how Heather could not. Be attracted to that.

ANGELA

(smiling)

Don't worry. We got her.

JUDITH

I think I saw that.

ANGELA

What else did you see tonight?

JUDITH

At the ceremony?

ANGELA

Tell me what you saw.

JUDITH

I saw.

(thinking)

Opportunity.

ANGELA

Yes.

JUDITH

For a multitude of women to make something of themselves.

ANGELA

I love that.

JUDITH

With the Devotions, we are directly funding each other's needs and dreams and aspirations. Which is -

ANGELA

Beautiful.

JUDITH

Yes, but! The room was also filled with possibility and choice and chance. Professionally, sure -

ANGELA

Kate definitely seemed very interested in you.

JUDITH

Well.

ANGELA

And you could always come work for me.

JUDITH

I could? Really?

ANGELA

Of course.

JUDITH

I don't really know anything about real estate.

ANGELA

You'll learn. Look how quickly you're taking to the Dignity Circles.

Judith glows.

JUDITH

I might take you up on that. It's also -

Scott and I got together when we were still very young. He always jokes that from the moment he slapped eyes on me, he's wanted me all for himself. Scott's been everything for so long. So I don't have many friends.

But I'm sure you and Parker have -

ANGELA

There are not many people I feel close to. Not many *women* I feel close to.

JUDITH

Really?

ANGELA

It's one thing to motivate women. Or organize women or inspire women. It's something else entirely to make friends with women. Really make friends. Where it's a two way street. Where there's giving *and* taking. Friends that you can trust.

JUDITH

I know.

ANGELA

But I feel can trust you. I felt that immediately.

JUDITH

I think I needed someone like you. To come along. I needed. I don't know - whatever it is you gave me, I needed it. So thank you. You're - you're simply amazing.

ANGELA

(touched)

Amazing? I don't know about that. But.

I'm grateful to be here with you.

Judith has tears in her eyes.

ANGELA

Oh! Sweetheart.

JUDITH

Sorry - no. Mascara got in the -

Judith gets hankey from her pocket or her purse
and delicately dabs at her face. *
*

Angela watches. Judith, suddenly aware of
Angela's gaze, becomes self-conscious. *
*

Is my face a mess?

JUDITH *
*

No.

ANGELA *

Angela takes the tissue from Judith and runs it
under Judith's eyes to remove any stray *
mascara, maybe around her mouth to catch any *
running lipstick. *

You're so beautiful.

ANGELA

Judith's face breaks wide open into a smile.

The women separate each to their own end of
the couch. Their husbands, Scott and Parker,
enter.

It is later, and we are now in both of their living room simultaneously. The two couple cannot see, and therefore do not acknowledge one another.

JUDITH

Eight o'clock. Kept an eye on the time.

SCOTT

Where were you?

JUDITH

That womens' group I do. With Angela.

SCOTT

Who's Angela?

JUDITH

Angela. She sold us the - I've mentioned her several times now.

*

*

PARKER

I did it.

ANGELA

You did it??

PARKER

I gave notice.

ANGELA

Yes yes yes yes yes YES!

Angela throws her arms around Parker in celebration. Parker laughs.

ANGELA

Congratulations!

*

SCOTT

What is this women's group?

JUDITH

What do you mean?

Angela hands Parker the champagne and lacking his own glass, he takes a swig from the bottle.

ANGELA

When are you officially done?

PARKER

End of the month.

SCOTT

I mean - what are you spending your time doing in this women's group?

JUDITH

Well, we - um. Tonight, we listened to one of the member's challenges at work and we all brainstormed solutions.

ANGELA

What are you going to do?

PARKER

Oh. I don't know.

SCOTT

So...a think tank? With women.

JUDITH

(nodding)

For women. And we exchange donations - we call them Devotions -

SCOTT

What are you donating to?

JUDITH

Each other! And Angela offered me a job -

PARKER

I've never not worked. I'll have to find some hobbies. Gardening? Whatever it is retired people do - *

ANGELA

I'll help you figure it out. You deserve this. I've never met anyone who deserves time off more.

SCOTT

You don't need a job. You've never worked. Why would she offer you a job?

JUDITH

There are. At these Dignity Circles. There are several women who seemed to see some potential in me. Angela is one of them.

PARKER

You're so good to me.

ANGELA

Good?

PARKER

Yes, good. You're just a good person.

SCOTT

You need to be careful. It's very easy to take advantage of people like you.

JUDITH

I don't think Angela would ever take advantage -

SCOTT

I don't know, Judy. Why would she offer to hire a woman with a blank resume? Seems like she's flattering you to get donations for...something. I don't trust it. I don't trust her.

ANGELA

You don't think I bullied you?

PARKER

No, of course not!
No!

ANGELA

I think this will be good for us.

PARKER

Yeah. I think. Me too. I'll have more time to concentrate on us. Take an interest in what you're up to. I don't know if you need help - or volunteers - at that womens' group you do, but I could -

ANGELA

Oh, well. I don't feel like you. You know. Neglected me. You don't need to do that.

JUDITH

Do you not trust her or do you just not like that this doesn't involve -

SCOTT

What?

(Beat)

Doesn't involve what? Doesn't involve who?

JUDITH

Nothing. I'm sorry. It's not a big deal. I'll be careful. I promise.

SCOTT

All I ever want is to keep you safe.

Judith musters a smile.

JUDITH

I know. Thank you.

PARKER

You give so much.

ANGELA

I care.

SCOTT

Hey. Fix your face.

JUDITH

What?

SCOTT

Fix your face.

Judith's face falls.

ANGELA

I do. I care.

We are now in Heather's living room. There is a figure wrapped in a blanket on the couch, facing away from us. Fast asleep. This is KAYLA, Heather's daughter.

Heather enters and drops her purse gently on the floor. She watches Kayla sleep for a few beats.

HEATHER

Kayla? Hey baby. You awake? *

No response. Heather eases herself down on the sofa, trying not to wake her daughter.

HEATHER

I had a weird night.

