**The Hit**

A play by Quentin Stuckey

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**Cast of Characters:**

Vanessa Hurtz

Darius Treadwell

Fred Best

Becky Lefave

Mitchell Romano

Britney Frank

Detective Nash

Mr. Romano

Mr. Hurtz

Prison Guard

Male Actor

Female Actor

**Act 1, Scene 1**

**A New York police station.**

**Enter MR. ROMANO and DETECTIVE NASH.**

NASH

Take a seat.

**NASH grabs a chair from USR, he places it CS just in front of Mr. ROMANO’s feet.**

ROMANO

I’d rather stand.

NASH

Take a seat.

ROMANO

Why should I?

NASH

We may be here awhile.

ROMANO

How long might that be?

NASH

As long as it takes, we have a lot to cover.

ROMANO

I didn’t do anything wrong, he’s the damn criminal.

NASH

Mr. Romano, you are in this as much as he is. You are an accessory to a person’s death. (pause) Don’t even make me mention all of the other crimes and offences the Romano family has committed. We’ve been on you for quite some time.

ROMANO

I admit nothing without my attorney present.

NASH

Mr. Romano, we offered to provide you with an attorney, you refused.

ROMANO

You were offering me chump change.

NASH

We were offering you the legal right to an attorney, but it’s obvious you have no respect for the law, so you are being questioned one on one.

ROMANO

You make a reasonable and yet unfair argument Detective.

NASH

I have questioned all the other important people in the investigation. You are the last person I’ll be speaking with. Now, would you like to sit down?

ROMANO

If you insist.

NASH

I do insist. Now sit the hell down.

**ROMANO sits down in the chair CS. NASH proceeds to hover over him.**

ROMANO

So where do we begin? Do we go back to the Treadwells and how Mr. Treadwell fucked us over? Or do we go back to my family? Where do we start?

NASH

Tell me about Mr. Treadwell, why were him and his family targets?

ROMANO

It’s so damn simple. We did him a favor, he owed us money, he wouldn’t pay so we put a hit on him.

NASH

What was the favour?

ROMANO

What is it you’re investigating? Mr. Treadwell’s criminal background or the death of his next of kin? Those are two separate issues.

NASH

They are directly related Romano. So why don’t you tell-

ROMANO

He was in a lot of trouble with a few cokeheads, he came to us for protection. But we only offered said protection for a very specific amount of money. We didn’t get the money. Treadwell’s protection is gone. And we’re the ones he now has to worry about.

NASH

What about these *cokeheads*? As you call them.

ROMANO

Dead. All of them. Mr. Treadwell was granted absolute protection from our organization. But he wouldn’t pay up. So, he was on our hit list.

NASH

And his family?

ROMANO

When you don’t pay up, everyone around you becomes part of the payment. Whether they realize it or not. (pause) A man’s family may be nothing more than innocent bystanders, but they have to go as well. Sort of like what one of those Boston marathon bombers called it: “collateral damage.” (pause) Not that I endorse terrorism. It’s fucking cowardly.

NASH

They all had to die, simply because Mr. Treadwell didn’t pay you the money he owed you?

ROMANO

That’s right.

NASH

And yet you provided him with this protection before he even paid you.

ROMANO

He gave us a lump sum to do our main job. But his account still had an impending balance due.

NASH

I understand. (pause) My next question is going to be a very direct one.

ROMANO

Well ask it, that’s what you hauled me in here for.

NASH

Why did you enlist that boy to murder the only son of the Treadwell family?

ROMANO

It wasn’t easy Detective.

NASH

I didn’t ask about how you felt Mr. Romano, I asked you why. He is a very a young man, what would possess you to enlist him?

ROMANO

He just had his twenty first birthday. He wanted to be apart of our crew, so I gave him a job. (pause) He was the one who came to me, you know. We didn’t go to him. Maybe he always wondered what it was like to be a mobster, but I can’t really speak for him.

NASH

He expressed an interest in being apart of the syndicate?

ROMANO

He practically begged me Detective. And so, like I said, I gave him a job.

NASH

The job being to shoot the son of the Treadwell family?

ROMANO

Yeah, his first hit. Murder is a part of our business. It’s not meant to be personal. If we have to kill, then we kill. (pause) It wasn’t like I handed him a gun and said “go nuts”, I went over everything with him. Taught him where the most vulnerable parts of the body are located, taught him how to fire and most importantly, I taught him how to be indifferent. It was just our business. (pause) But there is one thing I wish I had advised him not to do.

NASH

What was that?

ROMANO

I should’ve told him not to do it in a fucking theatre.

NASH

That wasn’t part of the plan?

ROMANO

Fuck no. It gave everything too much publicity. It exposed us. For fuck sakes, I’m sitting in the office of the FBI. (pause) These damn kids nowadays, they can’t do *anything*, and I really mean *anything*, quietly. You shoot a man and within minutes, you post about it on your newsfeed. Relentless, all of them.

**BLACKOUT**

**Act 1, Scene 2**

**The lights fade in to reveal the stage of a theatre. A small, intensely intimate off-Broadway stage. A MALE ACTOR and a FEMALE ACTOR are standing CS.**

FEMALE ACTOR

You son of a bitch!

MALE ACTOR

Don’t get so excited.

FEMALE ACTOR

How can you stand there and tell me how to feel?

MALE ACTOR

You’re drunk. Go in your room and sleep it off. You’ll be much easier to deal with in the morning.

FEMALE ACTOR

You’ve had more to drink than I have. If I were to go into your room, you know what I would find?

MALE ACTOR

What would you find?

FEMALE ACTOR

Empty bottle after empty bottle. Vodka, gin, beer-

MALE ACTOR

You are so cruel.

FEMALE ACTOR

And you need to get the hell out of here. I mean it.

**MALE ACTOR raises his hand in the air.**

MALE ACTOR

I’ll do it.

FEMALE ACTOR

Stop it. That’s not funny.

MALE ACTOR

I swear to you I’ll hit you so hard I’ll…I’ll (pause, breaking character) Line!

**Enter VANESSA HURTZ, a twenty-one-year-old playwright.**

VANESSA

Damn it Jim! You two were doing so well!

MALE ACTOR

I’m sorry Vanessa.

VANESSA

You were emoting, hitting all your marks, letting the scene breath but…those god damn lines. It’s always the lines! If you stopped smoking so much pot, maybe your memory might improve!

MALE ACTOR

Hey I’ve been sober for over two days now. Do you know how big that is for me?

FEMALE ACTOR (breaking character)

Your bag backstage reeks of weed.

MALE ACTOR

I told you, it’s just my cologne.

VANESSA

Like hell it is!

FEMALE ACTOR

Is he not saying them the way you want them to be said?

VANESSA

No! His performance would be flawless if he could just remember all his lines!

MALE ACTOR

I’m really trying.

FEMALE ACTOR

Hey, I’m trying too.

VANESSA

We open tomorrow night and we-(pause) Okay, okay…I’m going to take a few minutes to myself. I can feel a panic attack coming on.

FEMALE ACTOR

Should we leave?

MALE ACTOR

Rehearsal is just about over anyway.

VANESSA

(sighs) Look, both of you come here a moment.

MALE ACTOR

I thought you needed a few minutes to yourself.

VANESSA

Forget what I said, just come here.

**The two actors come closer to VANESSA as she places her arms on both of their shoulders.**

VANESSA

I want to apologize for my behavior over this last week of rehearsals. I know how hard I’ve been on you two, being the leads and all. (pause) This is a big deal for me. I want it to be good. I want you two to be good. This play means so much to me. And I-

FEMALE ACTOR

Vanessa, I don’t mean to interrupt you but rehearsal has now finished.

VANESSA

Oh, do you have some place to be?

FEMALE ACTOR

I’m having dinner with my family tonight. My mother got this new phone and we’re all going to help her set it up.

VANESSA (sarcastically)

As a close family unit?

FEMALE ACTOR

Exactly.

MALE ACTOR

Vanessa, I also have to-

VANESSA

Don’t let me keep you. Go home. Go to your families and your marijuana. (pause) Be here at seven tomorrow night. Curtain at eight.

MALE ACTOR

Well good bye then!

FEMALE ACTOR

Take care!

**Exit MALE ACTOR and FEMALE ACTOR. VANESSA walks DSC and sits on the edge of the stage.**

**Enter BRITNEY FRANK, she is carrying a clipboard.**

BRITNEY

I knew that I’d find you here.

VANESSA

On Earth? Or on stage? They are two very different places to be.

BRITNEY

Vanessa with all due respect, you’re the most pretentious person I have ever met in my life.

VANESSA

Awe, thanks Britney.

BRITNEY (laughing)

You’re welcome. As your assistant, I must be brutally honest.

VANESSA

It’s what I pay you for.

BRITNEY

You don’t sign my cheques. By the way you forgot your script backstage…again.

VANESSA

Shit, I need to stop doing that.

BRITNEY

Luckily, I found it. Here you go.

**She hands VANESSA a thick block of pages.**

VANESSA

I’ve memorized the play by heart so I never need the script.

BRITNEY

It’s still not something that you want to lose.

