

OPEN MEETING CLOSED

a play

by

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SYNOPSIS

4 women have closed their open AA meeting today to confront Helen, the woman who has slept with all their husbands . . . well, almost all. Enter the newcomer, looking for her first meeting, and you have the mix for an AA meeting / Intervention gone wrong.

CHARACTERS

- SUZANNE - righteously indignant – she has come to these meeting to get answers and right a wrong
- HELEN - a loner, she carries herself with a thick shell of “whateverworks” and a bit of an attitude
- REBECCA - the self appointed leader of the group, has a need for order
- LETTIE - “wants” everything to be “ok”, willing to help, a nurturer under stress
- MARION - not quite following along with everybody else although quite sincere and willing to help
- RAVEN - the newbie, an unknown to the group, being her first meeting, she is very unsure and tries to stay in the background; asking questions only as needed (late teens/early twenties)

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.

A NOTE ON THE NOTATIONS:

1. A slash “ / ” indicates the character with the next line of dialogue begins his or her speech (overlapping dialogue).
2. Dialogue in parenthesis “ () ” is expressed aloud, as an aside or unintentionally.
3. Dialogue in brackets “ [] ” is not verbalized / may be expressed nonverbally.

A CLARIFICATION REGARDING TYPOS:

Nope. They aren't. Did I miss one (or two)?—probably. But for the most part, if you see a typo, such as a word repeated, a grammatical error, lower case or UPPER CASE used in place of common punctuation, it was, indeed, intended.

(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?
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 shocks HELEN, using a hand held device commonly known as a stun gun, 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 it on a Groupon.

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 [Brian] ...

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

(A beat.)

LETTIE

So, your 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 [collect my thoughts]—Get her away ...

(SUZANNE stays her ground.)

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 [there]; 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 [became a regular routine]. 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. Let me start over: Hello, my name Helen: I'm an alcoholic. Ok, then. I met Doctor Bob in Ohio—

(Again, Suzanne hits Helen with the stun gun.)

SUZANNE

(As she continues the shock:)

You think we're total idiots? You're not Bill W; this is not a game—I mean it you [god you make me so mad I just want to] ...

(She lets loose the trigger.)

Start over.

(But HELEN does not respond. She has succumbed to the moment ... 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 stun gun from Suzanne:)

And that's enough of that.

MARION

(Taking the device 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

(referring, of course, to Helen:)

(You're sure she's breathing?)

REBECCA

(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.)

REBECCA

Have a seat.

MARION

Have some coffee.

LETTIE

Have a cookie.

(They all sit. A beat. The silence becomes awkward. MARION takes a cookie. Offers the plate to anyone else—everyone else—stopping at Raven.)

RAVEN

No. Thank you.

MARION

(Setting the plate back on the table.)

Suit yourself. I like regular Oreos better—but you get all that chocolate in your teeth—And we don't have any milk.

(Again: no response. Another silence.)

REBECCA

You have something for us to sign?

RAVEN

What? Oh ... yes.

(RAVEN digs what appears to be a court document it out of her purse. She hands it to one of the women. It is then handed to REBECCA, who looks it over, signs it and hands it back via the same route. HELEN slips at the speaker's stand and dangles awkwardly. The women try not to react—as if everything's quite normal. REBECCA tends to Helen.)

REBECCA

Somebody got a knife or a pair of scissors?

MARION

I have some cuticle scissors. Stops me from / biting them.

REBECCA

Give.

(MARION fishes the scissors out of her purse and attends to Helen with REBECCA. RAVEN finds herself being stared at by SUZANNE. Nothing is said, as HELEN is

freed from the zip-ties. REBECCA rechecks the woman's pulse. LETTIE looks through Raven's paperwork—drawing Raven's attention away—with sincere interest:)

MARION
(She has a heart condition.)

(REBECCA's look alone shuts MARION up. The two women, start to move HELEN to a chair next to REBECCA, who keeps her fingers on Helen's wrist to feel her pulse throughout. SUZANNE helps as needed.)

