

I'D LIKE TO APOLOGIZE

Written by
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Address
Phone Number

TEASER

INT. CHATEAU BEDROOM - NIGHT (FLASH-FORWARD)

AVERY HAINES, (33), brittle and blonde, straddles the feet of a headless corpse (designer suit) on a lux four-poster.

She glances up at a mirrored ceiling.

CEILING POV: Avery's eyes tear.

EXT. CHATEAU FRONT - MINUTES LATER

Avery looms in a second-floor window of a new-construction CHATEAU, elbows propped on a designer suitcase.

EXT. CHATEAU DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

An immaculate, boxwood-fenced drive bleeds into...

EXT. HIGHWAY - AT THE SAME TIME

A frantic highway crammed between billboards, strip malls.

INT. CHATEAU HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Spotless white sneakers schlep the suitcase past a glass block hall. They halt at a bifurcated marble staircase.

INT. CHATEAU BASEMENT HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Avery (in white sneakers) DROPS the suitcase and squints ahead at a Man Ray's *Tears* on a far marble column.

AVERY

Not even a fucking lithograph!

Her red nail divot what, on inspection, is a cheap canvas. Beat. She steps back, yanks the suitcase around the column to...

INT. CHATEAU BASEMENT LOUNGE - MINUTES LATER

A gaudy, 80s lounge. She heads for a frosted side-door. TAP.

AVERY

Val?

Her hand freezes on the door handle.

INT. CHATEAU BASEMENT HALLWAY - AT THE SAME TIME

Tightly wound prep VALLERY "VAL" OKOJIE ,(33), Black, faces the column, eyes shut. Her shaky hands swing a tote monogramed JSW III.

AVERY (O.S.)

Coming?

Val shakes her head. Beat. She rounds the column...

INT. CHATEAU BASEMENT LOUNGE BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Avery (in latex gloves), kneels by the toilet in a silver bathroom. She opens the suitcase on bloody silk scarf bundles.

VAL (O.S)

Was it uhm...was it Alan Dershowitz
who said don't trauma dump where
you defecate?

AVERY

God, I know. I was kicking myself
for not going acid bath. Then I
figured. That British psycho, Denis
Nilson? He pulled the flush trick,
something like 15 times!

Val shuffles in. Cautiously, she approaches the door as Avery unknots a bundle over the toilet. Organs PLOP in the water.

AVERY (CONT'D)

(ducking backsplash)

Wanna try?

VAL

I mean...you're almost done.

Avery hovers her hand on the flusher, shrugs at Val.

VAL (CONT'D)

Should we at least say something?
Would a eulogy be too...much?

AVERY
We didn't kill him! And it's
performative...

A shadow flits past Avery. Val turns to the light source.

Val's POV: The moon glows in a hopper window behind her head.

VAL
I just...I guess I feel like
morally we can't throw him away
without-

AVERY
Can't doesn't imply shouldn't. But
go ahead. Give us the last words,
whatever you want.

VAL
Okay...I can pull up a quick
prayer. Wasn't he Lutheran? Or,
wait, did his mom drag him into LDS
at one point?

She slips a cellphone, folder from the tote to buy time.
Avery stretches a hand. Val passes her the folder.

AVERY
Uh-uh, LSD. Remember, they did that
habitat for Heaven's Gate scam in
Del Mar?

She parses the folder's paper contents. Val texts on the
cellphone with shaky fingers out of Avery's sight.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Where's the death certificate.

VAL
It's whatever, wherever...it's in
there. Like I wouldn't...I should
say, didn't, take anything out to-

AVERY
Come on! You're an artist.
Basically, a paid BS-er.

VAL
Ave. Why? Why would lie to you at
this point?

She paces. Avery rams papers down the toilet. Beat.

AVERY

Did you know that apparently water-logged paper ranks on OSHA's top alt-fertilizer list? When you think about it, we're God damn activists, Vallery!

An artificial red light fills the hopper. FLUSH.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Go ahead, read a psalm. There's one about a clean heart? It's apropos.

VAL

Well, I mean, I wouldn't be praying for both of us.

AVERY

Right. Exactly, it's your guilt process.

(crawls to SLAM the suitcase)

I swallow painkillers.

A boot appears in the hopper. Avery notices. Val quickly snatches the tote and backs to the wall. Avery SNORTS.

AVERY (CONT'D)

That's it, huh? Free will's a fucking, libertarian sham?

VAL

What are you...no, you know what I don't understand?

AVERY

How would I know what you don't-

VAL

You're really claiming you didn't have other options than to be here right now?

AVERY

There were options. I didn't get to choose among them.

Val grips the tote to her chest in frustration.

VAL
 Look, I think I get the
 motivation...being able to write
 off our perceivable culpability as
 some kind of intrinsic,
 psychological defect. You're so
 messed up-

AVERY
 Why "our". You don't have to
 appease me.

VAL
 (To herself)
 I was just, uh...you know, I was
 just doing what was expected. One
 last time. I lied for us.

AVERY	VAL (CONT'D)
For me? Or to me?	I said for us!

POLICE RADIO VOICES grumble in the B.G. BOOM. Avery, Val duck
 glass shards as the boot plummets through the hopper window.
 A siren WHINES. Val curls her whole body around the tote.

POLICE OFFICER (O.S.)
 (through the hopper)
 Police! Don't move!

Avery looms over Val, hand extended. Val ignores her.

VAL
 Ave, please...I'm not playing-

AVERY
 This is my concession speech. I'm
 taking one for all three of us.

VAL
 Then can you say something
 meaningful?

AVERY
 Fuck me!

VAL
 Is that meaningful to you?

Avery shrugs and faces the window, hands raised.

AVERY
 No. But it's honest.

END TEASER

ACT I

INT. PRINCETON COMP LIT DEPARTMENT - DAY (PRESENT)

An oak door in a row marked 66, a post-it with a third 6 tacked on. Red nails dangle a key to the lock.

SUPER: SEPTEMBER, 2021

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

An ivory tower office. Avery unlocks a filing cabinet under a cluttered desk. Her hands fish around.

AVERY

Damn it!

She sucks a cut on her thumb. KNOCK. She grabs a vial of CBD oil from the drawer, sniffs. KNOCK. She locks the drawer.

AVERY (CONT'D)

It's open!

Enter DR. BILL THORMAN, (50s), donnish silver fox. He brushes past Avery to melt in a side wingback.

BILL

I read the manifesto. I promise.

AVERY

And what's our grant season strategy?

BILL

Well, that's why I wanted to...

She scoots on the side table, squeezes his arm. He folds.

BILL (CONT'D)

Cynthia said she needs me on the ethics committee.

AVERY

Do you have cancer, too?

Beat.

BILL

Ave, look at me, I'm not well...I'm not mentally all together.

AVERY

So fuck Cynthia! She's emasculating you out of the paper race. With her numerals are erotic symbols of the feminine psyche? From '96? As if we don't know what V stands for!

Bill plays with her dangling white sneaker.

AVERY (CONT'D)

She's shredding our papers in her non-denominational winter baskets.

BILL

Wouldn't that constitute harassment? Title VII also applies to dep heads...

AVERY

You're thinking of Title IX. No one gives a, you know, about Title VII!

BILL

All right, on my honor, I won't tell where you burry the body.

He drops a weary head in her lap. She smoothes his cowlick.

AVERY

I'm not touching her. As long as she backs my submissions. With an endorsement. From a senior associate professor?

BILL

(Taking the hint)
Do you have an outline yet?

AVERY

Nope. Cutting a 2-pager from my Wittgenstein series. Demonstrative emptiness of radical judgements in our fraught political landscape. There you go. That sounds buzzy.

He lifts his head, suddenly annoyed. She nuzzles his neck.

BILL

What does that even mean?

AVERY

Dunno. But say the abstract fools one or two tenure whores. Who's checking what's underneath, right?

BILL
I'm not an aesthetics authority.

AVERY
No, you're a coward! Tell me what
you really think.

BILL
Fine...in my humble opinion? You're
committing grant fraud.

AVERY
Oh! That is so ri-

Bill stands on wobbly legs. Avery reaches for him but he
sidesteps to the doorway. She hangs her head.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Self-editing still takes effort!
Ask Cynthia when you lick her
orthopedic boots.

BILL
Sorry, Ave. Look, I've gotta pick
up Nicole from chemo in Philly.

He steps into the hall and turns his back.

AVERY
Can't she get one removed? You
don't need two ovaries.

No response. Bill slinks off. Beat. Avery glances up at the
now empty doorway.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

Avery meditates in the wingback. She startles at VOICES.

BILL (O.S.)
My wife's dying and she's
pressuring me to read her drafts
like I'm a, forgive me, a God damn
TA!

CYNTHIA (O.S.)
Please, Bill, we all know.