I went to this party. At a fancy hotel. I didn't want to, but Nanna said it would be *good* for me to *occasionally* get *out* of the *house*. This party was so. Very odd. This woman talked at us for so long and all these other women were crying and clapping and it all just made me feel. I don't know.

How was your day?

Shit, huh?

It'll get better. Or honestly - I don't know that. I hope it gets better.

Quiet as Kayla continues to sleep deeply.
Heather watches her.

HEATHER

I want you to get better. I want to have the - the money. And the time. To get you better. I've been wracking my brains and I - I don't know how to do that. I work. I put it all towards you.

But I am alone.

I have this theory. Please don't repeat this word in public, but I have this theory that the entire world is designed to fuck a woman who finds herself unlucky enough to be alone. I know I have Nanna and I'm lucky to have Nanna. It's not enough. We're just three women. One old, one poor, one sick. It's not enough to get you better.

So. Maybe. Maybe many women - pooling their money and their time - maybe that can be enough. I want it to be. But I have a hard time trusting women en masse. Don't you?

Heather places her hands very gently on Kayla's hair.

HEATHER

I'll try. For you.

I don't want you to suffer. And they said they could help.

I want you to get better. And they said they could help.

If you - if you die. I can't be that alone. That can't happen.

They said they could help.

What do you think? Think they can?

*

For a few moments, Heather watches her
daughter sleep.

We're in Angela's living room. Several women, all wearing Devotion masks, enter. These women sit and watch the following passively.

Judith, Angela, and Heather, all masked, enter and sit.

Lastly, KATE C., her mask perched on top of her head, enters and takes space center. It should again be clear Kate has had the floor for some time now.

KATE C.

She hands me this candle and the flavor is. I don't know. "Cloying Vanilla" or some shit and the candle has this little fucking label on it that reads, "Chance made us coworkers."

Beat.

ANGELA

Okay.

KATE C.

What do you mean, fucking "Okay?"

JUDITH

We recognize that you're upset.

KATE C.

I get promoted. A promotion that has been CENTURIES in the making and this bitch - at my Congratulations Party! This bitch gives me some shitty candle. A candle?!? And then! The candle goes ahead and states we only TANGENTIALLY know one another because we happened to get hired at the same place?? I mean, why even take the time to say that? Let alone write it down? On a CANDLE? Isn't chance why anyone knows anyone? *

Beat. *

KATE C. *

And you know, maybe chance is what brought us together but. I know her, right? Like I can tell from the way she signs off on her emails if she's pleased or upset. "Thanks so much!" is so different from "I appreciate it!" I know she tends to wear her green sweater on Fridays because Friday is date-night and her husband thinks she looks great in green. *

I know that her favorite lunch is a burrito bowl because she's tricked herself into thinking that's healthier and I know that I was invited to her daughter's christening and I got her a great present. A Tiffany keychain, she'll appreciate it when she's older. *

Beat. *

KATE C.

And isn't there something hostile in that little candle statement? Or. Like at least resigned as fuck. Like the candle said, "Sigh. Here we are. Grinding away together. Ho-fucking-hum." I can't believe she is RESIGNED to know me and felt the need to put it on some. CANDLE. FUCK.

(Beat. Then, maybe the truest thing Kate has ever said)

I thought she was my best friend.

Kate C. is on the verge of tears.

After a second, Angela hands Kate a tissue. Kate takes it, but -

KATE C.

Oh, fuck off, Angela. Sorry. SORRY.

I'm crazy to be so upset. I know.

But. Without friends we can trust. What even are we.

Beat.

Judith and Angela then push up their masks.

JUDITH

We're so sorry you're feeling -

ANGELA

- all of that.

JUDITH

We do, however, think we could find -

ANGELA

- something constructive -

JUDITH

- to take from this experience.

I want a simple solution.

KATE C.

To what?

HEATHER

The women, masked and unmasked alike,
stiffen.

What did you just say?

KATE C.

Heather pushes up her mask.

I guess I'm just. A little confused as to what the actual problem is.

HEATHER

I think. And I don't want to speak for you, Kate, but I think Kate is feeling slighted by someone she considered a confidante.

JUDITH

I guess I can see that, but...another way to look at it was that the label was just. Vague. It could have meant, "I'm so glad chance brought us together!"

HEATHER

BUT THAT'S NOT. WHAT IT SAID.

KATE C.

I wouldn't assume she meant something -

HEATHER

Why don't *you* go?

KATE C.

What?

HEATHER

Your turn. You share.

KATE C.

Kate C. sits and pulls her mask down, but we know she's glaring.

JUDITH

You start with your name and last initial. What you do. Where you live.

Beat.

HEATHER

Heather O. I teach Seventh grade English. I live over in Rancho Cordova.

ANGELA

Good.

And Heather, what do you want?

Heather sits. And blinks.

KATE C.

It's not a complicated question.

HEATHER

No, it's just -

JUDITH

I know. It can be uncomfortable asking for what you want. You know, as women, we're not supported to think this way. Let alone name our greatest desire.

ANGELA

But you can do that here. Whatever it is. Whatever you. Hunger for. You can say it here.

Heather remains quiet.

KATE C.

Oh my God.

JUDITH

Heather. We all have to share.

HEATHER

I want.

(long pause)

I'm really uncomfortable.

JUDITH

Why is that?

HEATHER

It's not a particularly warm room.

ANGELA

I understand.

(shooting Kate C. a pointed look)

Some people may be exhibiting an emotional response to their own Share, but I would encourage you to trust this is a safe space.

HEATHER

I don't. I don't want to sound like I'm begging. Or a charity case.

ANGELA

I know this is where we *exchange* the money, but it's rare that we *talk* about the money. In these meetings.

HEATHER

You said that. But that's my hesitation. My want - my greatest desire? Is for money.

KATE C.

Why? What's it for?

HEATHER

My family. And I'd like to protect my family. Keep their affairs private.

JUDITH

(quietly)

Think about it this way - there are a lot of connected women in this room. Someone could know someone at Mercy or UC Davis -

Beat. Heather continues to hesitate.