VANESSA

You’re a life saver, you know that?

BRITNEY

That’s what they pay me for. Why are you here anyways? Isn’t rehearsal over now?

VANESSA

I’m just thinking.

BRITNEY

All by yourself? I had no idea you were capable of independent thought.

VANESSA

I’m not going home tonight.

BRITNEY

Spending the night somewhere else?

VANESSA

I’ll be here for awhile.

BRITNEY

You’re just planning on sitting here? At least come and get a drink with me, then you can make your way back to your position on this stage. (pause) I’ll even get out my tape and mark it for you, just stand up.

VANESSA

I’m not going to stay here. I’ll go home eventually, just not any time soon.

BRITNEY

Is he leaving tonight?

VANESSA

Who?

BRITNEY

Your father, is he moving out of your house tonight?

VANESSA

It’s not my house, I don’t live there anymore. I live in New York now.

BRITNEY

But you still like to go home every now and then. And now it’s just going to be your mother living in the house you grew up in, doesn’t that bother you?

VANESSA

If I go home to my apartment, I’m just going to ball my eyes out all alone. I’d rather sit on this stage.

BRITNEY

So your Dad is leaving tonight then?

VANESSA

Yes, my parents finally decided to split up. And it really fucking sucks. (pause) I shouldn’t be so surprised, it’s been a long time coming.

BRITNEY

They’re both still going to come to see your play right?

VANESSA

Yeah but on different nights.

**BRITNEY sits down next to her DSC.**

BRITNEY

You’ve been acting sort of distant during this last week.

VANESSA

I’ve been distant?

BRITNEY

To be frank, yes.

VANESSA

I think I’ve been too hard on my leads. Especially the stoner.

BRITNEY

They’ll do a great job. You gotta have some faith in them.

VANESSA

Yeah. I’m really trying.

BRITNEY

So, are you excited that your play is finally being produced?

VANESSA

I am.

BRITNEY

All these seats are going to be filled by all kinds of New Yorkers. Maybe even some talent scouts! I mean Vanessa, this is basically your Broadway debut, you should be exhilarated! (pause) And I have a feeling that it’s going to be a hit. Scratch that, I *know* it will be a hit!

VANESSA

First of all, it’s Off-Broadway and second of all, you’re right. I ought to be happy and yet I’m not. (pause) It’s not even like I’m upset, I feel worried.

BRITNEY

Fear of success?

VANESSA

Who could possibly be afraid of success?

BRITNEY

Oh boy.

VANESSA

What?

BRITNEY

Everything you’re saying to me is just a cry for help. Now seriously, tell me what’s on your mind. Does it have to do with your parents?

VANESSA

No.

BRITNEY

Then what is it?

VANESSA

Nothing.

BRITNEY

I really hate it when you do this to me.

VANESSA

What?

BRITNEY

When you bottle up your feelings and won’t let the slightest hint of vulnerability pour out of you. (pause) In fact, the only time I ever hear you express your true feelings is when you put them in a script.

VANESSA

I love the theatre.

BRITNEY

You love fantasy, you enjoy things that aren’t real. That’s not healthy. At least it is possible to make a living out of that, especially in New York.

VANESSA

Britney, I’ll do whatever it takes.

BRITNEY

To do what?

VANESSA

To make it to the top. To be known, respected and appreciated by everyone. This play is just the beginning, it’s a stepping stone to bigger things. I’m obsessed with being well respected for my writing.

BRITNEY

As long as this obsession doesn’t bring you down, then by all means, go and pursue it.

VANESSA

The play is the thing that’s bothering me.

BRITNEY

Your play is going to be a hit! You don’t have to worry about anything.

**Brief silence.**

VANESSA

Britney, do you know what this play is really about?

BRITNEY

You and Darius, am I right?

VANESSA

How did you know?

BRITNEY

It’s been obvious from the moment I read the title. Your play is called “It Isn’t You Anymore” and the lead characters are named Alessia and Marius. (pause) Now you tell me what you think your play is about.

VANESSA

Is it really *that* obvious?

BRITNEY

People often mistakenly refer to the characters as Vanessa and Darius during rehearsals, haven’t you ever noticed that?

VANESSA

I can’t tell the difference between Vanessa and Alessia or Darius and Marius.

BRITNEY

Don’t go confusing their names now.

VANESSA

Alright so the play is about my boyfriend and I.

BRITNEY

Nothing peculiar about that. Writers use the people they know as characters all the time, it’s flattering really.

VANESSA

I don’t think Darius is going to like that I based a character off of him.

BRITNEY

Too sensitive?

VANESSA

He’s too insensitive. (pause) That’s why I’m breaking up with him.

BRITNEY

You and Darius are over?

VANESSA

We will be.

**VANESSA rubs her shoulder slightly.**

BRITNEY

Has he been hitting you again?

VANESSA

No, not recently. Why do you ask?

BRITNEY

You’re rubbing your shoulder. Did he give you another bruise in the same spot?

**She rolls up her sleeve.**

VANESSA

 It’s an old bruise.

BRITNEY

I really hope that you hit and punch him back sometimes. Give him a taste of his own medicine.

VANESSA

I choose to leave violence to men who always have something to prove. (pause) But just to give you some peace of mind, he hasn’t touched me in weeks.

BRITNEY

I really hope that you’re telling the truth.

VANESSA

I am. (pause) Most of my scars and bruises are almost gone.

BRITNEY

Is that why you want to end it? Because of the abuse?

VANESSA

I’m just not very happy being with him.

BRITNEY

Have you told him yet?

VANESSA

Told him what?

BRITNEY

That you want to end the relationship.

VANESSA

I’m not going to tell him at all.

BRITNEY

What does that mean? If you break up with someone they really ought to know. And the one way for them to know is to have a conversation with them.

VANESSA

I don’t have to say anything. I can show him.

BRITNEY

And just how are you going to show him?

VANESSA

In a creative way.

BRITNEY

Why am I not surprised? And when is this creativity going to break his heart exactly?

VANESSA

April 12th to be exact.

BRITNEY

That’s tomorrow.

VANESSA

Yes.

BRITNEY

Which also happens to be the premiere of “It’s Not You Anymore.”

VANESSA

“It *Isn’t* You Anymore.”

BRITNEY

What is?

VANESSA

It’s not “not”, it’s “isn’t.”

BRITNEY

What?

VANESSA

You got the title wrong, but anyways that’s not the point.

BRITNEY

Tell me the point then.

VANESSA

Darius and I are breaking up tomorrow, the same night as the premiere of the play…do you see what I’m getting at?

**Brief silence.**

BRITNEY

(shocked) This entire play is about the end of your relationship!

VANESSA

Bingo.

BRITNEY

So…you’re putting this play on just to break up with him?

VANESSA

That is my intention.

BRITNEY

Wow.

VANESSA

Am I doing something wrong? Do you think I’ve gone too far this time? I mean, believe it or not, I do have limits.

BRITNEY

You sure about that? (pause) If you’re not happy with him then you should end it, but maybe writing it into a play isn’t the best way to do it. It may actually hurt him, no matter how insensitive he might be. You wouldn’t want him to get angry either.

VANESSA

He won’t lay a single hand on me, I’m not worried about that.

BRITNEY

Why aren’t you worried about that? Has he given you the same old: “I’ll never do it again baby” speech again?

VANESSA

He’s learned to control himself. Like I said he hasn’t touched me in weeks.

BRITNEY

I see, but going back to your play. (pause) So you actually utilized time and effort to craft a piece of fiction that you hope will end an authentic romantic relationship?

VANESSA

When you put it like that it sounds crazy, doesn’t it?

BRITNEY

Crazy for the average person, but normal for you.

VANESSA

Maybe I’m so normal that I’m crazy.

BRITNEY

Now it’s all beginning to make sense. (pause) The names of the characters, the emotional arcs, your irritability, your anxiety; this play has token its toll on you.

VANESSA

Everything I ever write takes a toll on me. (pause) The line between fiction and reality is being blurred. The character Marius is going to have his heart broken just as the real person Darius is going to have his heart broken.

BRITNEY

Between the two of them, who do you think will take it better?

VANESSA

At least I have control over my fiction, I have no control over reality.

BRITNEY

You know there’s still the option of just talking with him, he would most likely prefer that over seeing it acted out on stage. (pause) You’re going to go all “Hamlet” on him.

VANESSA

Britney, I want to hurt him. I want to look out into the audience and see him cringe at the things we went through. I want this play to destroy Darius and as you put it: “be a hit.”

BRITNEY

Two birds with one stone: a successful play and a man’s heartache.

VANESSA

Exactly.

BRITNEY

But I thought you were worried about hurting him?

VANESSA

I am but at the same time I want him to be hurt…I don’t know. I have mixed feelings about the play. (pause) One thing I am sure about is that I don’t want to be with him anymore.

BRITNEY

You were once happy with him, weren’t you? Even despite some of the abuse?

VANESSA

Once. But not now. Not at all.

DARIUS (o.s.)

Vanessa? Hello? Are you here?

VANESSA

Fuck, that sounds like Darius.

BRITNEY

What is he doing here?