Avery punches the seat back. The cut on her hand breaks open.

INT. AVERY'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Avery lays on the futon in a grungy bachelor bedroom. Her red nails shred over-due mail addressed to RICK HAINES JR.

INT. AVERY'S BATHROOM - MIDNIGHT

Avery bathes in an orange shag bathroom. In her hands is a letter from FIELDSTON WITHERS. She spies a red stain on the faucet handle.

AVERY

Shit!

She drops her letter, now covered with a blood splotch, on the carpet. For a beat, she glares at her open thumb cut under her bath water.

EXT. MOMA MIDTOWN COURT YARD - AFTERNOON

Val paces, eyes glued to a piano score labeled SIMON SAYS. A wind gust blows papers from her Juliard tote to a puddle.

VAL

No, shoot..oh-

A BANKER DUO strolls through the puddle. Val follows.

BANKER I

Wasn't Giuliani passing that anti-street piss bill?

BANKER II

Nah, he's slowly losing it.

They SNICKER and glance back at Val. She despairs over the puddle. On top, a waterlogged letter from FIELDSTON WHITHERS.

Val's POV: Ink bleeds until a single word is legible: HELP.

BANKER II (CONT'D)

It's a fucking Tisch grad performance simulation?

BANKER I

I know! 21st century Dada girl!

INT. GREENWICH VILLAGE, NYC BISTRO - MORNING

Val side-eyes a prefix brunch menu at a back table.

AVERY (O.S.)
 (flirty)
 ...was our graduation spot...excuse
 me. Val? Val! I thought you were
 still on the Cotswold tour!

Val shrinks behind the menu as Avery strides over to smother
 her in a hug. A blasé WAITRESS hovers with a drinks list.

VAL	AVERY (CONT'D)
Avery, hey. My uhm...the	(To waitress)
artist visa was only for six	We'll do two Bloody Marys.
months and-	

VAL (CONT'D)
 (To waitress)
 Oh...actually can I just have plain
 water, if you have tap, that would
 be great? Thank you.

Avery waves the waitress off and seats herself besides Val.

AVERY
 Then. Dun-dun-dun. Tony Blair
 threatened with a plebeian 9 to 5?

VAL
 No, it's...I just wasn't happy with
 the BBC team. So Simon pitched my
 art song concept EP to his friend
 at Warner. And yeah, I've been
 recording a Schubert lieder
 compilation with Kelly since last
 week? Not long...

AVERY
 Wow. Our first queer, kosher saint!

VAL
 No, Simon, uhm...he really came in
 clutch. He even found me a turnkey
 in Tribeca.

Avery nods, a little miffed. She scans the crowd of 20-
 something yuppies.

AVERY
 Recording while off-clock
 networking. That's insane!

VAL
 Oh, believe me, I acknowledge, I
 totally won the job lottery.
 (MORE)

VAL (CONT'D)

I mean, I couldn't imagine, the
daily grind of lectures-

The waitress quietly delivers their drinks. Avery preens.

AVERY

Yep. Grad and undergrad Soviet
formalism seminars. Also, doing a
little ghost editing for Bill. The
goal is to push that poverty line
past post doc this year...

Val sips her water to stall a response. Avery shrugs, laughs.

INT. GREENWICH VILLAGE, NYC BISTRO - LATER

Val, Avery giggle. Avery nurses her third bloody marry.

VAL

Are the donors still trying to buy
that Nassau gym complex?

AVERY

Lucky me. I have no idea!

VAL

Wait, you moved from campus?

AVERY

Uh-huh. Actually, I've been
commuting since Rick started
hospice. He's letting me sublet St.
Marks. Which is great. I can
pretend I'm an East village bright
young thing. But I'm still condo
hunting in Jersey for long
term...and other reasons.

She opens her bag, pulls out her LETTER. Val GULPS, then
reaches into her tote for hers.

VAL

You...too?

AVERY

Me too. That's why I've been
lurking back here. In case she
wants to show her plastic dermal
fillers.

VAL

Oh, she seriously wants to meet? I guess I just didn't have the Prozac or moral support to open mine. It came right when Nathan dumped me and I was juggling that 6-show schedule-

AVERY

(reading)

Sorry...oof. March 15! The fucking
ides!

She drops the letter and aligns her glasses in a row.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Dare I jinx it? Say her name?

VAL

Wouldn't you need a mirror?

AVERY

Look me in the eyes! Pupils are
mirrors.

Val blinks then wearily turns to face Avery.

FADE TO BLACK.

AVERY (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Come out, come out. From whatever
sweatshop diamond rock, echo park
narcissus lake of-

VAL (O.S.)

I think that's your last one.

INT/EXT. NYC CAB - AFTERNOON (TRACKING)

Val, Avery sit opposite, knees banging as their cab jolts over the Manhattan bridge. Avery toys with Val's letter.

VAL

I was planning to read-

She reaches but Avery holds the letter over her head.

AVERY

You weren't...and spoiler. She wants us to buy her drinks at the Century Club. We might as well go to the bar at Windows on the World.

VAL

You mean...that was in world trade?

AVERY

She's not meeting us. Field is a field is always a field.

VAL

I see. Not a rose?

AVERY

Never! Hemingway got it right.
Maybe she's always been a bitch.

The cabbie peers back, adjusts a cross necklace slung on the review mirror. Val cringes.

VAL

Should we have expected her to change?

AVERY

Nobody does! But part of me was idealistic. After the unprenuped divorce? If that's not a fall to the masses...

VAL

She wasn't that removed from us.

AVERY

You. Not me. I'm like the tissue paper in a Gautier Black Label box.

Val shoots her a puzzled look. Avery deadpans.

AVERY (CONT'D)

White trash! I don't pretend I've outgrown the trailer park roots.

She bends her head, reveals brown roots. Val averts her eyes to the meter.

AVERY (CONT'D)

And in any case, her net worth's in the 8s...high range.

VAL

Okay, but did you see the number on her Redneck Rockefeller six degrees page? She made that after two cabo wabo shots.

AVERY

Well, she's been verified. By *Town and Country*! There was a big 'ole centerfold. For her quaint, 8,000 sq ft brownstone? It's got a full bush out front.

VAL

It was probably a favor for some big shot Jack knows...a lot his friends' wives are in...corporate branding?

AVERY

It's called cross-sector media acquisition strategy management.

Val breaks into a laugh.

AVERY (CONT'D)

She's glaring down a Tiffany's glass ceiling. At her kindergartener with rhinoplasty! No PR exec is okaying that. Unless she's doing a CPS campaign now?

She tears Val's letter in half. Val grimaces.

VAL

Here. I should read it.
(grabs the halves, reads)
Is she...? Hold on. Do you think, is this her asking us for help? Or like...money?

AVERY

Building to it.

She reaches to lower Val's letter halves. Val peers out the window. The cab stalls bumper-to-bumper before a FRIENDS SCHOOL.

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - LATER

Val lays on the floor in a high rise living room among moving boxes. One hand types on an iBook. The other traces her taped letter.

VAL

I forgot about the whole dynasty.

AVERY

Mommy Sybil? With sixteen different
restraining orders? Check the
Jamaica Estates small claims!

She aligns music scores on a built-in bookcase.

AVERY (CONT'D)

God! You should look at the back.
She spelled your name "R-I-E" like
the lake!

VAL

Oh, that was our inside joke. I
told her I was born on the Ohio
border, near Lake Erie?

AVERY

I had no idea.

VAL

Right off route 66! When my dad was
at Booth in Chicago-

AVERY

I meant that I didn't know you two
hung out.

Val leans closer to her laptop screen. Avery frowns and
SHOVES a thick record against the wall.

AVERY (CONT'D)

It probably wasn't a deep
reference. She might've even farmed
out the mea culpa to one of the
nannies.

VAL

Oh...woah!

AVERY

I stand by it! What does botox do
to the brain? Is she even literate?
Do we know yet?

VAL

No, here, just...read this.

She turns her laptop screen. On screen: National Enquirer:
MAINLINE EXEC ARRESTED ON FRAUD CHARGES(December 2002).

VAL (CONT'D)

Not surprising, but Jack bilked over 65 million as a legal fixer for some shell company he and his sister bought out...Aesthete Estates?

AVERY

Sounds like ass teat.

VAL

Well, apparently ass teat is a luxury real estate marketing LLC in Bryn Mawr.

Avery squints over Val's shoulder at the screen, reads.

AVERY

He owned Rothko's Black on Blue? Man. He should buy Lichtenstein's Drowning Girl. Hang those two side-by-side.

VAL

Wait...scroll down? I thought it said his trial is set for this summer.

Avery scrolls. On screen: The cursor lingers on a mugshot of a doughy Kennedy-knockoff labeled: James Stuart Withers Jr.