LETTIE
Court ordered?
A little young for a second offense?
Thirty meetings for thirty days?

RAVEN
Sixty for sixty.

LETTIE
Third offense?

RAVEN
First. Throwing me into the deep end—
Making an example for an election year.
I'm here, right? You're here.
Obviously I walked in on something I
shouldn't have.

MARION
What?—No?—Why? ?—She's just [sleeping ... long day; got off a double ... shift] ...

REBECCA
Yes. Yes, you did. First meeting too.

RAVEN
Lucky me.

REBECCA
You know the rules?

LETTIE
Do you have a book?

RAVEN
I've been ... my friends told me what to expect but ... No—something ... no names—just ... yeah ...

REBECCA
Nothing leaves this room.

RAVEN

Right. Right. Yes.

(There is another pause.)

SUZANNE

Ok; somebody clue me in to what's going on?

REBECCA

... Don't even try it.

SUZANNE

Try what?

REBECCA

You don't have blackouts. You haven't been drinking.

SUZANNE

What?

LETTIE

I find this extremely offensive.

SUZANNE

I don't know what you're talking about. What happened here?

MARION

Suzanne, it's not fair to those of us who actually have blackouts—to pretend you're not responsible for what you've done totally sober.

LETTIE

Amen.

REBECCA

Amen to that.

SUZANNE

I don't know what you're talking about.

REBECCA

Ignore her.

(Referring to Helen:)

You're no better than her if you insist on playing out this game.

SUZANNE

What happened to Helen—

(To Raven:)

Who are you?

REBECCA

(Brandishing the stun gun:)

(Would you like me to remind you?)

(SUZANNE just stares at Rebecca—both knowing the device won't work.)

LETTIE

(Start to say something to Suzanne—then turns back to Raven:)

What's your name, honey?

RAVEN

... Raven.

LETTIE

(Continuing—on pilot—under an echo of "Hello Raven's" or similar responses from the others:)

I'm Letticia; but people just call me Lettie ('Cuz I let 'em).

(She smiles at her own little joke—and then it registers:)

"Raven": that's a pretty name. Black, isn't it?

(There is a silent hush from her compatriots: "Oh my god, I can't believe you went there".)

LETTIE

(Innocently to the group:)

Well, isn't it?

(Realizing:)

OH: that's not what I meant.

REBECCA

You had a point?

LETTIE

What?

SUZANNE

(Offering her hand:)

Raven, I'm Suzanne.

LETTIE

(Kicking in:)

Oh: my point:

(Looks again to Suzanne—then back to Raven:)

You don't have blackouts—Do *you* have blackouts, Raven?

RAVEN

I don't think so. I don't [know what to say here] ... if I did [have blackouts—nope, I really have no idea what to say]...

LETTIE

“You forgot them”: cute,—(I've heard that before.)—but speaking as someone who really does have blackouts: it isn't funny. And you can't use it as an excuse to cover up what you've done stone cold sober. I'm just saying.

(To Raven:)

It's not like going to sleep and waking up—it's more like suddenly coming to: you were here (doing God knows what .. well, drinking usually) and now it's three hours later—or four days later—and you don't know how you got from there to here and why or what you did and it's scary as hell.

(To Suzanne:)

And it's not an excuse. Especially when it didn't happen.

MARION

I never blacked out. I remember every blessed minute and bad decision clear as day. (Just not able to course correct.)

RAVEN

I'm sorry, but I don't really .. have a .. drinking problem.

MARION

(None of us have a drinking problem. We've got a stopping problem, that's what we've got.)

LETTIE

“It's not a drinking problem: it's a thinking problem.”

That's on one of the flyers around here someplace.

(Letting her gaze move around the room to see it—her eyes stop on Suzanne:)

I am so disappointed in you.

SUZANNE

can't blame a girl for trying.

LETTIE

I'm Lettie (we met), you're Raven; and that's Marion and Rebecca, you met Suzanne and .. uh .. Helen—

MARION

She's just a little tired ...