VANESSA

He must be looking for me. I haven’t answered any of his texts or phone calls.

BRITNEY

How come?

VANESSA

He was at some party earlier and I wasn’t in the mood to listen to his drunk ramblings.

BRITNEY

Oh my God, did he drive over here?

VANESSA

Britney, this is New York City. He could take the subway, a taxi, an Uber-

DARIUS (o.s.)

Vanessa? You got any change? I parked my car outside and I need some change for the meter.

BRITNEY

He’s an intoxicated driver!

**Enter DARIUS TREADWELL, stumbling slightly.**

DARIUS (slightly slurred)

Here you are. I’ve been calling you from the lobby, didn’t you hear me?

VANESSA

We were talking.

DARIUS

You must be deaf, I was yelling awfully loud.

BRITNEY

Hello Darius. *I* could hear you from the lobby.

DARIUS

Britney, how are you?

BRITNEY

Very well and yourself? Have you had a few?

DARIUS

I’ve had a couple gin & tonics.

VANESSA

Why are you here? What happened to the party?

DARIUS

I want to take you back to the party with me. You know, give you the proper chance to catch up. Get on my level.

BRITNEY

I think you two should be left alone.

**BRITNEY rises and begins to exit.**

VANESSA

Uh Britney?

DARIUS (to VANESSA)

Come on sweetheart, let’s get going.

BRITNEY

If you two insist on going to that party, let me drive you.

DARIUS

I have my car parked outside.

BRITNEY

And I’m amazed you could even park it and not crash into the theatre.

VANESSA

Darius, I don’t want to go to any party. I’d rather stay here.

DARIUS

At the theatre?

BRITNEY

That’s what she wants.

DARIUS

Stay out of this Britney. You always have to get involved in other people’s shit, don’t you?

VANESSA

Darius, don’t talk to her like that.

BRITNEY

And that is my cue to exit, good night Tony and Maria. (to VANESSA) I’ll see you tomorrow.

VANESSA

Good night Britney.

**Exit BRITNEY FRANK.**

DARIUS

I tell ya, I try to be polite with her but she really gets on my nerves. You need to start making better friends.

VANESSA

You were far from polite.

DARIUS

I told you I tried.

VANESSA

Uh huh.

DARIUS

You look great tonight. Do you always dress like this for your rehearsals? Do people stare at you? I bet that they do.

VANESSA

Stop it.

DARIUS

Come on, you don’t want to hang out in some run-down theatre. Let’s get going. This place gets more and more depressing the longer you stand inside it.

VANESSA

No.

DARIUS

Can we at least go to a bar or a club? Some place where they serve alcohol?

VANESSA

You’ve had enough.

DARIUS

I have a high tolerance, you should know that.

VANESSA

How many gin & tonics did you have?

DARIUS

Two.

VANESSA

Two?

DARIUS

I told you that I only had a couple. (pause) What’s the matter with you? Did I do something?

VANESSA

I’m okay, just tired.

DARIUS

Your play is happening tomorrow night, right?

VANESSA

Yes and I *insist* that you come.

DARIUS

If I have to.

VANESSA

Thanks. You really had to contemplate it, didn’t you?

DARIUS

Will you pay for the ticket?

VANESSA

Darius that’s just-

DARIUS

Calm yourself, I’m only fucking with you. (pause) Now, why don’t we leave now? This place has put you in a foul mood. Let’s go back to my place.

VANESSA

I’d really rather just be here tonight. I don’t want to go to any parties, clubs, bars or any place that is jammed to the ceiling with extraverted, obnoxious people.

DARIUS

So come back to my apartment then.

VANESSA

I don’t want to do that either.

DARIUS

If that’s how you feel, then I’ll stay here and keep you company.

**VANESSA sighs.**

DARIUS

Okay I won’t then. I’ll just go back to the party.

**VANESSA grabs him by the arm.**

VANESSA

No, it’s alright. Sit with me for a little while.

DARIUS

You always want to be alone, don’t you? Even when you’re with me.

VANESSA

If I wanted to be alone I wouldn’t have asked you to stay.

DARIUS

Are we good?

VANESSA

Why do you ask?

DARIUS

You seem a little more annoyed at me than usual.

VANESSA

We’re fine. (sighs) My mind is just wrapped up in getting this play off of the ground.

DARIUS

It will be great. (pause) Hopefully.

VANESSA (sarcastically)

So supportive.

DARIUS

Hold my hand. We can sit here and talk for awhile.

VANESSA

What if I don’t want to hold your hand?

DARIUS

You hate me, don’t you?

VANESSA

No I don’t.

DARIUS

I told you I was sorry for-

VANESSA

I don’t want to get into it. Okay? (pause) We’ve already been over that.

**VANESSA takes him by the hand and just as they are about to sit down in the middle of the stage, the lights all fade out except for a single spotlight on VANESSA.**

**Exit DARIUS TREADWELL.**

**Enter DETECTIVE NASH.**

NASH

And what did the two of you discuss?

VANESSA

My play mostly. He told me that he was actually excited to see it, even though he detested the poetry I used to write for him. He always said I could be a great writer if I tried harder. (pause) He would do that a lot in our relationship.

NASH

What would he do?

VANESSA

Fill me up with confidence and praise, and then knock me down to size by insulting me.

NASH

Did you love him?

VANESSA

Is that relevant?

NASH

Honestly, yes.

VANESSA

I did at one point. But once I started writing “It Isn’t You Anymore”, my feelings changed.

NASH

You never communicated these feelings to Mr. Treadwell?

VANESSA

Only through my writing.

NASH

Mr. Treadwell had the tendency to physically harm you, is that correct?

VANESSA

Yes.

NASH

Were you afraid that he may physically attack you if you were to discuss your feelings?

VANESSA

No. Like I said, we had already been through that. I really just wanted to end things with him in an unconventional, cruel way.

NASH

Because of the abuse?

VANESSA

Why does everyone fixate on that? It was a small part of the relationship.

NASH

Many would disagree with you Ms. Hurtz. Physical or emotional abuse in an interpersonal relationship is very serious.

VANESSA

I know. Maybe because I’m an artist I have a different temperament.

NASH

Maybe you do.

**NASH begins pacing around the stage.**

NASH

You were studying English at Columbia, is that right?

VANESSA

Yes.

NASH

What was Mr. Treadwell studying?

VANESSA

Criminology, but he was just about to transfer to Business.

NASH

Did Mr. Treadwell seem uneasy that night before the play?

VANESSA

Just a little drunk. Why do you ask?

NASH

I’m just attempting to understand why Mr. Treadwell was concealing a firearm in his coat that night. Was he paranoid?

VANESSA

No, at least he didn’t seem like he was.

NASH

Was he angry? Depressed? Suicidal?

VANESSA

Not Darius. He seemed his usual self when we were on stage talking. (pause) Darius never seemed unsure about anything. I liked that about him, but obviously there was a lot that I didn’t like.

NASH

During the course of your relationship, did Mr. Treadwell ever mention that his father was involved with organized crime?

VANESSA

You mean his Dad was with the Mafia?

NASH

Organized crime is the term we prefer. Were you aware of that?

VANESSA

He always told me that his father was dead. He told me that he died in a car accident when he was very young. But his father is actually part of the mob?

NASH

His father isn’t necessarily a member of organized crime, he just has a few ties which we have recently discovered through our investigation. And these ties may or may not have something to do with Darius’ possession and subsequent firing of the gun he concealed.

VANESSA

I didn’t know his family very well, we spent most of our time together in the city because of school.

NASH

Did you tell anyone, besides your assistant Britney Frank, about the true intentions of your play?

VANESSA

Just Britney.

NASH

I see.

VANESSA

I mean even if I had told Darius, why would that motivate him to bring a gun to the theatre? That wouldn’t make any sense.

NASH

He could’ve been planning his own cathartic entertainment just like you, perhaps by shooting you or himself during the play. He had a history of abuse.

VANESSA

But he didn’t know about it, he couldn’t even remember the name of the play. (pause) Even if he had found out, violence wouldn’t be his first reaction.

NASH

I believe you, Ms. Hurtz.

VANESSA

You do?

NASH

You haven’t given me a reason not to.

VANESSA

I am being as honest as I can.

NASH

I appreciate that.

VANESSA

What really surprises me is that someone would want to shoot him.

NASH

That’s why you’re here, we want to know.

VANESSA

I wish I had known that he was in danger like that.

NASH

Do you believe that he was in danger?

VANESSA

Well yeah, he must’ve been. The man was shot. If it had been some sort of mass shooting, we all would’ve been targets. But Darius was clearly the only person in trouble. (pause) I certainly had no idea that was going to happen.

**Brief silence.**

VANESSA

Do you think it’s my fault? I did try to stop it. Ask Fred, he was there!

NASH

Just keep answering my questions Vanessa. You’re doing fine.

VANESSA

Okay.

NASH

In order to put the pieces together of what happened on the evening of April 12th, we’ll have to find out what transpired at the party Mr. Treadwell attended.

VANESSA

What is so important about that?

NASH

We have some eye witnesses who saw him talking with Becky Lefave, she’s a friend of yours, right?