AVERY

He's too pale to prosecute. But now what's the restitution? That's where he'll come up short.

She hands Val the laptop, then wanders to a vintage turntable on a side cabinet. Val scrolls, reads.

VAL

Uhm...so, it looks like he owes 42 of 65, but they also filed for bankruptcy right after he posted 150k bail.

AVERY

150k plus whatever the law degree got him. That's not making a dent. I guess we'll grab Fishtown I-hop and stolen Bud Light with Field!

VAL

That may be a better meal...

AVERY
Because you've been to the Century
Club?

She pulls a record from the shelf and adjusts the turntable
needle. SCRATCH. Val closes her laptop, then cautiously joins
Avery.

VAL
Just once, for Simon's birthday.

Val's POV: The record needle drags a dust tail in a spiral.

A grainy, distorted WALTZ plays. Avery pulls Val in a dance
frame. Val dips her. Avery giggles.

AVERY
That's my job!

EXT. TRIBECA APARTMENT BALCONY - MIDNIGHT

Val prunes plants. Avery lays on a hammock, smokes.

VAL
I think Field is...I feel like
she's being genuine.

AVERY
Or she's baiting your savior
complex.

VAL
And I guess we have no obligation
to respond right away-

AVERY
That's your call. I did my duty.
She ignored my email. Your turn!

She blows rings in the dark.

VAL
Please, not around the children!

She wafts smoke from her plants. Avery stubs her cigarette
and lobs the butt into a neighboring patio. Beat.

VAL (CONT'D)
Have you...thought about Jack
recently?

AVERY
Now that he's a felon?

VAL
Or prior to the last 48 hours?

AVERY
I've thought a lot about us.

VAL
Which set of us?

AVERY
Us from Hells Kitchen!

VAL
Was that really our finest era?

AVERY
You had private lunches with Clive Davis. I was beating my South Beach calorie count and dissertation word count.

Val nods, grabs a mist bottle from a trolley cart, then sprays plant cuttings in plastic bottles.

AVERY (CONT'D)
You propagate the leftovers?
They're defective.

VAL
I'd like to disagree. The meek shall inherit. Martha Stewart says they can grow back as strong as the original parent stalk.

She gently fans out the leaves of a cutting (stem plus three buds).

VAL (CONT'D)
If you give them time...

END ACT I

ACT II

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Avery prods Val on a half-unwrapped sofa with a pillow.

AVERY
Up, up, up!

VAL
Okay, how did you get in? I
will-

AVERY (CONT'D)
Field day. Remember? This weekend's
the alternate, Jack pre-approved
date. We're storming the upper east
side for our reunion.

VAL
Then we should let her know...

AVERY
Do the honors? I've got another
call.

BUZZ. Avery pokes in her bra for her cellphone.

VAL
Is it...Bill?

AVERY
Nope. Rick's wellness concierge.

Val stretches, yawns.

VAL
What...is...that?

AVERY
Hospice therapist. Essentially an
unaccredited emotional support
animal in New Jersey.

BUZZ! Avery purposely ignores the call.

VAL
Are you playing hard to get?

AVERY
He's almost 50! God, he's shoved a
catheter up my dad!

VAL
So he's younger than Bill? That's
perfect, no?

Avery tosses a pillow at her. She tosses it back. Avery
ducks, but willingly takes a hit.

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT GALLEY KITCHEN - MID-MORNING

Avery sprays Sun-In lightener on her roots. Val watches her
over toast and her open laptop.

AVERY
No response yet?

Val checks her cellphone.

VAL
I would give her more than ten
minutes.

AVERY
Plus twenty-four God damn long
months! One drunken night, she
excises us out of her whole life?
She doesn't deserve any more of our
time.

VAL
Well, I am...I guess I'm just not
at the speaking to her stage.

AVERY
You're at the buying her brunch
stage?

VAL
No? And as far as *New York Magazine*
speculates, Jack is the broke one.
Field may not be not financially on
the hook for-

AVERY
That's wrong. Debt splits in a
divorce. Ask Rick about my mother.

VAL
Mmm. Unfortunately, divorce
notwithstanding...

She turns her laptop. On screen: A Vogue article titled
Culture Mavens: The Polydames Redefining the Arts.

AVERY

Aw, you're lucky. You're talented enough to be naive.

VAL

She made it. Is there another interpretation?

AVERY

Editors don't vet the asses they've gotta kiss for cash? That's a core tenet of nepo-publishing!

Val scrolls to an image. Glamorous FIELDSTON "FIELD" WHITHERS,(30s), poses in overalls besides a cracked mirror, covered in female slurs scrawled with pink paint.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Venus in slurs! Wow.

VAL

Yeah, she runs a farm house studio in Villanova, Pennsylvania, co-owned with her devoted husband of eight years.

AVERY

Who's dry humping a basement futon to single aryan female! It's cataracts wide shut.

VAL

Ave...please? my thesis was just that they don't live across from Central Park any longer.

AVERY

For the tax bracket drop!

She pulls tweezers from her pocket and plucks her brows.

VAL

So that's not quite the case, and I checked multiple sources for you. They live in the county with the 12th highest median income in the Mid Atlantic.

AVERY

Oh, too bad, then. We'll have stay in the backwater tenements out here. We're not worthy of her-

VAL AVERY (CONT'D)
Ave, you told me you wanted I was clearly joking!
to do the full roadtrip. I
booked us a overnight in that
new seaport Double Tree in
Philly. It's
non-refundable.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Of course I want to stay. In the
shithole where JFK Jr. busked for
welfare! Are you kidding me?

VAL
No...or yes? I understand
hyperbole.

Avery spins around with a grin.

AVERY
Sure? Top floor Tribeca's no Main
Line, Pennsylvania.

Val SIGHS, shrugs, but smiles back.

INT/EXT. PRIUS, HIGHWAY - LATE AFTERNOON (TRACKING)

Avery inches past suburban strip malls. Val glances out her
passenger's mirror.

Mirror POV: a black Ferrari decapitates a tube-woman outside
a bar. Her blue head floats into the clouds.

INT. AVERY'S HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Avery swivels at a faux-wood desk before an open laptop.

On laptop screen: An image of Bill's family (Nicole, teen
son, dog) captioned: NJ Therapist Talks Euthanasia Journey.

Avery scratches an X over Nicole's face.

INT. VAL'S HOTEL ROOM - AT THE SAME TIME

Val lays on the bed, rereads her letter. Her eyes linger on
an post-it with a PHONE NUMBER on the back (Avery's writing).

INT. FIELD'S HOME OFFICE - NIGHT

The desk phone in a stuffy office BEEPS. The desk chair spins to reveals Jack (older, heavier). He reaches a hand down his pants and scratches.

FEMALE VOICEMAIL (O.S.)
 You've reached the corporate inbox
 for Aesthete Estates Consulting.
 Please leave your name, reason for
 calling, number-

BEEP.

VAL (O.S.)
 Hi? Field? It's uhm...it's Vallery?
 Val? I'm just calling to let you
 know that I...we, Avery's with me.
 We saw that you moved to Main Line,
 and we're actually staying in
 Philly for the week-

BEEP. Jack extends his leg on the desk. His foot shoves the phone aside until it dangles from its chord.

JACK
 Bitch!

INT. VAL'S HOTEL ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Val curls in bed. On the nightstand is her laptop, screen open to an APPOINTMENT SCHEDULE. Beat. She exhales, redials.

VAL
 (Lower voice)
 Hello.

An AIM message from Simon to Val and KELLY pops on screen.

VAL (CONT'D)
 This is Kelly Simon? I wanted
 confirm the 4:30 consultation for
 tomorrow? I thought it would be
 good to get some professional
 guidance before...you know, I'm
 selling my dad's place, all his
 furniture. He's in hospice, so I'm
 just looking for, uhm...support?

She glances out the window, remembers...

INT. BLACK BOX THEATRE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Avery and Val, (20s), grungier, monopolize a black-box theatre first row with backpacks, books, papers, etc.

Super: Spring, 1992.

On stage Field, (20s), squeaks out Habanera. A west-village pianist rattles an upright, shouts critiques in a NYC drawl.

AVERY

Isn't the Ivy arts circuit still,
hush-hush, a meritocracy?

VAL

I mean, we are supposedly the first
participation trophy generation.

GRUMBLES echo behind them. Avery, Val study Field.

AVERY

He's broke. Probably vasectommied
by an ex. She's...perky.

VAL

Are you asking who has more social
capital to fling?

AVERY

White-wash Carmen or CBGB ghoul.
Let's have it.

VAL

Well, she seems more capable than
he is, or will likely be, relevant.

AVERY

That's per the Juilliard scholar?

VAL

Yeah. I guess I turned out to be
less of a consequentialist than I
thought. I listen for blood and
sweat over the luck of a decent
performance.