JUDITH

You can tell them. Go ahead! You told *me*. You just went ahead and told me at Sprouts.

HEATHER

That was different.

JUDITH

How?

HEATHER

You got me at a moment where I didn't have my defenses. I was without a - I don't know - a fortress. At Sprouts. For just a moment. But. Here I'd be performing.

ANGELA

It's not supposed to feel like that. We don't want it to feel like that.

JUDITH

We could help! We could help you. Couldn't you use a little help?

HEATHER

I could. But. Why?

JUDITH

Why what?

HEATHER

Why is it so important that I share?

KATE C.

I wasn't performing. Does she just think I was trying to get attention?

JUDITH

Because for this to succeed, we have to be open with one another. You have to be honest. And forthright.

HEATHER

But why does that matter? My understanding was that we were here to gift money to each other. You recruited me, Judith. So doesn't that imply that you would trust me enough to spend the money I make on...whatever I wanted?

JUDITH

Trust is exactly what we're trying to build here!

HEATHER

Then I have to question why you need information on me.

KATE C.

I was telling the truth!

JUDITH

No! I'm not trying to pry! But you should look at this as an opportunity for -

HEATHER

This is not the opportunity, though. I get the money so that I can then have *access* to opportunities.

KATE C.

Can I please say I don't get what the big deal is? Just fucking talk.

JUDITH

We want you to trust us.

KATE C.

She doesn't trust us. Look at her. She is SKEPTICAL.

JUDITH

Heather, we can -

ANGELA

Judith, don't push -

JUDITH

I promise that I - that we - have nothing but your best interests at heart.

HEATHER

I feel very pressured, very on the spot.

JUDITH

No, just listen for a second -

HEATHER

And that woman is very rude -

KATE C.

Is she pointing at me? What am I doing?

HEATHER

I think I might just leave. If that's okay. I don't think I can -

Heather stands to go. Angela raises both hands
to calm the crowd.

ANGELA

Why don't we all just. Take a breath.

The women do indeed pause, but no one
breathes.

ANGELA

Alright. We all need to be patient with one another. We all need to come to empowerment
in our own time. Do you agree, Heather?

HEATHER

I guess.

ANGELA

Let's be honest and try to identify that aspect of your personality that is resisting the gifts we are offering. What else has it kept you from? What is it going to keep you from in the future? Will you think on it?

*

*

Beat. Heather nods. Sits back down.

ANGELA

Why don't we all take the time to say something positive, yes? Kate -

KATE C.

No.

ANGELA

Alright, Judith?

JUDITH

(not meaning it, to Heather)

I'm so glad you're here.

HEATHER

(not meaning it)

I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to meet so many new friends.

ANGELA

I hope that's true, Heather. I think you're going to do great things here. I think you're going to open up your world, and all of ours, too. And I can't wait to see it. Shall we take care of business? Everyone get their transfers ready.

Everyone takes out their phones and waits expectantly.

ANGELA

And...Devote!

All the devices make a “Cha-ching!” noise at the same time.

Except for Heather’s. All the women, masked and unmasked, turn their heads to look at her.

Heather, whose thumbs have been hovering over her phone, finally taps the screen several seconds after everyone else.

One lonely “Cha-ching” rings out through the space.

THE INFANTA

We're back in The Sprouts. Heather stands with a basket over her arm, ostensibly looking at a selection of spices, but really she's cruising for Devotion recruits.

A woman walks by pushing a shopping cart. Heather makes a move towards her in an attempt to initiate conversation. This woman, intent on her shopping, steps definitively away just as Heather is about to speak.

Another woman, pushing her own cart, walks by too quickly for Heather to engage. Heather follows her for a few feet, but the woman never turns around.

Two more women, both with their own carts, brush past Heather. Then another, and another, and another. Suddenly, the aisle in which Heather finds herself is flooded with carts, all of which ignore her as she is ping-ponged about.

With her spare hand, Heather dips into her purse, retrieves her phone and puts it to her ear. She is panicked, overwhelmed, close to tears.

HEATHER

(into phone)

Mom? No - it's okay. Kayla's fine.

(hesitates, then plunges in)

I was wondering if you had a minute so I could talk to you about a financial opportunity that might be interesting to you...

Heather exits, phone to her ear.

The shopping cart women part and disappear to different aisles, leaving room for Judith, who pushes her cart briskly. Angela marches beside her, watching her friend closely.

ANGELA
Tell me what's making you angry.

JUDITH
I'm not angry.

ANGELA
You are. I can feel it.

Judith stops to look at her friend.

JUDITH
You can?

ANGELA
Of course. There's a - I don't know. A cord between us.

JUDITH
I feel that too.

ANGELA
What's making you angry?

JUDITH
I...feel that at the latest meeting, not everyone was acting in what I consider to be the spirit of The Empowerment Sessions.

ANGELA
Heather.

JUDITH
And Kate.

ANGELA
Yes.

JUDITH
The Circles are beautiful. A warm, secure place where we can float our feelings.

ANGELA
A safe place.

JUDITH
And safe places are scarce. So to question the - intent. Or very nature of the meetings! I don't understand that sort of skepticism. Or cynicism. And then Scott -

Judith stops herself. Angela turns around to face her.

ANGELA

What about Scott?

JUDITH

He - . You haven't really spent time with him, I don't want to give you the wrong impression of him. Or us.

ANGELA

I would never judge someone else's marriage.
Tell me.
What about Scott?

JUDITH

He doesn't really understand how all this...works. And he said -
That you only offered me a job to flatter me into Devoting.

Pause.

ANGELA

Do you think that?

Judith looks into Angela's eyes.

JUDITH

No. I don't.

ANGELA

Do you want to know what I think?

Judith nods.

ANGELA

I think you are capable of more than you have ever given yourself credit for. I think you might be one of those people who graces everything and everyone they touch.

JUDITH

Oh.

ANGELA

But no one's ever told you that or shown you that before. I wanted to show you that. So I offered you an opportunity to excel. That's all.

JUDITH

He's just - he's protective. So he can be suspicious.