VANESSA

I never met her before, I know that she was close with Fred.

NASH

Fred Best and Mitchell Romano were also at that party, according to the testimony of the eye witnesses.

VANESSA

I wasn’t even invited to this party. I had rehearsal anyways.

NASH

We have reason to believe that something may have happened at this party which may have put this conflict into motion and resulted in Darius Treadwell being shot, but we have to know what happened that night.

**VANESSA coughs.**

VANESSA

I want to know as badly as you.

NASH

There is one piece of information that you may know, and this information would be very valuable to the investigation.

VANESSA

What is that?

NASH

Where is Fred Best? We’d really like to speak with him.

**BLACKOUT**

**Act 1, Scene 3**

**The lights fade in on stage to reveal the living room of a house. The room is filled with twenty to thirty year olds drinking and smoking, with quiet R&B music playing in the background. FRED BEST is sitting CS on a couch alone.**

**Enter MITCHELL ROMANO. He sits next to FRED on the couch.**

FRED

How nice of you to show up.

MITCHELL

I’m sorry.

FRED

Where were you?

MITCHELL

Don’t worry about it Fred. I’m here now, that’s what counts.

FRED

True but where were you before you got here?

MITCHELL

You don’t wanna know and I don’t wanna talk about it.

FRED

I haven’t even had a drink yet. Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for you?

MITCHELL

Over an hour?

FRED

And do you know how long that is?

MITCHELL

I would assume any time past sixty minutes.

FRED

That’s right and it’s way too long for me to-

MITCHELL

Fred, calm down. I’m already on edge as it is.

FRED

Did something happen? What exactly took you so long?

MITCHELL

Fred, do you mind?

FRED

Yes I do mind, something is the matter with you and I’d like to know what it is. You think you can just keep me waiting like this? Now where the hell were you?

MITCHELL

You can’t know Fred. No one can know actually.

FRED

You know!

MITCHELL

Yes and believe me, I don’t wanna know. (pause) It’s just something I… signed up for, and now I have to put my money where my mouth is.

FRED

You haven’t been answering my texts or calls over the last few days, hell you’ve barely been showing up to class.

MITCHELL

I show up to class.

FRED

But I never see you.

MITCHELL

I sit way at the back. No one ever lays an eye on me.

FRED

Mitch, come on-

MITCHELL

It’s a secret. Even if I were to tell you…I-

FRED

Alright, if you don’t want to tell me then you don’t have to. The last thing I’d want to do is make you uncomfortable. (pause) You’re so secretive all of a sudden.

MITCHELL

Why don’t we just focus on having fun, eh?

FRED

It’s Thursday night, who attends a party on a Thursday night?

MITCHELL

We do. So, let’s have a good time.

FRED

Okay then. (pause) Quite a crowd here tonight.

**MITCHELL pulls a joint out of his pocket and ignites it with a lighter.**

MITCHELL

A lot of people, and yet no one worth talking to. (pause) Has Becky shown up yet?

FRED

Haven’t seen her.

MITCHELL

I thought that she was coming with you. That’s what you told me yesterday when I ran into you in the hall.

FRED

Yeah after you ignored the text I sent! You haven’t been responding to the group chat either.

MITCHELL

I wasn’t going to tell you this but I destroyed my phone.

FRED

You did what?

MITCHELL

I took a hammer and smashed my phone. It felt great actually. Like casting off the shackles of the 21st century.

FRED

But why? What on Earth would make you willingly smash your phone?

MITCHELL (sighing)

It has to do with the thing that I’m not at liberty to discuss.

FRED

Whatever Mitch. (pause) And just so you know, I don’t keep tabs on her whereabouts.

MITCHELL

Well you should, I mean if you’re really interested in her. You ought to frequent the places where she frequents, even her house.

FRED

That would be stalking.

MITCHELL

Come on Fred, girls are used to that. In fact, I think they encourage it. Girls live off attention, they just like to make us guys work for it.

FRED

Do you hear yourself? I wouldn’t be saying those kinds of things on campus or in any polite company. (pause) Actually, don’t even say those things at all, they’re incredibly sexist.

MITCHELL

Fuck off. You have to be politically correct all the time. Doesn’t that exhaust you?

FRED

It’s not just about political correctness, it’s about morality.

MITCHELL

Morality? People would have to Google that word to decipher its meaning, it’s so ancient. Do you think people are that concerned about morality anymore?

FRED

I am.

MITCHELL

Is Vanessa coming tonight?

FRED

I think she has her last rehearsal tonight at the theatre.

MITCHELL

“It Isn’t You Anymore”?

FRED

That’s the one.

MITCHELL

Fucking stupid title.

FRED

Yes but we should be supportive.

MITCHELL

So you’re planning on seeing it?

FRED

Yeah, what about you?

MITCHELL

I wouldn’t dream of missing it. (pause) You want some?

FRED

Yeah.

**FRED puffs lightly on the joint and then coughs dramatically.**

MITCHELL

I always forget that you don’t smoke.

FRED (coughing)

Only occasionally.

MITCHELL

I’m surprised that you’re willing to get high. Wouldn’t you want to be in full mental capacity when Becky shows up?

FRED

I hardly inhaled. And since when do you like to get high?

MITCHELL

I only smoke when I’m nervous. Same with drinking actually, if it were up to me I wouldn’t drink. But my anxiety demands it.

FRED

There are other things you can turn to besides drugs.

MITCHELL

With what’s been happening with me, I’m afraid not to be on something.

FRED

So something did happen to you? I knew it!

MITCHELL

I told you to let it go.

FRED

I just care about you that’s all.

MITCHELL

I know Fred and I can appreciate that, but this doesn’t concern you. It’s a family matter.

FRED

You once told me that you considered me family.

**MITCHELL sighs.**

MITCHELL

You’re like a brother to me. But brothers occasionally keep things from each other.

FRED

Secrets don’t make friends.

MITCHELL

I said we were *brothers.* Brothers have secrets.

FRED

Uh huh, I’m sure that they do. (pause) Whose house is this anyways?

MITCHELL

Someone told me it was a professor’s house, one of the younger ones in the Philosophy department.

FRED

This is a professor’s house? That wasn’t mentioned in the Facebook description.

MITCHELL

That’s just what I heard. Who knows if it’s actually true. People are always lying.

FRED

You’re too cynical. I’ve never lied to you about anything.

MITCHELL

You have, it’s just human nature.

FRED

Being dishonest?

MITCHELL

Yes, dishonesty, inauthenticity; call it what you like, humans lie to each other.

FRED

So then you’ve lied to me?

MITCHELL

Fred, I don’t know if this interrogating attitude of yours is because you’re anxious about talking with Becky, but you better cut it out.

FRED

I’m not interrogating you. You should relax.

MITCHELL

I’ll relax if you relax.

**Enter BECKY LEFAVE.**

FRED

Mitchell, there she is!

MITCHELL

Calm down and don’t approach her right away. She just got here.

FRED

Did you see that picture that she posted of the two of us?

MITCHELL

The picture of you two which was captioned as “best friends.” I think I came across something like that in my Twitter feed.

FRED

She posted it on Instagram actually so I know you didn’t see it, it got almost ninety likes.

MITCHELL

She would’ve had better luck with Twitter. Could’ve gotten more retweets.

FRED

Here let me show you.

MITCHELL

Aw Fred, I don’t-

**FRED pulls his phone out of his pocket.**

FRED

Look at this.

MITCHELL

Did you save the damn picture?

FRED

Of course.

MITCHELL

Because you think she may delete it so you’d like to have some proof?

FRED

No, I saved it because it’s a nice picture. I don’t always have an ulterior motive. I genuinely like the picture.

MITCHELL

Look at you two, drinking perfectly brewed coffee, the light from the sun hitting the orange mugs just right, no bags under your eyes, dressed flamboyantly. Just like the rest of us. Life is so damn perfect, isn’t it Fred? What filter did she use?

FRED

I don’t know but it makes us look nice. Look at the contrast.

MITCHELL

It makes her look nice, you look like somebody spilled that hot coffee on your lap.

FRED

Yeah, yeah; I think I should go talk to her now. She’s standing all by herself over there, looking all lonely and sad.

MITCHELL

Isn’t that how she always looks?

**Enter DARIUS TREADWELL.**

FRED

You don’t really give a shit, do you?

MITCHELL

Not really. And do you know why?

FRED

Tell me.

MITCHELL

Because you, Fred Best, romanticize people way too often. Especially girls. You think every little thing about everyone is so meaningful, beautiful and sensational; but in reality, you’re wrong. It all amounts to nothing.

FRED

Why must you always be so dark? Doesn’t it exhaust you to be cynical all the time?

MITCHELL

How do you expect me to answer that?

FRED

I don’t.

**Brief silence.**

FRED

That weed is starting to kick in.

MITCHELL (bluntly)

I don’t feel anything. (pause) I’m going through something at the moment and I don’t know what to do. I’ve gotten myself in a bad spot and I’m not sure how to get out of it.

FRED

Oh, so suddenly you’re going to be sensitive after being so abrasive? What is the matter with you?

MITCHELL

I wish I knew.

FRED

Hey, isn’t that Darius?

