

OPEN MEETING CLOSED

a play

by

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CHARACTERS

SUZANNE

HELEN

REBECCA

LETTIE

MARION

RAVEN

THE SETTING

A meeting hall – rented or borrowed from any number of sources for a local AA meeting.

THE TIME

A sunny afternoon, anywhere but Utah.

(At Rise:
Lights rise on a “meeting” already in progress – but before we go there, let’s take a look at the “where” of “where we are”.

A meeting room; could be a school classroom, a cafeteria, office space, gymnasium, local church--any space that offers itself available to a twelve step meeting or any number of other uses when not occupied for its original function—the room has been repurposed for today’s meeting. What has been added to the original décor are a number of folding chairs, a couple tables, a few pamphlets and signs. There is also the obligatory pot of coffee, stack of cups, sugars (or sweeteners), cream and bargain store pastries (possibly cookies—possibly left over from the last meeting). Among the signs of support and encouragement is one placed by the owners of the building “This is a Smoke-Free Facility. Thank you for your cooperation.”

So, now that we know where we are—and did I mention that if there’s a window involved in this space it is clearly daylight outside, the middle of the afternoon actually—let’s get to know who’s here. Five women, various ages but none too young and none too old to stand out from the others. One woman in particular (HELEN) is standing where we assume the speaker would do so to share their testimonial . . . if we’d ever been to such a meeting we’d know what we’re talking about. Clearly HELEN doesn’t, as her demeanor is being vigorously corrected by the other women:)

SUZANNE

Three.

HELEN

What the . . . what the fuck is three? I don’t know them out of order.

REBECCA

You don’t know them at all.

LETTIE

“Be honest.” “Be truthful.”

MARION

Don’t sleep with other people’s husbands.

SUZANNE

We're getting to that.

LETTIE

"What is said in the room: stays in the room."

HELEN

I thought that was a Vegas commercial.

REBECCA

It started here.

HELEN

You got it. You can understand my confusion.

LETTIE

"Don't come to a meeting drunk."

MARION

I thought that was just a suggestion.

REBECCA

It's a rule.

LETTIE

Technically you shouldn't come to a meeting if you've been drinking. You come to a meeting to keep from drinking.

MARION

So, if you've already been drinking / . . . ?

LETTIE

Better to go to the meeting, Honey.

HELEN

So, can you un . . . cable me now?

(And upon looking clearly we can see that HELEN has been zip-tied to the speaker's stand.)

SUZANNE

So, Helen, which of these rules do you feel you may have broken?

HELEN

. . . I'm assuming all of them?

SUZANNE

All of them.

MARION

Amen.

SUZANNE

And you're a sanctimonious bitch to boot.

HELEN

I am?

SUZANNE

Meaning?

HELEN

Meaning I . . . am. I'm a sanctimonious bitch. Can I go now?

MARION

Not until we hear your story.

(A beat.)

HELEN

You're serious?

(No reply.)

Oh, you are. You're really. Oh, we're doing this. Wow.

LETTIE

We want to feel for you, Honey, we really do. And we thought if we really heard your real story that . . . Well . . . we might finally identify with you and find it in our own hearts to accept you.

HELEN

Which fucking step is that?

LETTIE

It's a combination, really.

MARION

Can we dial it back on the language a bit? That word actually.

HELEN

. . . Up yours.

MARION

Thank you.

HELEN

(cunt).

MARION

(Starting to move to her:)

Alright, / that's it--

(And yet before MARION is even out of her seat
SUZANNE tasers HELEN, using a hand held device, the
type sold for self protection . . . probably in a pink case.)

HELEN

Wha the--Holy sHIT . . . What the hell--?

SUZANNE

I call it my equalizer.

HELEN

That can't be legal.

SUZANNE

My father would have called it an attitude adjuster. Got at a kiosk in the mall.

HELEN

You're all OK with this?

(Pause. The silence says everything.)

REBECCA

You did kinda push it over the edge there.

MARION

Such a mouth.

REBECCA

I was talking about Brian.

HELEN

Brian? Who the hell is . . .

(LETTIE holds up her hand)

HELEN

Your . . . ?

REBECCA

Husband, yes.

HELEN

I didn't sleep w—I never touched your husband—I don't even know who her husband is--.

LETTIE

(Showing her a picture from her phone:)

You let him watch.

HELEN

Oh . . . him . . . What do you—

(SUZANNE tasers her again.)

HELEN (Continued:)

--Goddamm it. / Watch it with that!

SUZANNE

We don't have time for lies. Or games.

MARION

Actually they do have a bingo game comes in at five o'clock to set up.

(No reply.)

I sometimes stay over. Last week I won twenty-eight dollars and fifty cents. It was a fifty-fifty.

(A beat.)

LETTIE

So, you're story, Honey.

HELEN

. . . F—ine.

(Looking directly into Suzanne's eyes.)