ANGELA

I understand. I want to protect you, too. I want to protect all my friends.

JUDITH

What you're doing - with the Circles -

ANGELA

What we're all doing. You. Me. All of us.

JUDITH

Yes. There's nothing wrong with it. Right?

Angela hesitates.

ANGELA

Does anything about it make you feel wrong?

JUDITH

This is the least wrong I've ever felt in my life.

We're in Judith and Scott's living room. Judith, Angela, Scott, and Parker all sit, nursing coffees and various after-dinner drinks.

ANGELA

So. I say, "Why not make a blueberry crumble?"

JUDITH

I was just stuck in the dessert aisle -

ANGELA

She was. Completely panic-stricken.

JUDITH

But Angela saved me.

ANGELA

No, just offered a suggestion. And then you whisked on home to make it!

SCOTT

When was this?

ANGELA

Feels like forever ago.

JUDITH

The night we had dinner with The Mullens.

(to Angela)

I was so grateful to you.

ANGELA

Oh, I was so happy I remembered you!

PARKER

She remembers all her clients.

SCOTT

Was that the night you were late? To dinner?

ANGELA

That happens. When you're baking.

SCOTT

That makes sense.

ANGELA

Time can escape you.

PARKER

How did the crumble turn out?

SCOTT

Excellent, if I remember correctly. Clearly, many good things came from that crumble.

(Beat)

And Angela! I hear business has been good.

ANGELA

There's always a certain amount of volatility, but. Yes. We've been doing well. Parker was able to retire early.

JUDITH

I didn't know that! Congratulations!

PARKER

Thank you.

SCOTT

Good for you. What have you been doing with yourself?

PARKER

Ahhh - Nothing. So far.

SCOTT

Oh?

PARKER

(shrugging)

Yeah. It's. Um. Well -

ANGELA

We were able to afford to give Parker a little time to focus on himself. Figure out next steps.

PARKER

It's...it's an adjustment. It's taking some getting used to.

SCOTT

Of course. Let me know if you ever want to hit up the links. I'm a member over at -

PARKER

Yeah, I used to golf so much for work. Sort of - taking a break. From that.

SCOTT

I get it. Just. If you ever get too bored doing nothing.

PARKER

Sure.

Thanks. It's a really nice offer.

SCOTT

You bet.

(Beat. Then, to Angela)

And you want to hire Judith?

ANGELA

I do! I think it would be a great opportunity for her. And I was so impressed by her work in this Womens' group we do. She has a real knack for people.

SCOTT

I've always thought that. That's nice to hear.

Judith extends a hand to Angela.

JUDITH

Thank you.

The two women clasp hands.

ANGELA

No, it's been. Just an absolute gift reconnecting with you.

JUDITH

Same.

Angela and Judith sit comfortably for a moment in the glow of mutual appreciation.

Scott shifts in his chair.

SCOTT

You know, I asked Judith this, but the answer was a little hazy. What is it that you...do. In this Womens' group. Is that alright to ask?

ANGELA

Of course, but - how do you mean?

SCOTT

I understand how charities work. Or something like. A book club. But my understanding is - that's not what this is.

ANGELA

Not exactly. Although I would consider some of our work charitable.

SCOTT

Oh? That's great. How so?

JUDITH

Scott -

SCOTT

(to Parker)

Do you know?

PARKER

In a general sense.

ANGELA

It's women helping women. We source opportunities. We strategize on how best to achieve goals. We pool resources.

SCOTT

That's what I'm curious about - there's a monetary aspect as well.
Or am I making that up?

PARKER

No. They donate to...actually, what is it you donate to, hun? I'm so sorry, I've never bothered to ask.

ANGELA

(to Judith)

Well, look at this. Suddenly, they're interested.

PARKER

(sotto voce)

I don't know if that's fair -

ANGELA
So you play golf, Scott?

SCOTT
I do.

ANGELA
How many business deals would you say you've made on a golf course?

SCOTT
I couldn't say exactly, but -

ANGELA
How many beneficial connections - both professional and personal - would you say have come from grabbing a drink at the club after playing the back nine? What is it that you all do when you go into that room? You know the one! It's always hazy with smoke and has the top-shelf booze? The room women were officially barred from until recently and are discouraged from entering even now?

(to Judith)
Do you know what they do?

Judith shakes her head.

ANGELA
I don't either. There have been protected spaces for men to master the universe since the universe began. The same privacy tends not to be extended to women. So with The Circles, we're just demanding some of the courtesies that are given very freely to you all.

Angela beams. Scott clears his throat.

SCOTT
I like the way that all sounds. Very...entrepreneurial. Which I have the utmost respect for.

ANGELA
Thank you.

SCOTT
But...but! I still don't understand what you collect the money for. It seems a little vague to me!

ANGELA
(to Judith)
Would you say what we do is vague?

JUDITH

No. It doesn't feel vague to me.

SCOTT

Really? Then what's the money for, Judy? Not trying to stir up trouble! Just asking.

ANGELA

I didn't know anyone called you Judy!

JUDITH

Just Scott.

(Beat)

I can only speak for myself, but the Dignity Circles have - for me - taught me what that is. Dignity. That saying what I want has value. That saying what I need has value. That learning from others, so that I can eventually get what I want. And need. On my own. Has so much value. Then I can hold my head up and be. I don't know. Dignified.

Pause.

ANGELA

That's. Perfect. I'm so happy to hear all that.

(to Scott)

So that's what we do.

SCOTT

Hmm. I see.

Pause.

PARKER

This has been really nice. But we should be...

ANGELA

Oh. Yes. We should.

Angela and Parker put down their glasses and stand, searching for their jackets.

SCOTT

(to Angela)

You've really done a number on her. Haven't you?

ANGELA

What?

SCOTT

No. I just mean. She's really changed.

ANGELA

I know. She's so much lighter. Freer.

(to Judy)

You're radiant, Judy. Good night.

JUDITH

Thank you for coming.

SCOTT

G'night.

Judith, Angela, and Parker each hug and kiss on the cheek goodnight. Scott shakes Parker's hand and grants Angela a little wave.