**FRED points over at DARIUS who is standing next to Becky USR amidst the other people at the party.**

MITCHELL

Darius? You mean the Darius Treadwell?

FRED

Woah, suddenly he has a high enough status to be referred to as “the”?

MITCHELL

Darius.

FRED

Yeah, Vanessa’s boyfriend. I wonder if she’s here too.

MITCHELL

You’re sure that it’s Darius standing over there? Not someone who just happens to look like him?

FRED

Very sure, I mean it’s a little dark in here but-

MITCHELL

Listen Fred, I’ve got to get going.

FRED

How come?

MITCHELL

The family matter, I really have to leave.

FRED

You seriously have to go?

MITCHELL

Yes.

FRED

Mitchell, will you at least text me when you get home? I don’t know what’s going on with you but you’re freaking me out.

MITCHELL

My phone is gone Fred.

FRED

Right. Well, have a good night.

MITCHELL

I will. (pause) I’ll see you at the play tomorrow night. And hey, good luck with Becky.

FRED

Do you honestly mean that?

MITCHELL

I wouldn’t lie to you.

**Exit MITCHELL ROMANO.**

FRED (to himself)

What is going on with him?

BECKY

Is this seat taken?

FRED

Yes it is, by you.

**She sits next to him on the couch.**

BECKY

By me? Becky Lefave?

FRED

That’s right, so why don’t you just sit down then?

BECKY

I think I just did.

FRED (laughing)

You look awesome.

BECKY

Thank you, I stole my sister’s pants. Can you believe they actually fit me better than they fit her? I’m bigger than her.

FRED

Does the whole outfit belong to your sister or just the pants?

BECKY (laughing)

The whole outfit actually.

FRED

You’re a thief.

BECKY

I asked for her permission. And when she said “no”, I took her clothes anyways.

FRED

So how are you?

BECKY

I’m doing well, happy that exams are almost over.

FRED

How have they been going so far?

BECKY

Good. (pause) Except that I was almost caught cheating.

FRED

Becky, you cheated on one of your exams?

BECKY

Yes.

FRED

How did you do it?

BECKY

It wasn’t that bad. I just wrote a few notes on my hand. There are worse ways to cheat.

FRED

Cheating is still cheating.

BECKY

I know it was wrong, but I got away with it. (pause) I thought I was done for when the professor called out: “Becky!” But she wanted the other Becky in the class.

FRED

Well, I hope you did well on that exam.

BECKY

I cheated, didn’t I?

**BECKY laughs.**

BECKY

How are your exams going?

**Brief silence.**

BECKY

Badly?

FRED

They’re not going at all actually.

BECKY

What does that mean?

FRED

I…I wasn’t going to tell anyone this now but-

BECKY

Fred?

FRED

I dropped out.

BECKY

You mean you’re not in your program anymore? Like you’re completely out of the school altogether?

FRED

Yes. It’s something I’ve been thinking about for a long time. And it turns out that university isn’t the most viable option for what it is I want to do. (pause) Believe me, I didn’t do this on any kind of impulse. I really did think it through.

BECKY

It doesn’t seem like you’ve thought it through. You didn’t think to tell me any of this. I could’ve helped you sort yourself out.

FRED

You’re treating this like I killed someone, I’m just not enrolled in Columbia anymore.

BECKY

So that’s it? You’re throwing in the towel just like that? You’re not even going to finish the semester?

FRED

I’m done. University just isn’t who I want to be anymore.

BECKY

Fred, I have to say I’m surprised. I mean you had one of the highest GPAs in your program, you were on your course union, all these student societies, you were even going to be a part time tutor and now-

FRED

It doesn’t matter to me. None of it is worth anything.

BECKY

Fred, don’t say that! You ought to be proud of everything you’ve accomplished; only two years into the program and look how far you’ve come.

FRED

I enjoyed all those things, at the time. But now it’s different.

BECKY

So what happens now?

FRED

With me?

BECKY

Yeah, what is your plan? I mean, one doesn’t drop out of school without some kind of a plan.

FRED

I do have a plan.

BECKY

Let’s hear it.

FRED

You’re going to think I’ve lost my mind when I tell you my plan.

BECKY

How crazy is it?

FRED

I’m going to move to Los Angeles.

BECKY

That’s not crazy. People leave New York for LA all the time.

FRED

I’ve managed to save up enough money to rent an apartment just along Sunset Boulevard, and I’ve secured a job at a Starbucks there as well.

BECKY (laughing)

So you’re going to be like Emma Stone in “La La Land”?

FRED

I don’t want to be a star. (pause) Vanessa is the one who wants to be a star.

BECKY

Maybe she ought to go out to LA. She’s the one who wrote the play we’re seeing tomorrow night, right?

FRED

Yeah that’s her. I’m sure she will move to LA, one day.

BECKY

Why do you want to live there if you’re not interested in show business?

FRED

I’d just like to live in California, but not alone though. I’d like to be with someone.

BECKY

Like who?

FRED

Becky, I want you to come with me.

**Awkward silence.**

BECKY

And there’s the crazy part.

FRED

Is it that crazy?

BECKY

Maybe not completely crazy, but…Fred I-

FRED

I want you to be with me. And I can tell you feel the same way. We’ve had each other’s backs for over a year now. I mean, Becky, you can’t sit next to me and tell me that you don’t feel something for me. We’ve spent all this time together. We really know each other, completely. (pause) So what do you think? How about coming out to LA with me? We could get away from everyone and everything. Just the two of us.

BECKY

Fred, you’re throwing away a promising future because you want to live in California with me?

FRED

My future wasn’t promising. No one’s future is anything but unknown.

BECKY

You had a lot going for you.

FRED

No, I didn’t.

BECKY

I don’t know what to make of this.

FRED

You don’t have to decide right this second. Think about it.

BECKY

Fred, even if I wanted to do this, I need to finish school. I’ve worked too hard to just drop everything and run away the way you want to.

FRED

You could take a leave, you don’t have to completely drop out like I did. Just talk to your program director and take a semester off. It’s so easy.

BECKY

I’d be disappointing so many people, especially myself.

FRED

You’re not listening. You wouldn’t drop out. It would be a break.

BECKY

Fred, you wouldn’t accept that.

FRED

What?

BECKY

If I came out and went back to New York three months later, that wouldn’t be what you initially wanted. You want me stay there with you. You want a wife.

FRED

Don’t you want that?

BECKY

I don’t even feel that way about you. I’m sorry.

FRED

Really?

BECKY

I couldn’t be there with you as just a friend. It wouldn’t make sense for either one of us.

FRED

I guess you couldn’t.

BECKY

I could come and visit you. I don’t have any problem doing that.

**Brief silence.**

FRED

I don’t know if I’ll be going anymore now.

BECKY

Because of me?

FRED

Why don’t you like me?

BECKY

Fred.

FRED

Forget what I said. It’s okay.

BECKY

I’m sort of seeing someone right now as it is.

FRED

You are? Who?

BECKY

It’s not too serious, we’ve only been on a few dates but-

FRED

Who is this person?

BECKY

He’s actually here tonight.

FRED

In this room?

BECKY

Yeah.

FRED

Where and who?

BECKY

Darius Treadwell. He’s just on the other side of the room.

FRED

You’ve been on a few dates with Darius?

BECKY

Yeah, I meant to tell you but I wanted to wait and see how things went with him.

FRED

Of all the people-

BECKY

You know him?

FRED

Yes, as a matter of fact, I…fuck it.

BECKY

There he is.

**Fred turns around to witness DARIUS standing USL, he slowly approaches BECKY and sits next to her on the couch, forcing FRED to slide over.**

**Exit BECKY and DARIUS.**

**Enter DETECTIVE NASH.**

FRED

And that was when they went off together.

NASH

You didn’t consider telling Becky that Darius was dating Vanessa?

FRED

She broke my heart, ruined my future plans; I stopped caring.

NASH

Was she even aware that you and Vanessa were friends?

FRED

I mentioned Vanessa to her a few times, in fact I even invited her to come and see “It Isn’t You Anymore.”

NASH

Why?

FRED

Because I wanted her to meet Vanessa, she’s one of the closest friends I have. And I thought that Becky was going to be with me at that time. You know, like a girlfriend.

NASH

Did she accept your invitation?

FRED

She did, but after the party she decided not to go. So, she never ended up meeting Vanessa.

NASH

I suppose that Darius never mentioned to Becky that he was already in a relationship with Vanessa.

FRED

Why would he? He was cheating on her. The asshole.

NASH

Mr. Best, were you angry with Mr. Treadwell?

FRED

No.

NASH

Now Mr. Best, you have to be honest with me.

FRED

I was angry with him, he was hooking up with the girl I wanted to live with. I guess I felt that she wouldn’t move out to California with me all because of him. (pause) What you fail to understand Detective is that I gave up everything to be with her. And when I found out she would rather be with Darius…it was awful.

NASH

I can sympathize with you Mr. Best.

FRED

Would you please call me by my first name?

NASH

Fred, we’re going to have to move on to another portion of the questions I wish to ask you.

FRED

Uh huh.