AVERY

Hard work's the greater moral,
right? Always...

Val picks a raw blister on her fingers.

VAL
I feel like where there's a will
there's a chance for improvement.

AVERY
Only you can give that platitude!
You're above the talent ceiling.

VAL
But that is what I honestly
believe. It's not a platitude.

AVERY
It's also what economists say
foments mass consumer delusion.
Keep shilling for lessons, kids.
You'll do more than bartend one
day!

On stage: Field flips her hair in a bow. Pianist winks back.

EXT. OFF-BROADWAY STAGE - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Val stands under a poster for RASHOMON: THE MUSICAL by TAD
BILK. Field is top billed.

Val tenses at FOOTSTEPS. Suddenly, a nail pierces a hole in
Field's name above her head. Beat. Val flinches.

AVERY (O.S.)
I knew he'd cave!

Avery leans into Val's shoulder. Her free hand swings a
bouquet of wilted roses.

VAL
Stop!

AVERY
We'll blame Jack's other favorite
study buddy.

VAL
But I thought that was-

AVERY
He's dull as hell. We'll have to
make up a new name.

CUT TO BLACK.

VAL (V.O.)
Was it...ever you?

AVERY (V.O.)

God no!

INT. HOMEWOOD SUITES BEDROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Val GROANS. A shadow looms over her.

VAL (O.S.)

Ave? I think you might be misremembering...is misremembering even a word? Tad was with Simon's ex. We met them at that Stonewall documentary in Gramercy-

AVERY (O.S.)

It was a Hockney retrospective. In the Guggenheim.

VAL (O.S.)

Okay. That is what it was.

AVERY (O.S.)

Doesn't have to be. Memories and facts are different things.

INT. HOMEWOOD SUITES BEDROOM - SUNRISE

Avery CLICKS on the bedside lamp. Val blinks, sits up.

AVERY

And misremembering is a stupid word.

VAL

I realize now, I meant to use disremembering. But something about disremembering just sounds less innocuous than the definition, maybe? I don't know...

Avery reaches for a coffee mug on the desk.

AVERY

Oh sure. I would've dismembered Field!

Val cracks a smile. Avery hands her the mug.

INT. BUSINESS CENTER - EARLY MORNING

Val pulls pages from a printer in the back of a busy office/lounge. Avery shuffles in, laptop propped on her palm.

AVERY
Tree killer!

VAL
You dragged me out of Greenpeace.

AVERY
You can join when you've got your Grammy and Boeing 747 to pick you up from your vanity sit-in!

She drops in a swivel chair, props her feet on the main conference table. Other guests SCOFF on their way out.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Should've told me we're stalking.

VAL
I would not consider White Pages stalking.

AVERY
Too bad. Cause I was on a solid tear last night.

The printer HUMS. Val grabs pages as they drop to the tray.

AVERY (CONT'D)
I'll show you the bikini warrior poses of Bill's 27-year old divorce counselor!

VAL
Please, please leave him and his little bald spot, too.

AVERY
Cowlick. By the way. Tell me the protestant cutlets look like evangelical quarter pounders now.

Val scans the room. Few remaining guests avoid eye contact. Val beckons Avery closer, drops her voice.

VAL
That is just...crass.

Avery turns her laptop. On screen: Field on a beach, chest puffed. Besides her, sunburnt Jack in a speedo thong.

VAL (CONT'D)
Are they bigger than Jack's head?

AVERY
Waist up?
(reaching for Val's pages)
Waist down?

Val gives a thumbs down and hands Avery the pages.

VAL
I knew it, the moment I saw it!

AVERY
I think you have me beat.

She grins, flips pages, reads.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Isn't the main cheating penalty
having to fuck off-line?

VAL
I dunno...but I highly doubt Jack
cares about any cheating. I mean,
Field clearly chose not to use an
alias for that Ashley Madison
affair site, gym membership, Boston
loaner Maserati...

Avery triumphantly TAPS a page.

AVERY
Here we go. His family folded their
design firm. Redoing Trump Tower?
How the Hell do they go from that
level to filing Chapter 11?

VAL
Well, I read somewhere...
(gesturing at the pages)
They had a copyright infringement
spat with the Calder Estate over, I
think it's modern infant mobil #4?

PING. Avery peeks at Val's cellphone on the table. Val
quickly covers the screen with her hand.

VAL (CONT'D)
Simon.

AVERY
Leave him!

Avery holds the cellphone out of Val's reach.

<p>VAL</p> <p>I can't not respond to a work call-</p>	<p>AVERY (CONT'D)</p> <p>For one weekend? That you initiated?</p>
---	---

Avery DROPS the cellphone on the table.

VAL (CONT'D)

At least he helps me get paid.

She slinks back to the printer, pulls out a final page.

AVERY

Liar!

INT/EXT. PRIUS/SUBURBAN TOWN - NOON (TRACKING)

Avery slows the Prius to a fork in the road. A sign reads:
Montgomery County 1/3 Mile

VAL

"Hey strangers" was the greeting!

AVERY

She texted that? What is she,
fucking Camus now?

VAL

Well, as she said in her letter,
she believes that re-engaging will
be cathartic.

AVERY

More word salad than she juices for
the kid.

A squirrel with a gash down his back skitters onto the road.

VAL

Ave, watch-

BOOM. Avery jerks the Prius over the squirrel's bloodied
body. Val flails forward against her seatbelt. Avery laughs.

AVERY

Rest in peace...do we think she's
trying too hard?

Val rubs her neck, glances back at the squirrel.

VAL
That's just a prep school, New
England voice.

AVERY
Exactly. Didn't the letter sound
like a jackass?

VAL
You mean, like his imitation of her
with the hoity-toity Katherine
Hepburn accent? I really did not
want to dig that far into their
marital neurosis-

AVERY
But what if he's pretending to be
her. Pretending to be him.

VAL
So in like a Norman Bates way?

AVERY
No, she's not dead! This isn't a
Rear Window situation either. But
maybe he's bored. We happen to be a
familiar audience.

VAL
What would he need an audience for?

AVERY
Mind games! Drama! They were both
into coercive, weird control plays.

Val nods slowly, not quite unconvinced.

INT/EXT. PRIUS, SUBURBS - MORNING (TRACKING)

The Prius speeds past upscale suburban sprawl.

AVERY
She knows we're coming?

VAL
I called the number you wrote but
it went straight to an automated
business voicemail. I told them-

AVERY
You didn't text her back?

VAL

No. I thought we agreed it may not be her responding, and I was trying to get her actual voice on the line-

AVERY

Why? You thought she's temping in their office?

VAL

I don't know...

AVERY

You don't think it's her either, do you!

Val shrugs.

INT/EXT. PRIUS, HILL CREST NEIGHBORHOOD - LATER

Avery parks in a GUEST LOT separated by an iron gate from a coven of pristine brick chateaus (identical to Teaser).

VAL

When did a mass-produced castle become such a status symbol.

AVERY

Post-Sopranos. But you've gotta judge who's inside. They're hand-to-mouthing it for the mortgages.

Suddenly, golden girl REECE "REE" WHITHERS, (40s), in a tight pants suit, jumps from a Hummer by the gate.

REE

Hey!

She waddles in platform heels across the lot.

AVERY

It's Ivanna's body double!

VAL

Oh, gosh, shut up! I can't just unsee that.

Avery laughs. Val locks eyes with Ree and smiles.

AVERY

She looks nothing like Jack. Think the curtains match the drapes?

VAL
 Maybe...but can we reserve snark
 for the one hour we have here? She
 was named co-director of their
 furniture consignment LLC-

AVERY
 Vally, Herbalife is an LLC!

Val shakes her head as Ree approaches. Avery balks.

VAL
 Can you try to be neutral?

AVERY
 While you show how much you care
 about Field?

VAL
 Am I not allowed be curious AVERY (CONT'D)
 what happened to her? You aren't!

REE
 Kelly! Hi!

Avery SNORTS. Val waves at Ree.

AVERY
 Aren't you tired of performing for
 people who don't care about you?

VAL
 What do you think I was doing all
 yesterday, Ave?

Avery fumes. Ree skids behind the duo, taps their shoulders.

REE
 Welcome Ladies!

Avery jumps as if to bolt. Val pins her in place with a
 glare, then steps forward to shake Ree's hand.

VAL
 Hi, Ree. Kelly. This is my uhm...my
 friend, Anna.
 (nods at Avery)
 Thank you for meeting us on such
 short notice.

REE
 Of course! I've walked gazillions
 of clients through the same
 transition.
 (MORE)

REE (CONT'D)

With older folks, you never know.
One day they're at taebo and
then...

She SNAPS her fingers. Val feigns a somber expression.