Angela and Parker exit Judith and Scott's house.

A pause. Judith watches Scott warily.

SCOTT

That was a lovely evening. I liked them. A lot.

JUDITH

Really?

SCOTT

Really.

JUDITH

I so wanted you to. Like them.

SCOTT

I could see why you'd want to work for her.

JUDITH

So...you'd be open to that?

SCOTT

You have to put those people-skills to good use. To help others.

Judith smiles. She puts her hand on his arm. He draws her in for an embrace.

SCOTT

Honestly, it's been just you and me for so long that I -

JUDITH

No, I absolutely get it. I have a hard time letting other people in, too.

SCOTT

I don't know that I understand all of this - Dignity stuff - but if it's what you want -

Judith nods.

JUDITH

It's what I want. It's so nice to have. Something that's. Just. Mine.

SCOTT

Just yours?

JUDITH

You know. Something I did. Alone. That can be just for me.

SCOTT

But you're not alone.

*

He backhands her. We hear his hand make contact with her cheek bone - a loud crack.

SCOTT

Why would you say that? Do you know how hurtful that is?
I didn't think you were stupid, Judy.
Don't be stupid.

*

*

*

*

We're in Angela's living room.

Angela enters in sleep attire, with a journal and a pen. She is working on one of her Crowning Ceremony speeches.

Muttering to herself, she pauses and crosses something out. She goes to sit on the edge of the stage. She begins to read aloud, trying the new speech out in her mouth.

ANGELA

I want to talk to you today about
Danger.

(to herself)

No, not quite yet. Build to that.

She crosses a phrase out and starts again.

ANGELA

I want to talk to you today about
Control.
How many of you feel any sort of control in your lives?

She looks out at us, surveying the crowd.

ANGELA

It's hard. Let's be honest.
It's
Awful
Out
There.
And we can do so little about it all.
But here. In rooms like these. We have control.

The doorbell rings. Angela doesn't break her train of thought.

ANGELA

Women in control.
Uh-oh. Watch out. People don't tend to like that.

The doorbell rings again. Not taking her eyes off her notebook, Angela walks off to answer it.

ANGELA (O.S.)

Sweetheart! Come in, come in, give me one second, I'm just in the middle of a -

Angela re-appears, nose still in her notebook, with Judith trailing behind.

ANGELA

People don't tend to like
women in control.
But when we are?
We - individually and as a collective -
Contain the best kind of danger.

Angela makes a note. Judith steps fully into the light. The bruise on her cheek has bloomed.
Angela sees it immediately.

ANGELA

Oh. Oh no.
What happened? Are you alright?

JUDITH

It's just a - it's just a little.
I'm alright.
He never means to.
He never means to leave a mark.

Angela moves swiftly towards Judith and envelopes her in a hug. The women stand in their embrace for some time.

JUDITH

I interrupted you. I'm sorry -

ANGELA

You never have to say that to me. Sit.

Angela hurries out, returning with an ice pack moments later.

Judith gently places the pack to her cheek.
Angela sits.

ANGELA

How long?

Judith shrugs.

JUDITH

It's always been a part of....But not. You know. Consistent.

ANGELA

And you've stayed.

JUDITH

There's never been an alternative.

Beat.

ANGELA

My mother. She -

I remember being very excited - thrilled - about a test I got an "A" on.

And I ran through the door and I threw my arms around her neck and she took her hand and she put it palm flat on my small chest and pushed me back and I fell a little and I don't think she meant to do that but she fixed me with this doorstop deadbolt look and said into the plastic receiver of the phone to a neighbor Diane probably:

"Jesus. You give your fucking life to these kids. And they won't even let you have a simple phone conversation."

JUDITH

I thought she was. You always speak so highly of her.

ANGELA

She was magical. But only when she wanted to be. And she never said *anything* if I did well or if I did good or even if I looked nice.

JUDITH

You lie about her then. In your speeches.

ANGELA

I just use the parts that serve me.
So I know a little. Just a little about what it can be like to love an untouchable person.
Who can be cruel.
But now I'm "Angela After Her Mother."

JUDITH

It doesn't hurt anymore?

ANGELA

It doesn't rule my life anymore. I'm not seeking approval I'm never going to get.
Everything I have in my life is entirely mine. I worked for it all. Everything that brought
me here to this moment talking to you is because of decisions I made. I have complete
ownership over my own person.
How does that sound? To you?

JUDITH

Perfect. Impossible to achieve.

ANGELA

Why do you say that? Maybe - maybe - the Judith I first met couldn't imagine thinking
for herself. But not this woman. Not the Judith I see in front of me.

JUDITH

(gesturing to her bruise)

What are you talking about? Look at me.

ANGELA

No. That's not you. That's something that happened to you.
If I'm "Angela After Her Mother,"
You can have your "After" too.

JUDITH

Scott's not going anywhere.

ANGELA

But you could. You're about to make Queen. Forty thousand dollars right in your bank
account. All yours. He's not attached to it at all. Think about what you could do with that.
Who you could be.

JUDITH

It's not enough for a new life. At least - it's not sustainable.

ANGELA

It's enough for an escape. And you could always continue to recruit in new circles. You could have forty thousand dollars coming in every few months.

A shadow of hope flits across Judith's face.

JUDITH

You think that could work?

ANGELA

I do. You'll have your Devotions and I'll give you some work.

JUDITH

You'd still hire me?

ANGELA

Sweetheart. Of course. You're so close.

JUDITH

To becoming like you.

ANGELA

No. To a new life.

JUDITH

I could leave him. For good.

ANGELA

Do you want to?

Judith nods.

ANGELA

You could have anything you want. So. What do you want?

JUDITH

I...um. I've never truly felt. Easy anywhere. Ever since - as long as I can remember. I've never walked in or been sitting in a room and thought, "I belong here."