Keep her—keep her the fuck away from me. I have a heart condition.

LETTIE

We all have heart conditions, dear.

MARION

And you've slept with / them.

SUZANNE

And anyhow I've got it set on low; I've trained my dogs at a higher voltage.

REBECCA

Suzanne? Enough. Let her talk.

HELEN

Thank you. Can I have a moment to . . . Get her away . . .

(SUZANNE moves across the room.)

HELEN

Can you take these off?

REBECCA

'Fraid not.

HELEN

You are a law suit waiting to happen. You know that, right?

SUZANNE

Yeah . . . about that . . . I don't think you'll be pressing any charges.

HELEN

And why not?

(Silence: a bit of a Mexican standoff: the women hold their ground, no one quite sure if there is more to the story for Helen or not . . . and yet is it worth taking the chance if they do know something or not . . .)

REBECCA

Start your story.

HELEN

. . . If this will end things: fine. I started drinking in high school but nothing really over the top until college. I didn't fit in. Didn't think I fit in. Didn't really feel it, you know? But drinking: drinking allowed me not to feel . . . allowed me to . . . relax. It offered me an escape. And it worked. Till it stopped working. Until drinking became more important than relaxing. More important than anything. I could function at work but all I could really think about was where I was going to hide on my lunch break. Passing out in my car. Till I lost that job and then the next one and eventually I lost my boyfriend and then I realized I was really alone. But I didn't care because I just wanted my next drink. Long story short: finally I met a doctor. Somewhere in Ohio. He was a drinker too. I'm sorry—he was an alcoholic.

HELEN (Continued)

Let me start over: Hello, my name Helen: I'm an alcoholic.

(No reply.)

Ok, then. I met Doctor Bob in Ohio—

(Again Suzanne tasers Helen.)

SUZANNE

(As she tasers her:)

You think we're total idiots? You're not Bill W. This is not a game. I mean it
you

(She lets lose the taser.)

Start over.

(But HELEN does not respond. She has succumbed to the taser . . . how far succumbed, at this point, is anybody's guess. Meanwhile , somewhere at the end of Helen's testimony, the door to outside has opened and in the doorway stands a young woman in her late teens named RAVEN, who watches all quietly, unnoticed.)

REBECCA

What the hell did you do now?

SUZANNE

I didn't do anything. It's on low / . . .

(Just to be sure she checks the device's settings.)

LETTIE

What?

MARION

Is she dead?

SUZANNE

Of course she's / not dead.

LETTIE

Oh my god, I think she's / dead.

SUZANNE

She's not dead.

REBECCA

Then what is it?

(She is now checking Helen's vitals.)

SUZANNE

I think I may have had it turned on to high.

LETTIE

Oh my god, she's dead!!

SUZANNE

She's not dead!! / No one's dead!!

LETTIE

Does she have a / pulse? She said she has a heart condition!

MARION

Is she / breathing?

LETTIE

Is she bleeding?

SUZANNE

Why would she be bleeding?

LETTIE

I don't know: you might have a ruptured a vein or something.

REBECCA

She's breathing.

MARION

Oh thank god.

SUZANNE

God had nothing to do with it.

REBECCA

That's enough of you.

(Taking the taser from Suzanne:)

And that's enough of that.

MARION

(Taking the taser from Rebecca:)

Give me that thing.

(Dumps it in coffee.)

SUZANNE

What did you—What did you have to do that for?

REBECCA

You're a menace.

SUZANNE

You could have just taken the batteries out.

MARION

(Sees LETTIE, who has shut up since noticing RAVEN at the door,—turns also to see Raven:)

Hello, Honey.

(Everyone quiets and turns to look. A beat.)

MARION

How long've you been there?

RAVEN

. . . I think I'm at the wrong meeting.

LETTIE

Where're you supposed to be?

RAVEN

. . . No, I'm pretty sure. This is the wrong place.

SUZANNE

This is a closed meeting.

RAVEN

The sign says "open" . . . / . . my mistake.

REBECCA

Why didn't you lock the door?

MARION

We never lock the door.

RAVEN

Actually the sign says "open meeting closed"

REBECCA

. . . Why does the sign say "open meeting closed"?

MARION

(Knowing because she wrote it:)

Because we're an open meeting. And because we're closed.

(A beat.)

REBECCA

(To Marion:)

And that didn't sound stupid to you? When you read it?

RAVEN

I wasn't here.

LETTIE

You're looking for the AA meeting?

RAVEN

I'll catch the next one.

MARION

(Aside:)

You're sure she's breathing?

REBECCA

(Back at her—aside:)

Shuddup.

SUZANNE

Come in and close the door.

RAVEN

I don't think I want to.

REBECCA

Come in. Now.

(A beat. RAVEN follows instructions.)

SUZANNE

Close the door.

RAVEN

You want me to lock it?

REBECCA

That would be a good idea.

(RAVEN does so. Not turning her back to the group.)