REE (CONT'D)

But, let me assure you, it's
fantastic you're being proactive,
preparing early.

She pats Val's shoulder.

REE (CONT'D)

It's all you can do! This is the
right first stop in the grief
process.

VAL

Thanks.

AVERY

Excuse me for a sec.

She lunges aside to check her cellphone.

EXT. WALKWAY TO CHATEAU - MINUTES LATER

Ree marches ahead to the first chateau on the block, key in
hand. Avery, Val follow at a distance.

AVERY

Anna?

VAL

I was thinking Anna Karenina, for a
Russian lit tie in?

AVERY

You have no idea what I do!

VAL

Was I supposed to have read your
dissertation?

Val steps faster over the curb to break their side-by-side.
Ree turns, waves them over. Avery rushes behind Val.

AVERY

Hey...wait! I can explain what you
do!

VAL

That's great. Because, you know, my
job title hasn't changed in the
last thirty years!

Avery shakes her head at Val.

END ACT II

ACT III

INT. REE'S OFFICE - DAY (PRESENT)

Val, Avery perch on Corbusier chairs before a lucite desk.

REE

It's so wonderful, you came early.

She runs her hand over staged bookshelves.

REE (CONT'D)

In my longer consults, I typically start with a quick...the marketing term is brain board exercise. Basically, you give me the elevator pitch.

She pauses for effect. Avery nudges Val.

VAL

Oh, uhm, my dad has a sort of eclectic...you know, he's been a bowery bachelor since '72, you can imagine...

Ree angles a prominently displayed DESIGN INTEGRITY award.

REE

Love it. *Grey Gardens* meets Warhol.

She grabs a pad, Mont Blanc pen. Avery whispers to Val.

AVERY

It's got the same bath shag since Norman Mailer's golden shower.

Val GULPS down a giggle.

REE

Fabulous, right? It's that experiential DNA that helps us craft a sort of tapestry narrative around your space.

She whips out a magazine from the desk. On the cover: A colonial mantle featuring a gold balloon dog sculpture.

REE (CONT'D)

Here's a 2-bed pied in Miami a Bedminster client couldn't budge. The camp kitsch look was in.

(MORE)

REE (CONT'D)

We called his space Jeff Koons-
esque. Two weeks. It sold for
upwards of 10 and some change.

AVERY

Wow, in a recession!

INT. REE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Ree's voice garbles. Val prods Avery out of a stupor.

REE

And the irony! Her set of Gio Ponti
murrano jugs? She was shoving dirty
spoons in them!

VAL

Jugs? For...was it, ten thousand
spoons?

AVERY

(under breathe)

Isn't it ironic?

Val cracks a smile. Ree slides the magazine over the desk.

REE

See this. It's a total disaster.

She grabs a new magazine from a side table. Avery GROANS. Val
drops a hand on her chair arm.

AVERY

(To Val)

What time's your rehearsal?

VAL

Uhm...4:30? Yeah...

(to Ree)

I'm so sorry, I lost track. If I
can take a look at any contracts
and follow up with you next week?

REE

Oh, no worries. No, in fact, this
is a perfect stopping point.

She grabs a contract from her desk, hands it to Val. Avery,
Val scan bullets on the page.

REE (CONT'D)

And no rush. But to put it on your radar, we only hold spots for 48 hours.

AVERY

That's quick.

REE

It's a policy with the holidays. We're always inundated. Little secret? We call it dying parent season! It's when everyone wants a price check on mom's jewelry, dad's golf clubs. The waitlist fills starting Labor Day.

Val flips through the contract, points to a bullet.

VAL

Can I just ask, why is there a retainer clause?

REE

For tax filing, we like to have proof of billable services agreed upon.

AVERY

(to Val, under breathe)

Bull.

(to Ree)

You don't work on commission?

REE

It's my mistake, I should've explained. We totally phased out commission structure last year for flat-rate billing. It's easier to track. Frankly, it saves the client busywork and it's basically industry standard now.

AVERY

Right..

She trails off. Ree seizes on Avery's pause and faces Val.

REE

Plus, we're not hiring entry-level agents who lack luxury market sales experience. With us, you're getting combined fifteen years from myself, my partner, our team.

She opens the magazine to a photo of Field in a suit.

REE (CONT'D)

Here's a profile on our business model. Read through. Call me whenever you're ready to move forward.

She makes a show of presenting the magazine to Val.

REE (CONT'D)

And I'll try to pull some strings. Hopefully, we can pop your dad on our VIP wait list.

VAL

Okay...uhm, thanks...thank you. I really appreciate-

AVERY

(nodding at the door)
It's 3. We should...

REE

Absolutely, it's been my pleasure!

INT. REE'S OFFICE HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

Val trails Avery down a switchback staircase. She stops, gazes out a Tiffany's window over the mid-step landing.

AVERY

Who is it?

Val's POV: Outside, a Maserati (Jack in the driver's seat) swings into the driveway. Beat.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Someone coming?

VAL

Nothing. It looks like a delivery.

She leans closer to the window, remembers...

EXT. COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Avery, Val (in a Clinton-Gore tee) are joined by Field. The trio wanders past a wall of male portraits.

Super: Fall, 1992

Field points and waves at a PROFESSOR down the hallway.

AVERY
How many times can he say "meta"
before he ejaculates on himself?

VAL
The tally was thirty on Friday.

Field pulls a monogrammed notebook from her bag.

AVERY
(to Field)
You take notes?

FIELD
I think it's fascinating how he
recontextualizes De Beauvoir's
feminist framework for a modern
audience. He's making her relevant.

Val's mouth twists with a response. Avery shakes her head.

AVERY
(to Val)
Live and let die.

VAL
So then, choose apathy?

AVERY
(to Val)
Choose to lower your expectations
of certain people!

Val shakes her head. Field doesn't seem to notice.

FIELD
He's not so bad. I heard his new
book is actually on Hillary
Clinton's reading list.

Suddenly, Jack darts from around a corner.

JACK
See Ave? Middle-class white
feminism only gets you in so far.

Avery pouts. Jack puts on a show as the foursome approaches
the professor.

JACK (CONT'D)
 And really, Ave, you're conflating
 what should be gender-neutral
 scholarship with Gloria Steinem
 media-hog aspirations.

AVERY
 Come on. Bunnies are still cuter
 than brainwashed parrots!

Jack wraps arm around Field. She hands him the notebook.

AVERY (CONT'D)
 It's yours?

JACK
 I take notes on the lectures my
 parents bother to pay for.

AVERY	VAL
Must be nice. Getting to	(to Avery, whispered)
throw money at threats!	Live and let die?

INT. LECTURE AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Val squishes between Avery and Field in the front row. They
 watch Jack chat with the professor on the lecture stage.

FIELD
 (to Val)
 You don't have to play peacemaker.

VAL
 I'm okay. There is a kind of
 security in being overlooked...

Field glares at Avery over Val's head.

VAL (CONT'D)
 You get away with more.

FIELD
 But Vally, you're our voice of
 reason!

VAL
 Well, I guess I never had the
 luxury to be unreasonable, so...

FIELD	AVERY
Totally, that makes sense!	No, my God!

VAL
Really, I can take it! I always
leave our interactions feeling
better about my emotional
regulation skills. Which is saying
a lot, since I'm the one on meds.

Field laughs uneasily. Avery SNORTS. Field ignores Avery.

AVERY
We're all on something.

FIELD
And we need to collectively
destigmatize that concept.

AVERY
(To Val, snickering)
What're you knocking back?

VAL
Ugh, low dose Zyrtec. I wasn't
aware. My itchy under-eyes are from
hay fever!

AVERY
Ooh. Sounds super congenital!

She and Val exchange a knowing grin. Jack approaches.

JACK
Are we all on something?

AVERY
(To Jack)
Why, you didn't start Rogaine yet?

He pulls a face at Avery and snags the seat next to Field.
She reaches to smooth his hairline. He flinches.

INT. REE'S HOUSE/ STAIRCASE - AFTERNOON (PRESENT)

AVERY
I heard the doorbell.

Val turns from the window. Avery tosses her the Prius keys.

INT. REE'S OFFICE HALLWAY - AT THE SAME TIME

Jack, tipsy, POUNDS on Ree's door.

REE (O.S.)
Shh! They're still here!

The door opens, reveals Field. She gives Jack an icy cheek peck. Ree keeps watch at the windows.

INT/EXT. PRIUS/HIGHWAY - LATE NIGHT (TRACKING)

Val drives right-handed. Her left hand taps alberti base on the dash. BUZZ. She glances at her cellphone on the console.

VAL
Tell me, did I make the cut for the
2002 VIP dying parent waitlist?

AVERY
Vallery! Are you...excited?

Val stomps on the pedal.