Suddenly, it's as if Judith is in the middle of an *
Empowerment Session, speaking honestly about *
what it is she wants. *

Angela hands Judith the mask of The Queen and *
 she holds it carefully, reverently. *

JUDITH

I chose to marry someone. Or...I don't even know if that's right. I don't know how much
 choice had to do with it. I have been and am with a person who has not been easy for me.
 He told me he would never hurt me. But he did not encourage success. Or abundance. *
 And I ended up believing I couldn't stand without his support.
 But I can.

And we're back in a conference room in a very
 nice hotel. *

JUDITH

Look.
 I know it sounds silly.
 That a chance encounter in a supermarket
 Could change my life so completely.
 But there is nothing silly about it. *

Angela hands Judith a glass of champagne and *
the two toast. Angela sweeps out, leaving Judith *
to her reverie. *

JUDITH

And I know that now because of all of you. *

Judith is somewhere where she's happiest - it's *
the safety of Angela's living room, it's the fizzy *
celebration in a conference room in a very nice
hotel, it's the color and joy of the bakery aisle at *
Sprouts. *

JUDITH

Because you took the time to ask me what *I* want.
More than that, you were attentive to the answer.
More than that, you were willing to help.
Because of you, suddenly I belong. *

JUDITH

I'm in the center of the room
Standing on my own
On the dais in front of you all.
I can feel the roots of my hair
The ends of my fingernails.
I like the sound of my own laugh.
I don't remember ever thinking that before.
I am free of all pain.
My legs are strong.
My arms are strong.
My lips are red and my voice is clear.
AND I AM NOT TO BE FUCKED WITH ANYMORE.
Because I am a woman at ease.

THE QUEEN

Judith puts on her Mask. She is flooded with light. The stage is flooded with light.

Judith does a small spin, feeling her fingertips and the roots of her hair; truly enjoying the feeling of being in a body that is so EMPOWERED. *

Suddenly, Heather is at the foot of the dais, her face naked of a Devotion mask. *

Judith? HEATHER *

Judith continues to be lost in thought. *

Judith?? HEATHER *

Judith snaps out of it. *

Sorry - what? JUDITH *

Judith snaps her attention down as she lifts The *
Queen mask up. *

HEATHER
I need to talk to you.

JUDITH
Now?

HEATHER
Now. *

JUDITH
Did you enjoy The Crowning Ceremony?

HEATHER
Oh. Well. Congratulations. *

JUDITH

You'll be up there soon. The feeling is just -

HEATHER

I won't be though.

JUDITH

Don't say that.

HEATHER

Why did you ask me to join?

JUDITH

I saw that you - I saw that you were like me. But we've both changed.

HEATHER

You have.

Judith smiles.

JUDITH

What did you want to tell me?

HEATHER

(gathering herself)

This is not - I'm not coming back. I'm not going to participate in this anymore.

Pause as Judith processes this.

JUDITH

What is it that's upsetting you?

HEATHER

No I'm not upset. I just. I won't be coming back.

JUDITH

Why?

Judith comes closer to Heather, hands
outstretched, and takes Heather's hands in hers.
Heather is distinctly uncomfortable. *

JUDITH

Whatever it is we can fix it. Why do you want to leave?

Heather doesn't answer.

JUDITH

You've seemed.... Well. If I'm honest you've seemed discontent this whole time.

HEATHER

I think I have been.

JUDITH

You've never really bought in, have you? But if I - or if we - can do something to reassure you -

HEATHER

There's nothing you can do.

JUDITH

I don't like that. That I can't change your mind. That you won't be part of this community anymore. It makes me sad that you're not yet ready to accept abundance into your life.

Heather draws her hands out of Judith's.

HEATHER

I'm not trying to hurt you. But. I want out.

A beat as Judith eyes Heather suspiciously.
Judith makes towards the exit.

JUDITH

I need to talk to Angela.

HEATHER

Judith, I'm so sorry. But you should get out too.

Judith spins on her heel and stares at Heather,
furious but also suddenly unsure.

HEATHER

My mom. I had recruited my mom and look. My mom brought my attention to the fact that this.

(carefully)

I don't think this can be legal. Any of it.

JUDITH

Your mother was at the last Empowerment Session?

HEATHER

She Devoted to me, but. Then we talked about -

JUDITH

So your mother wasn't here today? She didn't see all this? She hasn't really participated, given it a chance, has he? She couldn't possibly know what she's talking about.

HEATHER

She and I talked about the...structure of the Circle and. She pointed out it's a huge amount of money changing hands.

JUDITH

They're gifts. It's not illegal to give gifts. If that were true, then baby showers would be illegal.

HEATHER

But you don't recruit for baby showers. You don't invite guests to a baby shower by asking them for money. You don't promise guests that they'll get more money back after the shower.

JUDITH

I don't understand.

HEATHER

And you - . Ultimately, you have to keep recruiting people for the Circle to work.

JUDITH

Sacramento is a big place!

HEATHER

No. It's not. Not if you're only recruiting women. Not if you're only recruiting women who can part with five thousand dollars.

JUDITH

Five thousand dollars is not that much when you consider how much money you can make -

HEATHER

Five thousand dollars is *everything*. Five thousand dollars is *several* months of savings. It's scrimping every day so I can put something away. Pulling that money from my bank account leaves it empty. It's everything. Is it different for you?

JUDITH

No. Scott puts -

HEATHER

And I cannot believe that I just -
I got wrapped up in the. Pageantry of it all. So it took me a minute to see past all -
(gesturing to the remains of the party
around her)

This. But. My mom really clarified it for me. Soon - you'll run out of women. Think
about how many women are already involved.

JUDITH

Sure, but -

HEATHER

And it'll all fall apart. And only a few people will make money. And the rest will lose.

JUDITH

Wouldn't the authorities have stopped this already? If it were illegal?

HEATHER

We don't know each other's last names. I don't know if anyone even uses their actual
name.

JUDITH

You knew me. Before this.

HEATHER

Right. But I don't know anyone else. There's no real paper trail. The police wouldn't
know to look on Venmo unless someone tipped them off.

Beat.

JUDITH

Is that something you intend on doing?

Heather doesn't answer.

JUDITH

What would that even look like?