NASH

Now you mentioned that Mitchell Romano had been acting extremely suspicious at this party, but he wouldn’t divulge to you why he was acting in this manner.

FRED

Yes that’s true. But it started even before the party, like I told you he wouldn’t answer any texts or calls. And after everything that happened that night at the theatre, I still don’t understand how-

NASH

Fred, did you and Mitchell conspire to shoot Darius Treadwell that night?

FRED

Me? Of course not! What Mitchell did to Darius had nothing to do with me.

NASH

You said yourself that you were angry with Darius because of Becky, and the following evening Darius is shot by your friend Mitchell Romano, with you in the audience watching voyeuristically.

FRED

I saw it. And I wish I could’ve stopped it but I didn’t have the slightest notion that Mitchell was going to shoot Darius. (pause) Vanessa had no idea either, no one knew about Mitchell’s assassination plan. And she tried to stop it herself when she saw Mitchell with the gun!

NASH

The only person that could’ve known about Mitchell’s actions were you, his best friend. You were the last person to see him out in public before the shooting.

FRED

But he wouldn’t tell me one damn thing, he was so secretive. I didn’t know anything!

NASH

It’s not at all possible that you knew about Mr. Romano’s family’s background and hired your best friend to shoot Mr. Treadwell?

FRED

What about their background?

NASH

Fred, Mitchell Romano’s family is an organized crime syndicate.

FRED

You mean Mitchell and his family are the mob?

NASH

An Italian American organized crime syndicate, the Romanos have been known to the FBI for ages now, but they’ve always managed to elude us.

FRED

I’m in shock. I swear he never mentioned this to me for as long I’ve known him.

NASH

You’re asserting that you had no inkling of Mitchell Romano and what kind of business his family was in?

FRED

No!

NASH

Are you telling me the complete truth?

FRED

I am, honestly I am!

NASH

You didn’t speak to Mr. Romano at all before the premiere of “It Isn’t You Anymore”?

FRED

The very last time I saw him was at that party. And like I told you, as soon as he spotted Darius there, he instantly left. It was almost as if he feared being in the same room as him. (pause) The next time I saw my friend, he had a gun in his hand.

NASH

That’s very interesting.

FRED

I’m telling you the truth sir, as much as I was angry with Darius I would never wish him any physical harm.

NASH

I see.

FRED

Go to the theatre, the play begins, Mitchell rises up out of the audience and shoots Darius in his seat, Darius then pulls out his own gun and shoots Mitchell with his last ounce of strength…it was tragic. They’re dead now. I hope that you guys are able to find a motive. We all want to know why this happened.

NASH

We’re done for now Mr. Best.

FRED

One thing I don’t understand though is-

NASH

What is that Mr. Best?

FRED

Why did Darius also bring a gun to the theatre that night?

**BLACKOUT**

**Act 1, Scene 4**

**The lights fade back in on stage to reveal the same interior of the off-Broadway theatre.**

**Enter DARIUS TREADWELL.**

DARIUS (on the phone):

I’m not going to be home tonight. (pause) I told you already, tonight is the first performance of Vanessa’s play. (pause) I told her I’d be here. I know you said to be careful in public. (pause) I am being careful, I’ve got it in my coat. (pause) Relax Dad, nothing is going to happen. (pause) How would they know where I am? (pause) We can’t just keep running like this, we should stand up to these guys. (pause) I hate to remind you but this is what you get when you don’t pay people back. They’re gangsters, they don’t give a fuck if we live or die. (pause) I know that you didn’t ask for my opinion, but you’re going to hear it regardless. (pause) I’m sick and tired of lying to people Dad, all my friends think you’re dead. Vanessa doesn’t even know that you’re alive. (pause) How much longer is this going to go on? (pause) I keep telling you, just go to the police. They have fucking agents who look after these things. (pause) Alright, I promise I’ll keep my wits about me. (pause) Nothing will happen, I’m in a theatre. I’m perfectly safe where I am. (pause) I’ll be home next week. (pause) Bye. (pause) Yes, I’ll call you tomorrow.

**Exit DARIUS. He takes an empty seat in the actual audience.**

**Enter VANESSA and BRITNEY.**

BRITNEY (looking out into the audience)

This is it?

VANESSA

That’s a lot of people. Too many to even stop and count.

BRITNEY

It looks like a big audience to you because you’re nervous.

VANESSA

I’ll have you know that I’m very calm.

VANESSA

Have you seen Darius yet? He should be here by now.

BRITNEY

The doors just opened.

VANESSA

He said he would come, I’ll kill him if he doesn’t show up.

BRITNEY

If he doesn’t show up, I guess you’ll actually have to break up with him over text like a normal person.

VANESSA

He’ll be here.

**Enter FRED BEST.**

FRED

Hey there!

VANESSA

Aw Fred, you came!

**VANESSA hugs FRED.**

FRED

Obviously, I couldn’t pass up the biggest night of your life.

VANESSA

I don’t know if it’s that big.

FRED

This is off-Broadway, you’re so close to the real thing.

VANESSA (to Britney)

This is Fred, one of my friends from Columbia.

BRITNEY (shaking Fred’s hand)

I’m Britney, nice to meet you.

VANESSA

Britney is my assistant.

BRITNEY

And confidant.

VANESSA

Fred, you showed up empty handed. Where is this girl I’ve been hearing so much about? What’s her name again?

FRED

Becky.

VANESSA

Yes, where is she?

FRED

She couldn’t make it, something came up.

VANESSA

Everything okay with her?

FRED

I’ll talk to you about it later. I don’t really need to get into it right now. You wouldn’t want to hear about it anyways. (pause) Where is Darius?

BRITNEY

She was just asking me the same question.

VANESSA

He’ll be here, shortly.

FRED

Uh huh. And how is everything going between you two?

VANESSA

Oh we’re fine, why do you ask?

FRED

I just hope that you’re alright.

VANESSA

I couldn’t be happier.

FRED

I’m just asking because I’ve heard about his-

VANESSA

He hasn’t laid a hand on me in weeks. Things have gotten better.

BRITNEY

And yet you had to write this play.

FRED

I’m so excited to see it.

VANESSA

I think everyone here tonight will appreciate it in their own way. I’m very happy with it. (pause) Is Mitchell on his way?

FRED

I can’t even begin to think about his whereabouts. He’s been an enigma lately.

VANESSA

How so?

FRED

Has he been answering your texts?

VANESSA

I never text him.

FRED

Well he smashed his phone for some apparent reason. He wouldn’t tell me why except that he wasn’t “at liberty to discuss it.”

VANESSA

When did you start noticing this behavior?

FRED

We went to that party last night, he showed up late and began acting very bizarre and aloof. Then he just left in a hurry. I haven’t seen him since.

VANESSA

Interesting. (pause) He’s not in any kind of trouble, is he?

FRED

Not that I’m aware of.

BRITNEY

Oh he has to be. Destroying his most vital form of contact, acting secretive, leaving parties early; this friend of yours sounds like he’s in some deep shit.

VANESSA

He’s a university student, all he has on his plate is work, food and exams. There’s nothing dangerous about that.

FRED

Do you think he’s depressed?

VANESSA

Maybe.

**Enter MITCHELL ROMANO. He approaches FRED from behind, tapping him on the shoulder.**

MITCHELL (drunkenly)

Good evening.

FRED

Hey, we were literally just talking about you.

VANESSA

How’s it going Mitchell?

**VANESSA leans in to hug him.**

MITCHELL (backing away from her)

Vanessa, I’m sorry but I can’t stay. I just dropped by to wish you luck.

BRITNEY

There is no luck in the theatre, only leg breaking. (to VANESSA) I have to go make sure everything is set up, curtain in twenty minutes.

VANESSA

I’ll come back there as soon as I can.

BRITNEY

Do you have your headset?

VANESSA

I knew I was forgetting something.

BRITNEY (handing her an extra headset)

Here you go. Just make sure it’s on.

VANESSA

Thanks Britney.

**Exit BRITNEY FRANK. VANESSA places the headset over her head.**

FRED

Mitch, have you been drinking?

MITCHELL (slurred)

No. Why do you worry about me so much?

VANESSA

You smell like it.

FRED

And you sound like it.

MITCHELL (slurred)

I may be the slightest bit inebriated. But I have a good reason to be.

FRED

Why? Why do you need to be drunk on the opening night of Vanessa’s play?

VANESSA

Britney was right. You are in trouble.

MITCHELL (slurred)

I really hate it when you guys get like this. Like a bunch of god damn detectives, you just have to know everything. Probing me with accusations and questions.

FRED

Mitch, we’re your friends and we want to help you.

MITCHELL (slurred)

Keep your God damn voice down.

VANESSA

Mitchell, you can tell us anything.

**Enter DETECTIVE NASH.**

NASH (to himself)

Wait a minute.

MITCHELL (slurred)

You couldn’t begin to understand what I’m going through. What my family wants me to do. You couldn’t…understand.

FRED

Tell us, quit leaving us in the dark. We are your friends for a reason.

NASH (to himself)

None of this is adding up.

MITCHELL (slurred)

I had to get drunk in order to find the strength to do it.