VAL
Not. At. All. I mean, Lisa and Cal
are very alive. They fly business
from San Diego to a Tijuana resort
three times a month with their
favorite daughter!

AVERY
Lauren's still winning?

VAL
She bought them Salman Rushdie
tickets for their anniversary. My
cashmere blanket was never in
contention.

She reaches for her cellphone. Avery swats her away.

AVERY
It's a two-hander!
(checks Val's cellphone)
You made the cut! And now your
retainer's \$3000. Pre-tax.

VAL
Oh well. I think the buck stops
with my legal name on a soon-to-be
overdrawn credit card.

AVERY
Use Rick's. Say a family friend's
footing the bill.

VAL
Does he know-

AVERY
Does my father in hospice who
thinks I'm Suze Orman incarnate
care what I spend?

VAL
That's a terrible excuse!

She resumes tapping her baseline. BUZZ.

VAL (CONT'D)
Wait, maybe we should ask if she
would take installments. And how
much can tax be?

AVERY
No, it's mine this round.

She reaches in her pocket, pulls out her cellphone as proof.

EXT. GAS STATION - MIDNIGHT

Val adjusts the gas pump in the Prius. Avery steps out.

AVERY
I'm gonna rate their bathroom. Need
anything?

VAL
I'm good.

Avery walks into the convenience store, checks her cellphone.
On screen text from Bill: Talk ASAP!

INT. NYC REHEARSAL PRACTICE ROOM - EARLY MORNING

Val meanders through a gentle waltz on a grand Steinway.
SIMON KIRSCHBAUM, (60s), a stylish spright, struts inside.

SIMON
Where's the solo encore!

VAL
This...is...she.

SIMON
I don't like her. You're not an
overqualified accompanist!

He waves his glasses in the air like a conductor's baton.

VAL

But that is my public brand.
Dependable, competent. Delicate
with a slight underlying morose-

SIMON

Madonna! Listen to Fosse for a sec,
yes?

He scoots on the bench besides Val.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Why's there no best supporting
artist Grammy? Hmm?

Val stops, slumps. Beat. Simon stands up to lecture.

SIMON (CONT'D)

That would be cruel and unusual!
You go with Rachmaninov, Liszt!
You're gonna make the Barney's
lounge husbands weep out their
clonicked asses!

Val launches into List's LA CAMPANELLA. Simon CLAPS.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Lovely! Yes! We're getting warmer!

VAL

But...is it...defecatory enough?

She plays with increased gusto.

SIMON

It's a decent technical showcase
for an album promotional.

Val's cellphone VIBRATES on the windowsill. Simon grabs it,
stuffs it in his pocket. Val shouts over her playing.

VAL

I was waiting for a compliment!

SIMON

I said this one was lovely! I only
hyperbolize with my partners. Not
my artists.

He plops back on the bench and shakes Val's shoulders.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Hail, Madonna, full of grace!
You'll make us all feel like born
again!

INT. BARNEY'S DRESSING ROOM - MID-MORNING

Avery pulls a black shirtdress half-way over her head.

AVERY
Help!

A hand KNOCKS on the slatted door. Enter Val (from rehearsal). She gestures at the dress.

AVERY (CONT'D)
Mrs. Bill signed her divorce
papers.

VAL
You look like you're in mourning.

AVERY
She downed a whole pill caddy last
night. That's sad-ish.

She yanks the dress down. The unbuttoned front frames a
pacemaker below her left breast. She pats the scar on top.

VAL
She sank half his cash and the life
insurance claim he wanted make on
her? What an icon!

AVERY
Right? Can't fault her.

Val glances at the scar. Avery fumbles with the buttons.

AVERY (CONT'D)
And unlike her, there's nothing
redeeming about me. I'm heartless.

Val scoots to a back bench, inspects a reject outfit pile.

VAL
Then why are you going to the
funeral? Why reinforce-

AVERY

I'm not! It's in Atlantic City. The divorce counselor can fuck jersey Bill under the boardwalk. Dead or alive.

VAL

Then this is post-funeral date chic?

Avery laughs bitterly.

AVERY

You're not selling BS you haven't deluded yourself with first!

VAL

All right, you look like a great other-other woman in a Lifetime soap.

AVERY

That wasn't sincere.

VAL

Okay, you know what? The look really says psychotic clinger stalking Mr. Pervy Professor whose suffering wife you probably helped put a hit on.

Avery's eyes close. Val EXHALES.

VAL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I shouldn't...I just think everything is coated in BS and everyone...like we all leave behind our own mess! But maybe it's up to us to accept our individual mess and move on instead of making a big show of failing to change?

AVERY

Does that mean you're happy choosing apathy, now?

VAL

I can make peace with it as a coping mechanism.

Avery opens teary eyes. Val shrinks back into the corner.

AVERY

Well, I'm not above trying. And you're clearly trying. What is being a performer but trying to perfect your last-

VAL

Oh, please, I stopped trying years ago!

Val breaks into a SNIFFLE. Avery glares at her.

EXT. OUTLET STRIP MALL BACKSIDE - MORNING

Ree leads Val, Avery (in shirtdress) past a row of luxury outlets.

REE

We'll stop by the sample spaces to give you some ideas.

She pauses at a metal door labeled: SHOWROOM.

INT. SHOWROOM HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Ree guides Val, Avery into a construction site covered in WORK IN PROGRESS signs. Ree yells over a saw BUZZ.

REE

Oh, and I forgot. I have tons of photographer recs we've worked with. I'll send you options when I'm back in the office.

She opens another door.

INT. SHOWROOM HALLWAY - MINUTES LATER

The door opens on a stark, white lobby. Val, Avery huddle in the back while they watch Ree chat with a receptionist.

AVERY

What's our code for time's up?

VAL

Look, we should give it-

She stops abruptly as Ree waves them over.

INT. SHOWROOM - MINUTES LATER

Val, Avery take in a showroom floor organized into mini rooms with labels (ultra mod, shabby chic, deco). Ree strides down a center aisle, gesturing with every step.

REE

Here are the mood capsules I was mentioning. They're all constructed based on data from our consumer psychology team. With each one, the idea is we want you to walk into the space and feel like you're immersed in a real, lived-in fantasy world.

She stations herself at a four-way intersection.

REE (CONT'D)

Feel free to have a look around. And point out what details visually grab you. What setting you gel with, instinctively.

Val eyes a Calder-style mobile in a 70s-theme room. Ree leaves her post and taps Val's shoulder.

REE (CONT'D)

Isn't it neat? Came in last week.

VAL

I was just wondering, is that baby mobile no.4 from Ikea? My friend is due next month, so...

REE

You know, that's a great question. I'll have to ask my assistant. Unfortunately, we've seen tons of mid-range copycats saturating the resale market lately.

Avery joins them. Ree meets her gaze.

REE (CONT'D)

Up there's an original Calder from last year.

AVERY

I thought he's dead.

REE

Well, again, any specifics can be verified later with my research office. But at this stage, I want to keep the fact jargon out of your emotional processing.

She smiles and wanders to wipe dust from a nearby sofa.

REE (CONT'D)

Try to put yourself in the story of the space. Tap into your creative right brain.

She taps the right side of her head.

AVERY

(Whispering)

What do we bet. They're all fakes?

Val shrugs and watches Ree. Avery glances up at the mobile.

It spins in a downward spiral over her head.

INT. 70S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Ree grabs a blue vase by the neck, shows it to Val.

REE

We have some vintage art nouveau for you. It's Richard Uhlemeyer. Vichy glasswork, 1942.

VAL

Uhlemeyer...that sounds German?

REE

The seller's a big collector from Munich. He's cleaning out his family's second French estate. This was all imported from France.

AVERY

(elbowing Val)

They're Nazis!

Ree ignores Avery's comment and points to an adjoining space.

REE

Now, your dad's collection would be right over here.

She leads Val away to an all-white adjacent room. Avery lingers by the vase. Beat. She peers down the neck.

Avery's POV: A SEARS SALE TAG on the vase bottom.

INT. WHITE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ree palms a white-walled corner. Val's eyes follow her hands.

REE

I thought we would try some
contrast marketing.

VAL

Like a contrast between...?

REE

We wanna make the commercial,
rocker rebel aesthetic pop.

VAL

But, sorry, pop against...?

REE

Well...

She swivels her head around the showroom. Val flashes Avery an SOS side-eye. Ree notices.

REE (CONT'D)

I know there's a lot to absorb and
you're not alone. Most people find
white space nerve-wrecking. There's
no story to distract, fill in the
blanks, right? But once we move in
your pieces with some pro lighting?
This whole nothing?

She SLAPS the wall with her palm.

REE (CONT'D)

Gone. Doesn't exist. We'll dress it
up. I have a brilliant impression
therapist who can talk through what
statement you want to make. It's
your story...