HEATHER

I'm assuming. I don't know. But I'm assuming while the police look into it, they would
freeze everyone's bank accounts.

JUDITH

You won't get the money. For your daughter.

HEATHER

At this point, that's for the best.

JUDITH

And I won't get my money. If you leave now, it'll all fall apart. If you go to the police, it would -

Why would you do this to us?

HEATHER

I don't want to do anything to you. I didn't really want to be involved in - you got me in to this.

JUDITH

I gave you an opportunity.

HEATHER

You made me an accomplice.

JUDITH

No.

HEATHER

Judith look at the facts.

JUDITH

No.

HEATHER

There's no way everyone can make the money promised to them. It's mathematically impossible. And. Were you planning on paying taxes on any of the money you receive as Queen?

JUDITH

I was going to talk to Angela about - NO. You don't pay taxes on gifts.

HEATHER

They're not gifts. It's a way for a very few people to make a lot of money. You're being conned.

JUDITH

No.

NO.

NO!

I think. The Circles help people. I needed help. And I got it. Now I can be safe. Now I can thrive. I can be powerful. These wants have taken years to even articulate! You don't get to take my words away from me! You don't get to take my power away from me!

HEATHER

I don't want to do that. I'm not trying to do that.

JUDITH

YOU DON'T GET TO TAKE IT AWAY. The Circles help people.

Judith gives Heather a little shove.

JUDITH

They HELP.

Another shove.

JUDITH

And I don't know why you can't see that!

Another shove, this one more forceful. Heather stumbles backwards, falling down.

Judith snatches her hands back, suddenly aware of what she's done. She crouches down to check in on Heather, but Heather shifts back fearfully, keeping space in between them.

JUDITH

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. Are you alright?

Heather stays down, avoiding Judith's gaze.

JUDITH

I would never hurt another -
I'm so sorry.
That was stupid. I'm stupid. That was a stupid thing to do.
No no no no no no no.
I'm sorry.

Judith slaps herself across the face hard.

JUDITH

Stupid. So stupid.

She slaps herself again.

JUDITH

Never do anything right. Idiot. Worthless.

Slap slap slap.

HEATHER

Hey. Stop it.

JUDITH

If you're right then he was right he was right he was right.

SLAP SLAP SLAP.

HEATHER

Stop it. RIGHT NOW.

As Judith continues to berate and abuse herself, Heather grabs Judith's arms and pins them to Judith's sides. The two women end somewhere between a restrictive hold and an embrace. Heather doesn't let go, waiting for Judith to stop resisting, for her breathing to slow.

After a bit, Judith looks up at Heather, almost with hope.

JUDITH

Angela wouldn't do anything bad. To me. You have to be wrong.

Heather gently brushes the hair out of Judith's face, wipes away sweat, or tears, or both.

HEATHER

I'm so sorry. I don't think I am.

I'm going to go to the police.

You'll get found out one way or the other. If it's not me, it'll be someone else. And I can't go to prison. I can't leave my daughter like that. You understand?

Heather uses a hand to gently tip up Judith's face, so she can look her right in the eye.

HEATHER

I think you should know everything. So you can make your own decisions. I think you deserve that.

Heather gently releases Judith and exits.

Judith stays kneeling on the floor. She removes The Queen mask from where it's been resting atop her head and stares at it.

Angela enters, arms outstretched for an embrace, thrilled to see Judith.

ANGELA

All hail the Queen!

Angela stops in her tracks when she sees Judith on the floor, staring at her Mask.

JUDITH

Is it true?

ANGELA

What?

JUDITH

Is what we're doing. With the Circles? Is it bad?

ANGELA

You know it's not.

JUDITH

Is it illegal?

Angela doesn't answer.

JUDITH

Heather says it's illegal.

ANGELA

Heather doesn't understand. Heather has never understood what we're doing here.

JUDITH

Heather says that eventually we'll run out of women. That we won't be able to pay everyone out. Heather says that it's tax evasion. Heather says that it's a con. Is what Heather says true?

Is it illegal?

ANGELA

(quietly)

Oh Judy.

Long pause.

JUDITH

Oh. Oh.

Did you know that when we started?

Did you know that when you asked me to join?

Angela hesitates.

JUDITH

Did you?

ANGELA

I wanted. I just wanted to share with you every possible opportunity -

JUDITH

Have you been expecting this? For this to all blow up?

ANGELA

No.

It's - it's never been an issue before. No one's ever. Complained.

JUDITH

What's going to happen?

ANGELA

Sweetheart, nothing. Well.

I don't know.

JUDITH

How do you not know?

ANGELA

What did Heather say?

JUDITH

She's going to go to the police.

ANGELA

I see.

JUDITH

How much trouble are we in?

ANGELA

None. Not that much.

JUDITH

What does that mean?

ANGELA

It's just gifts!
We'll explain. And I'm sure we'll work it all out.

JUDITH

Explain to who?

ANGELA

Police, we'll get a lawyer -

JUDITH

I don't believe you.
You have no idea what will happen.
You don't need the money.

ANGELA

No.

JUDITH

So. Why?

ANGELA

We're never - as adults - as adult women especially! We're never rewarded.

JUDITH

Please stop.

ANGELA

I believe this. I wanted a place where women - like you, who have not been told they are remarkable, to be rewarded when they got to the top of the Circle -

JUDITH

Circles don't have tops.

ANGELA

-where women like you could get lauded for who you are as a person. Where you could get told you are remarkable because you are.
We are remarkable. You are remarkable.

*

JUDITH
 Stop selling, Angela. Stop. *

ANGELA
 Look at me. We can fix this.

JUDITH
 I don't have any money. I emptied my bank account to Devote initially. I don't have -

ANGELA
 You can't go back to Scott. *

JUDITH
 Why? Because he hurts me? *

ANGELA
 Look at you. You can stand tall and get what you want. You can get what you deserve.
 I'm so proud of you. I did this for people like you.

JUDITH
 You twist everything.

ANGELA
 I'm pointing out -

JUDITH
 I'm ruined. I don't have any money. I don't have a home.

ANGELA
 You can stay with Parker and I.