VANESSA

Do what?

MITCHELL (slurred)

I shouldn’t have to do it here, but-

FRED

Do you realize what a big night this is for Vanessa? Does it occur to you that you’re screwing it up right now? Or are you too selfish to even think about that?

VANESSA

Fred, come on.

MITCHELL (slurred)

I’m here to kill someone. My family says that I have to.

FRED

Mitch, you’re just fucked up. You don’t know what you’re saying.

MITCHELL (slurred)

I’m telling the truth Fred.

**MITCHELL pulls out a hand gun.**

VANESSA

Mitchell!

FRED

What are you doing with that in your coat? Have you lost your mind?

MITCHELL (slurred)

There’s a hit on someone in this audience. And it’s my job to shoot them.

**MITCHELL aims the gun to the audience.**

VANESSA

Mitch, stop that!

FRED

You came here to kill someone?

VANESSA

This is crazy, this doesn’t make any sense!

MITCHELL (slurred)

I knew that you wouldn’t understand.

FRED

Mitch, don’t lose your nerve. Just talk to us. You don’t really want to hurt anybody.

VANESSA

Who are you going to shoot?

MITCHELL (slurred)

Vanessa, my family has ordered a hit on your boyfriend’s family.

VANESSA

Darius?

MITCHELL (slurred)

Yes. The entire Treadwell family. And I am here tonight to shoot your boyfriend.

NASH (to himself)

Mitchell Romano discussed his plan with Vanessa and Fred just before shooting Darius Treadwell?

VANESSA

You set foot in this theatre to kill Darius?

MITCHELL (slurred)

You can’t stop me. This has to be done. Or God knows what my father will do to me.

**VANESSA pauses briefly.**

VANESSA

I don’t know if I want to stop you.

FRED

Vanessa! Are you kidding me?

VANESSA

This could work.

FRED

What could work?

VANESSA

Fred, haven’t you ever wondered what your life could become if you made some rash choices?

FRED

I don’t often make any rash choices.

VANESSA

Maybe it’s because you’re afraid. But I’m not. (pause) If Darius has to be killed here tonight at the premiere of my play, then so be it.

FRED

You can’t tell me that you’re going to turn a blind eye when your own boyfriend is shot while watching your play.

VANESSA

It’s like Mitchell said, we can’t stop him.

FRED

You mean, you’re perfectly fine with this?

VANESSA

It gets me what I want.

FRED

What do you want Vanessa?

VANESSA

Attention. That’s what I want. It will be my own “Birdman.” Violence will only enhance the public’s interest in my play.

FRED

You really think by letting this happen that you’re suddenly going to be popular?

VANESSA

Why wouldn’t I? The playwright’s boyfriend is about to be murdered, unbeknownst to him and her, while watching her off-Broadway play. (pause) It’s genius.

FRED

But you can’t-

VANESSA

Fred, do you honestly think Darius’ death should be prevented? You were never crazy about him anyways.

FRED

Darius is sleeping with Becky. That’s why she’s not here.

VANESSA

You’re serious?

FRED

I found out last night. Becky doesn’t want to be with me because she’s sleeping with him.

VANESSA

I wrote this play because I wanted to end my relationship with Darius. I’m tired of being with him. I’ve had enough of him.

FRED

And his abuse?

VANESSA

Yes.

MITCHELL (slurred)

None of that matters anymore, because he is a dead man. There is no escape.

VANESSA

Do it.

MITCHELL (slurred)

You’re giving me permission?

**VANESSA nods.**

NASH (to himself)

She lied to me.

FRED

This is wrong.

VANESSA

Fred, look deep inside yourself. (pause) Darius Treadwell is better off dead. You know that.

FRED

Do it, Mitchell. Shoot the fucker.

NASH (to himself)

He lied to me.

MITCHELL

Where is he?

VANESSA

He’ll be sitting out there in the audience. He has reserved seating.

NASH (to himself)

A conspiracy.

**MITCHELL moves closer towards the audience.**

VANESSA

Mitchell, wait!

MITCHELL

Why should I wait?

VANESSA

At least let the first scene begin. (pause) I hope they enjoy it, now that the play has only been strengthened.

**Exit MITCHELL, FRED and VANESSA.**

**Enter BRITNEY FRANK.**

BRITNEY

When she turned on her headset, I could hear everything that was said.

NASH

So the two of them are involved in a conspiracy: a kind of cover up?

BRITNEY

I’m telling you only what I heard that night.

NASH

You understand I’ll have to confirm what you’ve told me. I’ll be talking with the other back stage crew members.

BRITNEY

They all heard it too. Their headsets were synced with mine and Vanessa’s.

NASH

Thank you for coming in Ms. Frank. You’ve blown this case wide open.

BRITNEY

Before I go, I think you should know that the theatre owner wants you to call him.

NASH

Did he tell you why?

BRITNEY

He just said he found something interesting backstage.

NASH

Tell him I’ll call him.

**BLACKOUT**

**Act 1, Scene 5**

**The lights fade back in on stage to reveal the interior of Detective Nash’s office. VANESSA and FRED are seated next to each other behind his desk CS.**

FRED

We’re done for. Nash must know.

VANESSA

He can’t prove anything.

FRED

Then why are we both here like this? He already spent time questioning us. What more could he possibly ask?

VANESSA

I don’t know Fred. But whatever he says, you have to deny it with every fibre of your being. This isn’t the time to panic.

FRED

I shredded that script you wrote for us. No one can get their hands on it. (pause) Vanessa, where is your script?

VANESSA

It’s at home.

FRED

You mean you still have it in your possession?

VANESSA

I don’t believe in throwing out anything I’ve written.

FRED

We followed everything precisely. We had it all planned out, how could-

**Enter DETECTIVE NASH.**

**He places the file on his desk and then proceeds to sit in the chair behind his desk CS.**

VANESSA

Good afternoon Detective Nash.

FRED

How are you today?

NASH

I’m doing well. And how are you two?

FRED

Excellent.

VANESSA

I can’t complain.

NASH

I brought you both in here to tell you that we now have a motive. We know why Mitchell killed Darius.

VANESSA

What was the reason? We must know.

FRED

Yeah, I mean I don’t think either one of us could go on living without knowing why our friend was so violently murdered that way.

NASH

It turns out that there was a hit on the entire Treadwell family, and Mitchell Romano was sent to shoot Darius. He had recently joined the ranks of his family of organized crime.

VANESSA

I can’t believe it. How could Darius’ family get mixed up in something like that? This is unbelievable. (pause) How did you get this information Mr. Nash?

NASH

It’s not a matter of how I got it, as it is who I got it from.

FRED

Well who told you this?

NASH

Why does it matter to you Mr. Best?

FRED (scoffs)

I’d just like to know, that’s all.

VANESSA

Mr. Nash, I’m not trying to rush you but I do have an interview scheduled today with-

FRED

An interview? With who?

VANESSA

Entertainment Weekly. They called me a few days ago and want to do a story on me.

NASH

Haven’t they been calling you “a shooting star”? Or something to that effect.

VANESSA (laughs)

Yeah, it’s a clever pun, considering what happened on the opening night of my play. You know someone was shot, and I’m on my way to the status of a Broadway star.

NASH

We get the pun.

FRED

Any publicity is good publicity.

NASH

You must be enjoying all the attention you’re receiving.

VANESSA

I can’t think about anything except Darius.

FRED

It was such a tragedy.

NASH (to the audience)

This is terrible acting, even for the theatre. I don’t buy it for a second.

VANESSA

Did you say something Mr. Nash?

NASH

Ms. Hurtz, are you familiar with “Rope”?

VANESSA

The material used to tie people up?

NASH

The film directed by Alfred Hitchcock, based on a Patrick Hamilton play which in turn was based on Leopold and Loeb.

VANESSA

I can’t say that I have.

NASH

Have you seen the film Fred?

FRED

What does that have to do with anything?

NASH

“Rope” is one of my favorite films, did you know it was made to look like it was one continuous shot with no cuts?

VANESSA

Like “Birdman.”

NASH

Exactly. (pause) The plot of the film concerns a pair of boyfriends who murder a friend of theirs and hide the body in a wooden chest. Testing to see if the crime is in fact fool proof, they host a dinner party with the food being served right on top of the wooden chest.

VANESSA

That’s creepy.

FRED

Very disturbing.

NASH

Precisely. What I love most about the film is the conspiring of the two characters Brandon and Philip. They planned this murder thoughtfully and purposely, deeming the life of their friend inferior in comparison to theirs. But they made one critical error.

FRED

And what was that?

NASH

They wore their guilt on their sleeves, and the Jimmy Stewart character eventually connected the dots and discovered the body hidden inside the chest.

VANESSA

Hollywood, am I right? They can make anything seem so simple.

FRED

What does this have to do with us sir? Or even Darius?

NASH

Hold on a minute Fred. (pause) Ms. Hurtz, where did you place your mic?

VANESSA

My mic?

NASH

Yes.

VANESSA

I didn’t have a mic, do you mean my headset?

NASH

You may as well have been miced.

VANESSA

What do you say that?

FRED

I don’t remember Vanessa putting on a headset.