Val nods along, almost in a trance.

INT. 70S ROOM - MINUTES LATER

Avery shows Val a tag peeking from an accent rug. On the label: GROOVY REFLECTIONS BY MARTHA STEWART. Ree watches them.

REE (O.S.)
(calling out)
It's vintage! Handwoven in
Casablanca!

AVERY
Oh! I thought it was from
Knockoffistan!

VAL
It's expected, they have to upsell
a little...

Avery SNORTS and surreptitiously scratches a canvas over a faux marble mantle. A FINAL SALE sticker peels off the corner.

AVERY
Keep her busy? I'm gonna count the
lies per square foot in here.

VAL
Okay, but...but why do you care?

AVERY
I wanna fault them for something
worse than being idiots. At least
you can pity idiots!

Val returns to Ree's side. Avery turns her back on them and grabs a life-like apple from a sideboard. Beat.

REE (O.S.)
...we're doing a casual thing at my
cousin's bistro, the Boathouse? You
probably saw it off of the
turnpike. You're welcome to come,
by the way. It's your basic upscale
Americana fare. But, and I'm not
exaggerating, you won't find a
better Chardonnay outside of
Brandywine, really...

Avery frowns into the apple's plastic surface.

VAL (O.S.)
 Thanks. I mean, Avery is more of
 the white wine aficionado, but
 we'll definitely try to make it...

Avery BOUNCES the apple back in the bowl.

EXT. OUTLET STRIP MALL PARKING GARAGE - AFTERNOON

Val speeds past car rows. Avery jogs at her heels.

AVERY
 What happened to pulling the plug,
 Kelly?

VAL
 What? I agreed with you! The big
 sister corporate speak, the bizarre
 fake furniture! I'm not in denial-

Avery halts in place. Val barrels into the Prius.

AVERY
 Were you that close to Field?
 Honesty hurts me less...

VAL
 Well, she never treated me like a
 prop.

AVERY
 God! That is is the most patent-

Val POUNDS the suitcase, then slides down the Prius's side.

Val!	<p>AVERY (CONT'D)</p> <p>VAL</p> <p>She may be going through some terrible trauma...I can't think of anything else right now!</p>
------	--

AVERY (CONT'D)
 Really? Owing taxes is a trauma?

Val stabs the Prius key in her palm. Avery wrestles it back.

VAL
 Stop! I just...it hit me, our
 reason for coming. We're reveling
 in schadenfreude when she could be-

AVERY

She can't suffer. Available credit
and low self-awareness negate that
privilege!

She yanks Val upright. Val buckles in her grasp.

VAL

I just wanted to let her know. Like
if she needs a place to stay, or if
she wants to discuss with a
licensed attorney? I will call my
sister for the first time in...

She breaks from Avery's grasp. Avery screams at Val's back.

AVERY

Val, come on! This is the laundry
list of what you need. You feel
guilty. Talk about schadenfreude!
What's so concerning to you? You
didn't even respond to her letter!

VAL

Because I had the decency not to
use her as a conduit for inflating
my own ego!

Val breaks into a sob. Avery yanks open the driver's door.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MINUTES LATER

Avery pulls the Prius to the curb. Val crouches, smoking one
of Avery's cigarettes. Avery rolls the window.

AVERY

You better-

VROOM! Ree's Hummer skids past them. Ree waves on her way to
an EXIT. Val waves back. Avery flips her finger at Ree, then
circles back to Val.

VAL

That was a bold choice.

She stands.

AVERY

I had to...

VAL

No you didn't. You know what? I
think you did it for Field.

Avery shrugs and POPS the passenger's door open. Val hops inside.

END ACT III

ACT IV

INT/EXT. PRIUS, BOATHOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON (TRACKING)

Avery rolls the Prius past a rose garden. A fountain Adonis sculpture urinates water. Val taps her baseline on the dash.

AVERY

Think it's fresh water?

Val stops tapping, breaks into a smile.

INT. BOATHOUSE BAR - EARLY EVENING

Avery downs a shot at a stodgy oak bar. Val spins on her barstool.

AVERY

Really exuding that rocker, rebel aesthetic.

She reaches over to steady Val's knees.

VAL

I was trying to get into the character.

Avery flags an old bartender. He refills her shot. She passes it to Val, motions for her to drink.

AVERY

The character? Don't other Simon Kelly! Say my character. Then it's easier to forget the role of Val.

VAL

But I'm not-

REE (O.S.)

Hey! You made it!

Val knocks down the shot, COUGHS. Avery slaps her back.

EXT. BOATHOUSE PATIO - MINUTES LATER

Val, Avery face Ree at a private four-seater overlooking the garden. A sleazy waiter delivers bread, wine list.

REE

Hi Danny, we'll start with three
gun-smoke Chardonnays.

(hands back the bread)

And...the usual.

DANNY

Got it. Three signatures. Plus
sparkling, no ice, half lime?

REE

Perfect!

(To Val, Avery)

My sister's 9 months sober. But we
don't mention it and we don't share
drinks.

Danny collects their bread plates, heads inside.

VAL

Oh, that's uh...great for her.

REE

Right? She's been through so much-

AVERY

Wait. You work with your sister?

REE

Sister-in-law. Fabulous trained
artist, by the way. She just did a
third masters at Central St.
Martins.

DANNY (O.S.)

Right over here, sir...Sir?

Val, Avery glance around. Ree TAPS the table for attention.

REE

I handle logistics on the business
end. She's more of the creative
consultant, with her design
background?

JACK (O.S.)

(slurring)

Woah, woah. You get the...no, you
don't touch me on my own fucking
patio!

REE

Jack? Jack, what's going on?! Are
you with...where is she-

Jack stumbles across the patio.

JACK
I'm done!

He trips into to a bush besides the table. Ree SHRIEKS and runs inside to the bar. Val pops from her seat.

VAL
Oh! Oh, uhm...

Jack crawls from the bush. Blood drips down his chin. Avery stares at his face, INHALES, then faints into Val's arms.

INT. BOATHOUSE LOUNGE - EVENING (PRESENT)

Avery'S POV: Her eyes roll open on a plastic cactus.

She prods the stem. Jack stares at her from a club chair across a coffee table.

JACK
You had to steal the scene?

VAL (O.S.)
Jack, excuse me.

Val rushes in with an ice bag. Avery woozily reaches for it and holds it to her head. She GROANS.

JACK
You've got nothing to say. So you bite off the one dick in the room. But you know what you're still doing, right?

AVERY
(To Val)
One? You see it...?

Avery shields her eyes. Jack mock frowns at the insult.

AVERY (CONT'D)
(to Val)
You don't have to stay. I fucked up...I should deal with him.

VAL
Why? I think...I want to.

JACK
Definitely, you should!
(jerking a thumb at Avery)
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)
I don't know how you deal with the
psycho-gaslighting!

Avery sits up. The ice bag PLOPS on her lap. Val extends a hand. Jack reaches simultaneously.

VAL JACK (CONT'D)
Sorry- It's on me, I got it!

Avery pushes Val off, grabs the cactus, swings it at Jack. He ducks too late. The cactus makes contact with Jack's shoulder.

JACK (CONT'D)
Damn it! At some point, you have to
sober up, Ave! You-

AVERY
I'm not the problem. Between the
two of us, I'm not the pothead.

JACK
Then what are you? The ketamine
kettle?

Jack limps backwards to the doorway. Val smiles to herself.

VAL
(to herself)
And neither of you can call each
other...

She purposely trails off. Jack bows his head at her.

JACK
That was a good punch. I'll give it
to you, Vally!

Val crosses her arms and fixes her gaze on a Modigliani portrait (signed Elmyr) by the door. Jack turns to Avery.

JACK (CONT'D)
Get your shit together. K? You can
talk assault charges with my
lawyer. She'll call you tomorrow!

AVERY
Because you control her schedule,
too?

JACK
I better. I'm covering her kid's
ride to Vanderbilt.

AVERY
Only Vanderbilt. That's the one you
didn't want aborted?

Jack SLAMS the door. Avery SMACKS the cactus on the wall. The
portrait sways, the painted face spirals.

VAL
Ave, watch-

The portrait CRASHES to the floor, face down. Avery steps
closer and inspects the wreckage. Beat.

AVERY
Huh...

She pulls a stapled gift note from the canvas back.

INT. BOATHOUSE LOUNGE - MINUTES LATER

Avery, Val study a gift receipt from FIELDSTON MCCULLOUGH
(date 2002).

AVERY
She didn't legally change her name?

VAL
Well, but if that's the case, there
would have been a court record and
in her letter she signed with-

AVERY
That makes no sense. She never
wrote a fucking-

Ree's heels CLICK past the door. Val grabs Avery's arm. Avery
silently shoves the note down her dress front.