JUDITH
 You're a liar. You've lied to me from the beginning.

ANGELA
 It's not lying. It's - not looking at everything at the same time. Narrowing your vision.
 Just a little. When you need to.

JUDITH

Do you really get lemons off your tree in November? And is the blueberry crumble at Sprouts really your favorite?
Are you my friend?

ANGELA

Of course I am. How could you doubt that?

JUDITH

How many Judiths were there before me?

ANGELA

None!

JUDITH

I don't believe you.

ANGELA

There were other recruits but you have to understand -

JUDITH

What? What do I have to understand? Why did you pick me?

ANGELA

Because you needed me.

Judy - I mean this - I haven't felt a connection like this in years!

JUDITH

Since your mother?

What exactly about your mother is true?

ANGELA

Everything I said about my mother is true.

JUDITH

I wonder -

ANGELA

Talking about her won't solve anything for you.

JUDITH

I wonder. If she knew. If your mother could sense. That you couldn't be trusted. Even when you were little. Maybe that's why she avoided you. She knew that you could be poison.

ANGELA

Judy!

JUDITH

Maybe she was afraid of you, too.

ANGELA

She wasn't. She was just -
I'm not bad. I helped! You needed me. They all needed me.
I care about women!

*
*

ANGELA

And the poor and children! And animals and I don't know - leaving the world better than you found it! I'm good! I'm a good person!

JUDITH

Good people give, Angela. That's not what you do.

*

ANGELA

Judy. Don't leave. You'll be alone.
I'll be alone.

JUDITH

Oh Angela.

*

Judith leaves.

*

We're back in Judith's living room. Scott's there, as if he's been waiting for Judith.

Judith enters, the weight of the night clear on her face, in the set of her shoulders.

The couple take each other in.

SCOTT

What happened to you?

JUDITH

You were right. About Angela.

SCOTT

I see.

JUDITH

It's...I think it's going to get bad. For me. For both of us.

Scott nods.

JUDITH

What are you going to do?

SCOTT

I'll take care of you.

JUDITH

You will?

SCOTT

I've always taken care of you.

JUDITH

If that's what you want to call it.

SCOTT

I love you. Know that?

JUDITH

I know that.

SCOTT

Do you love me?

JUDITH

I'm here. Aren't I?

Parker stands in the Bakery Aisle in Sprouts. He has a boxed blueberry crumble in his hands. He stares at it vacantly.

Judith enters, a shopping bag over her arm and watches him. It takes Parker a few moments to realize she's standing there.

Judith. PARKER

Hello. JUDITH

Pause.

PARKER
(referencing the dessert in his hand)
Dinner party tonight. Need to ingratiate myself to a new boss.

Oh. JUDITH

PARKER
And he's - the new boss - he's a lot. And I've never met the wife and honestly, it's a miracle I was able to find any position in this market so I don't want to. I wanted to make a positive impression. With the dessert. And you know that moment when you're so overwhelmed by choice that nothing seems - I don't know. Nothing seems right.

I do. JUDITH

PARKER
Anyway. Not your problem.
Are you well?
You look well.

I'm alright. It's all been - JUDITH

She does something with her hands to indicate a brokenness.

JUDITH

But we're paying off the fines. I still jump whenever the phone rings but. I'm alright. Are you?

PARKER

I miss my life.
I miss my very nice life.

Pause.

JUDITH

How is she?

PARKER

Oh. She's - .
Clearly, the trial didn't go the way she wanted it to, but. She's making the best of it. I visit her. When I can.

Pause. Judith smiles in goodbye, and goes to exit.

PARKER

Judith?

She stops.

PARKER

I - there's so much I didn't know. About what was going on. About her. But. I do truly think she regrets that your life might be worse for knowing her.

Judith considers, then nods.

JUDITH

Don't get the crumble. Get a chocolate cake. Everybody loves a chocolate cake. And don't worry too much about the dinner. You got this.

Parker smiles gratefully. Judith exits.

Angela enters. She stands, surveying us for a few long moments.

She is plainly dressed, no make up, no blow out, but she glows. This woman is in her element, and she knows it.

ANGELA

I have a question for you -

What would you do if you were standing where I am now?

I owe five hundred thousand dollars. In fines. In lawyers' fees. For settlements in civil lawsuits brought against me.

I'm doing time for "operating an endless chain in the state of California."

Things with my husband are. Rocky. At best.

So.

What would you do?

I'll wait. I have nothing but time.

Would you try to win back the favor of everyone who says you've done them wrong?

Or. Would you respect their wishes? Say goodbye. Fade away.

It's uncomfortable, isn't it?

Facing consequences.

It doesn't feel particularly. American.

My lawyer asked me what I'm going to spend my time doing in prison (in retrospect, she may not be a particularly good lawyer) and do you know what I said?

"Go to work."

Let me tell you a story about my mother.

When I was little. I'd pretend to fall asleep in the car so she'd be forced to carry me inside when we got home. That way, she'd have to touch me. She'd have to hold me.

I put in a little work. And I got what I wanted.

So I'm going to work.

I'm not going to spend the time watching the dead skin cells and dust motes floating in the sunlight.

I'm not going to repent. For what? Helping?

I've only ever tried to help

I've only ever tried to make other people's lives better.

And if

Someone

If someone maybe didn't benefit from my efforts.

If they are desperate or in danger or even just less happy

Then -

All I can do, all I can do

Is work harder to make sure that will never happen again.

I'm going to use this time to reflect on how fragile we all are, as individuals and as communities.

How easily a fortified group can come undone but, with will-power, be built again to do good.

It's what we women always do - we survive.
If we find ourselves forced to submit to a system that does not consider
our intent we, nonetheless
Survive.
And I am so lucky to currently be surrounded
By
So many
women.
All of whom with needs and wants
That I can provide.
Better than that -
That we can provide each other.
So.
What is it you want?
You can tell me.
What am I going to do - hurt you?

Angela throws her head back, shoulders down.
There's dignity in her stance.

ANGELA

What do you want?

LIGHTS OUT.

*