VANESSA

I’m the director Fred, of course I would have a headset on.

FRED (whispering)

Be careful.

NASH

I had a lengthy discussion with Britney Frank after I met with Fred. She’s your assistant, right?

VANESSA

She is.

FRED

You had lengthy discussions with all of us didn’t you sir?

NASH

That’s true, but talking with Britney gave me more information than anything I got out of the two of you.

VANESSA

What did Britney tell you?

NASH

Ms. Frank told me that she handed you a headset as the two of you were talking with Mitchell Romano. This was about twenty minutes before the show began. (pause) Neither one of you mentioned seeing, let alone, conversing with Mitchell before the play. And yet Britney does. Why would she tell me that?

FRED

I don’t know why would she be so dishonest. Neither myself or Vanessa had a conversation with Mitch that night. (pause) Right Vanessa?

VANESSA

Fred is right. We didn’t see Mitchell until he rose up out of the audience and shot Darius, twice.

NASH

Uh huh. (pause) Well then why don’t one of you explain something to me.

FRED

Britney is lying to you!

NASH

But why would she lie? That’s what I’d like you to explain to me. (pause) What would Britney Frank have to gain from lying about the death of Darius Treadwell?

VANESSA

I don’t know Detective Nash, but she’s certainly weaving together an elaborate lie. (pause) The three of us did have a brief conversation before the show, but Mitchell was not a part of it.

**NASH gets up from his desk, and begins pacing around the stage.**

NASH

Let’s say that Ms. Frank was in fact lying about the events of that night. Let’s say that she didn’t claim that you and Fred talked with Mitchell just before the play. There would still be the matter of that headset. (pause) Vanessa, did you turn on your headset?

VANESSA

Yes I turned it on, I had to be able to communicate with Britney and the backstage crew.

NASH

And when did you turn it on?

VANESSA

About fifteen or twenty minutes before curtain.

NASH

So Britney and all the other backstage crew members could hear every word that you said twenty minutes before curtain?

**Awkward silence.**

VANESSA (nervously)

I suppose they did hear my voice.

NASH

Therefore Ms. Frank wasn’t the only one who could hear your conversation.

VANESSA

No, she wasn’t.

NASH

I talked with some of the crew members after hearing what Ms. Frank had to say. (pause) And that is why you may as well have been miced.

VANESSA

But why?

NASH

Britney Frank and those people backstage all heard loud and clear what you told Mitchell to do. (pause) You told him to kill Darius Treadwell.

FRED

Vanessa!

NASH

Don’t even try. They heard you too Fred. (pause) Like Brandon and Philip, you both wear the guilt on your sleeves.

VANESSA

None of it is true. They’re a bunch of liars!

NASH

It is true.

VANESSA

What proof do you have besides what Britney and a couple of blue collar workers have to say? They’re envious of my new fame, they just want to tear me down. They want to steal the limelight away from me.

NASH

I know that the two of you conspired together.

FRED

We did no such thing.

**NASH confidently walks back over to his desk. He opens his top drawer and pulls out a few sheets of paper stapled together and places it on his desk.**

NASH

Have you been doing any writing lately Ms. Hurtz?

VANESSA

I don’t know what that is.

NASH

You mean these pages?

VANESSA

Yes, what are they?

NASH

Fred, do you recognize these pages laid out before you?

FRED

I don’t read much.

NASH (examining the papers)

Paragraphs, dialogue and background of the conspiracy between you two. It’s written almost in the format of a theatrical play. Now, who in this room would think that in order to successfully get away with murder, they would have to plan it out, in grave detail, through writing? (pause) Fred certainly isn’t a writer. He just stated that he hardly reads. But Vanessa Hurtz, you are a playwright. And your name happens to be written at the top of the first page.

VANESSA

How did you find it?

NASH

They say that criminals always return to the scene of the crime, and sure enough, you two rehearsed each other in the same off-Broadway theatre after the forensics team were through. But you left it behind one evening. And it was the theatre owner who found it and brought it to my attention.

VANESSA

I have this bad habit of leaving my scripts backstage.

NASH

I questioned the both of you in this very room. Both of you firmly stated that you had no prior knowledge that Mr. Treadwell was to be shot in the theatre. And you both lied right through your teeth. The two of you wanted that innocent boy to die, right before your very eyes. (to Fred) You wanted him dead because he was with Becky. (to Vanessa) You wanted him dead for the publicity and for the way he treated you in the relationship. But from what Britney and the crew heard from the headset, you were mainly infatuated with the attention it would bring to you and the play. What did you think the headlines would say? “Tragedy strikes an off-Broadway theatre, the first time playwright’s love has been fatally, brutally shot during her play”. You didn’t care about his life in the slightest.

VANESSA

I got what I wanted.

NASH

Somehow I doubt that you wanted to be caught as an accessory to murder.

VANESSA

It still brings me and the play plenty of attention, doesn’t it Detective?

FRED

Mr. Nash, we didn’t kill Darius. Mitchell Romano killed him.

NASH

You were both practically behind the trigger. Being an accessory to a person’s death is still a crime. (pause) And now you have two dead friends. Darius must’ve known about the threat to his family and so he felt he had to protect himself. That may be why he was also carrying a gun.

FRED

Darius did return his fire.

VANESSA

Killing Mitch. (pause) He must’ve known that he was in danger.

NASH

You too were more than aware of the danger. And yet you lied about it.

FRED

We had an agreement. We both wanted Darius to die.

VANESSA

I spent so much time writing out what each of us should say during the investigation, words and sentences that would heighten our innocence.

FRED

We rehearsed constantly too. Every gesture, every emotion, every pause.

NASH

You thought you could predict the kind of questions you would be asked?

VANESSA

We did our best.

FRED

She had it all laid out for us.

VANESSA

I’m a writer for a reason.

NASH

You are a master of deception. And was it all for? The fame? The revenge? Look at where it’s taken you. You two are in for the fight of your lives.

VANESSA

We’ll see.

**BLACKOUT**

**Act 1, Scene 6**

**The lights fade back in on stage to reveal the interior of a prison cell. VANESSA HURTZ is seated on a bench in the corner, staring absent mindedly at the wall.**

**Enter PRISON GUARD.**

PRISON GUARD

Vanessa Hurtz?

VANESSA

That’s me.

PRISON GUARD

You have a visitor.

**Enter MR. HURTZ.**

VANESSA

Dad?

MR. HURTZ

Well, you guessed it.

**VANESSA rises off of the bench and hugs him tightly.**

**Exit PRISON GUARD.**

VANESSA

I’ve missed you.

MR. HURTZ

I guess you’ll need a lawyer, huh?

VANESSA

That’s what you have to say to me?

MR. HURTZ

No. I have a lot to say to you, kiddo. I just don’t know how or where to start.

VANESSA

You must be furious.

MR. HURTZ

I’m more concerned than furious. (pause) They’re accusing my little girl of murder.

VANESSA

I didn’t kill anyone.

MR. HURTZ

Your mother has been collecting every tabloid, news article and Facebook post about you and your play. At first she was shocked that Darius was killed like that, especially with her being in the audience, but then when it came out that you did nothing to prevent it-

VANESSA

You and Mom have been talking?

MR. HURTZ

Texting.

VANESSA

What have you two been texting about?

MR. HURTZ

How could that possibly matter right now? Vanessa, look at where you are. And it’s not like you’re being held in here for some minor offence. You’re an accessory to your boyfriend’s death. (pause) At least that’s what they’re accusing you of, we have to find you a good lawyer.

VANESSA

I know.

MR. HURTZ

What went wrong? Why did this happen?

VANESSA

Those are questions that don’t have simple answers.

MR. HURTZ

Vanessa, you’ll always be my little girl, but…you know on the way over here, I was creating scenarios in my head of how this evidence against you couldn’t be accurate. Maybe you weren’t involved at all, maybe it was just a mistake. (pause) Was that just me ignoring the truth?

**Brief silence.**

VANESSA

Are you waiting for me to answer you?

MR. HURTZ

I’m waiting for you to say something.

VANESSA

I’m guilty Dad. You know that.

MR. HURTZ

I do know that.

VANESSA

I’m not going to fight it. I went to great lengths to cover up the fact that I knew my boyfriend was going to be killed. And now, I’ve been caught. My cover up failed. Everything failed. (pause) My relationship, my first play and my family. I got greedy and desperate because I wanted to feel like…

MR. HURTZ

How did you want to feel?

VANESSA

Like I was important.

**Brief silence.**

VANESSA

I thought fantasy was always an antidote to the unbearableness of reality. But I was wrong.

MR. HURTZ

This doesn’t have to be it for you. You still have the chance to beat the case.

VANESSA

I told you that I’m not going to fight it. I know the choices I’ve made and I stand by them. (pause) And now the entire world knows who I am, at least they think they do.

MR. HURTZ

I don’t even recognize the way you’re speaking to me right now.

VANESSA

I’m sorry Dad.

MR. HURTZ

What happened that night? I’d like to know in full detail. Tell me everything. Don’t leave anything out.

VANESSA

You better take a seat. We may be here for awhile.

**BLACKOUT**

**THE END**