EXT. LINCOLN CENTER COURT YARD - NIGHT

Val, Simon stroll arm-in-arm past a concert crowd.

SIMON
You breathe that toxic rot day in,
day out. She's like the little brat
from the *Bad Seed*.

VAL
I don't know...I've always thought
of her as Edith the lonely doll.

SIMON

No, no that's you, darling Princess Val!

VAL

Oh well. I guess invited her to the opening, so I can feel less alone.

Simon stops short and studies Val for a beat.

SIMON

I wonder, sometimes. What did you think being on stage is? It's the pinnacle. The spoils of the top.

Val sways in Simon's grasp. Simon pulls her closer to the lit courtyard.

SIMON (CONT'D)

One only looks like the loneliest number. That's an illusion. When you're number one, there's whole crowd propping you up! And a faithful manager! You're never alone.

VAL

But Avery and I have a kind of special *lucidié à duex*? Like when we're apart...that's really when life stagnates for both of us, I like to think-

SIMON

Not both.

Val mopes. Simon relinquishes her arm.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Count the bodies she's felled! We know she's hiding the dead daddy. The boyfriend's wife finished herself off. Now the Jackie O frenemy is MIA? Marilyn takes Camelot? Is that her plan?

VAL

We all have one dead connection...

SIMON

Well, she's on her fourth. Who's next to lose their crown? I'm afraid. The name rhymes with best gal pal...

Val laughs bitterly and wanders to her table (from ACT I).

SIMON (CONT'D)
You still come back to our table?

VAL
Tradition dies hard with me.

SIMON
You should get a plaque. Crying
here since '92.

VAL
I remember, you gave me my first
New York napkin!

Simon rushes to Val's side and steers her away.

SIMON
No one would fault you for wiping
the eyes, moving on, reinventing
yourself!

Val glances at the faded stain left by her puddle.

VAL
Oh, don't worry, I can fault
myself...and in fact, I will fault
myself. I just hate the idea of
starting over. Always having to
hope for something better is...it's
so stressful!

SIMON
What isn't stressful?

VAL
Practicing? The more you practice,
the less important what you're
practicing becomes. I like that
security.

Simon leads her to a spotlight under a balcony. A few concert
goers recognize Val. They point, smile, WHISPER.

SIMON
Nice, huh?

Val nods at her reflection in a street lamp.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Next weekend when you take your
bow? Don't look into her eyes.
Promise?

Val nods slowly. Simon holds up crossed fingers.

INT. FIELD'S HOME POTTERY STUDIO - NIGHT

Jack, Field face off across a work table. A clay mound blocks the space between them. Field toys with a cutting wire.

FIELD

I want them to know its mutual,
that's all. I don't even think
about the social inequity when-

JACK

Sweetie, you're not making your
Hallmark poverty case. Okay?
They're watching German
expressionist films. They're not
your level-

FIELD

I'm not stupid.

Jack pulls an envelope from his jacket. Field purses her lips.

JACK

That's more than a Palm D'Or costs.
Should scare them...

He slides over the envelope with the same handwriting as Field's original letter. She doesn't touch it. Beat.

JACK (CONT'D)

What're they up to now?

FIELD

Val has a promo concert with Kelly
Zhu on Saturday? She's a soprano...

She slices a clay slab with the wire.

JACK

I know her. She won the National
Arts Foundation grant. Same year
you applied...

Field POUNDS her clay slab with a silent ferocity. Beat.

FIELD

And I assume Avery tags along
because-

JACK

Of course, that's how it's always been. You should go, too. Gather intel on our pawns before they level up.

FIELD

Oh, I really don't think I have to. The dream of me dead is enough to keep them talking.

He nudges the envelope. She continues to knead her clay.

JACK

But you don't want me going. The New York attorney general agrees, I wasn't the brightest fixer.

FIELD

You turned minor inconveniences into crises. That takes skill.

JACK

Interesting...that's what my ex-wife accused me of!

She frowns but paws the envelope closer to her bag.

JACK (CONT'D)

(CONT'D)

By the way, Bobby said he'd rather stay in the dorm than be indoctrinated into our yuppiedom.

FIELD

He wants to spend the three weeks alone in New Hampshire? He should've at least called me.

JACK

He'll be fine, Ma's taking over. Her Barnard sister fixed that house in Chappaquiddick. They're gonna do a boating weekend?

FIELD

I see. Am I not rigatta-qualified for your mother?

JACK

I wasn't invited.

He prods a maggot on the kiln behind him with a wooden dowel. A long golden hair (like Ree's) falls off the kiln's ledge to the floor.

FIELD

I wonder what she has to say about me to my son.

She SLAPS her clay on the table.

JACK

Ma knows everything. At this point, we should face it. Everyone and their accountant knows. That was the whole reason for leaving the fund to Ree. We're on our own...you and me.

Field's eyes follow Jack's to the hair.

JACK (CONT'D)

We'll be all right.

He quickly flicks the hair back into the kiln.

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Simon arranges Val's record collection next to a baby grand with a bow on top. Val carefully folds down boxes. RING.

SIMON

I won't peep!

Val checks a landline on a corner desk and reluctantly presses speaker.

INT. AVERY'S OFFICE - MID-NIGHT

Avery cries, furred in her wingback.

INTERCUT BETWEEN VAL/AVERY

VAL

Hey! How was uhm, did you see-

AVERY

No! Can you imagine? He's moving to a think tank in Rotterdam!

VAL

Oh...oh, Ave. I'm so sorry, are you-

AVERY

Val! I fucked him! While he was planning his little backpack through tulip fields with the divorce counselor!

BUZZ. Avery's line goes silent. Simon mouths CHEATER! Val shakes her head at him.

VAL

I mean, are you...safe?

Beat. Simon eye rolls. Avery screams and sobs into the phone.

AVERY

I'm a fucking idiot! He thinks I'm dumb enough to believe he gives a...he's not interested in educating Dutch kids! I-

VAL

Avery. Where are you?

Avery buries her head into the chair arm.

AVERY

Can I...I may need stay over tomorrow? Is that-

VAL

Uhm...

She glances at her moving boxes. Simon mouths BOUNDARIES.

VAL (CONT'D)

Look. Should I pick you up?

AVERY

(sobbing)

Mm...mm-mm. I'll go. I can drive.

END INTERCUT

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT GALLEY KITCHEN - LATER

Val, Simon clink Coppola wine cans.

SIMON

Sure. He'll fly to Rotterdam. In a vintage Droste cocoa tin.

VAL
She would never!

Simon sips his can and wiggles his eyebrow.

VAL (CONT'D)
She's surprisingly presbyterian!

SIMON
I'm not familiar with the
reference...

VAL
We, uh, try not to cremate our
dead.

SIMON
There we go! You admit, she'd kill
him somehow.

Val breaks into a buzzed giggle.

VAL
I mean, I think she'd take infamy
over anonymity any day.

SIMON
And you're questioning her motives!

VAL
Am not!

SIMON
Don't fight the truth!

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT MAIL ROOM - NIGHT

Val opens a mailbox, retrieves an Aesthete Estates envelope.
She stares at it open-mouthed for a beat.

INT. TRIBECA APARTMENT LIVING ROOM - LATER

Avery naps upright on a bench under the window. Val enters,
absorbed in her envelope. Avery's lids flutter.

Avery's POV: Val appears as a distorted, fuzzy shadow. Only
the envelope in her hands is clear.

AVERY
Mail came already?

Val jumps at her voice.

VAL
Oh! You won't believe what Ree
wants this time...

AVERY
Is it another money request?
Wouldn't be shocking

Val pulls out a note and two tickets from the new envelope.

VAL
In a roundabout way...

INT/EXT. BARN/FIELD - MORNING

Val, Avery trudge through a muddy field.

AVERY
The artist better to come to her
own shit show.

VAL
But would not showing be the
ultimate statement of female self-
sublation in the modern art labor
market?

AVERY
Look at you, out-pedantizing me!

They approach an open barn decked with abstract paintings,
sculptures. Ree and a work crew arrange tables, catering.

VAL
That is the stated theme from the
invite.

AVERY
Nah, she's not that deep.

Ree waves at them from across the barn. Avery cringes. Val
shoves her hands in her pockets. Avery nudges her.

AVERY (CONT'D)
You didn't wave!

VAL
Now it does feel a little like us
versus them...

She turns to look back at the muddy lawn.

VAL (CONT'D)
With an empty Field in the middle.

INT. BARN - LATE AFTERNOON

Avery grabs drinks at a bar. Val leaves her and stops to look at an anomalous black canvas. Beat. She steps closer.

Val's POV: A shadowy female form is hidden in the inky paint.

Val GULPS as a hand taps her shoulder.

FIELD (O.S.)
Vally! I missed you the other day!

END