(A beat.)

REBECCA

Alright then.

MARION

(First time:) I remember my first meeting. I was quite a bit older than you.
(Although that's really nothing to be proud of—for either of us.)

REBECCA

Shut up.

(Once silence has been established.)

Alright: we're going to—we're here to address the elephant in the room. For years, for most of us that was our drinking; *today* it happens to be Helen.

MARION

(How's her blood pressure?)

REBECCA

(Holding steady.)

Raven, I'm not going to insult you by pretending you're stupid, here. You're not stupid, are you—trial by fire, Raven—You with us?

RAVEN

... What happens here [stays here] ...

REBECCA

Exactly. This is Helen. She is not drunk.

(To the others:)

And she's not dead.

SUZANNE

What happened to her?

REBECCA

I swear, Suzanne, I'll drop kick you through a window.

SUZANNE

Fine. She's a skank.

MARION

I have another name for her but I won't say it.

REBECCA

Helen knows our husbands. Biblically. It's her way of [how shall I put this delicately:] distracting herself from drinking.

RAVEN

I heard about that.

MARION

From?

RAVEN

... [I read it online somewhere but I think it might be better to say:] Friends.

LETTIE

You need new friends.

REBECCA

Helen also lies. Helen is still drinking. / Helen is—

LETTIE

But I think she may be sober today.

SUZANNE

Today.

REBECCA

No judgment; we've all been there.

RAVEN

Did you want to tell me your stories?

(A beat.)

REBECCA

Why would we want to do that?: we have to deal with Helen.

RAVEN

Oh. Right. I thought / ...

LETTIE

Did you want to tell us *your* story, Honey?

RAVEN

... No. No. Helen is obviously .. more important here.

MARION

No one's more important here. We're all important. You're important.

SUZANNE

Why did you choose this particular meeting?

RAVEN

Uh .. [What bout Helen?]

REBECCA

She'll keep.

RAVEN

Because it wa[s] you are—it[’s] all women. My friends (who I need to change) warned me not to go to a mixed meeting if I could help it.

MARION

Oh, yeah, she'd be thirteened in a minute.

RAVEN

“Thirteened”?

SUZANNE

It's a step.

REBECCA

“Thirteen steppers”; they prey / on newbies.

RAVEN

I thought there were twelve. Did they add more?

REBECCA

A Thirteen Stepper focuses on luring newbies into the sack.

RAVEN

So ... Helen ... ?

MARION

Helen's a / [thirteen thru 69 stepper] ...

REBECCA

Some people use alcohol to escape. Some use drugs, some people food, some people sex. Some people TV but that's not been labeled as a group yet.

LETTIE

(Happy to add to the list:)

Some people gambling.

REBECCA

My point is: you take away the alcohol and some of us just wander to find another way to escape.

MARION

Some people run have been known to run.

REBECCA

But it's all just a distraction, really; and we move from one escape to another to another till finally, hopefully, we stop running and finally face our own reality.

MARION

We've all done it.

SUZANNE

Speak for yourself.

LETTIE

Not that.

MARION

No, not to that extent but we've all traded ... addictions. It's who we are. We're social animals.

REBECCA

We all have a need to fit in. To find where we belong. Some of us need that extra push—

MARION

And then some of us really don't. We don't—we just—we fit in—we don't have that problem—Our problem is we fit in too well. We just—Don't know how to stop—We just ...

SUZANNE

Ramble?

MARION

what?

LETTIE

What does that have to do with ... ?

REBECCA

We're' just saying thirteen steppers look for those who need to fit in. They target them.

SUZANNE

People with that certain look.

RAVEN

What look?

MARION

Like you.

LETTIE

No offense, honey, it's kind of sweet.

SUZANNE

And what's worst is your traditional thirteen stepper uses sex *after* they've sobered up. Which makes them scum. And they keep / coming back:

REBECCA

It's kind of like sharks going after minnows.

MARION

Helen's just a / [I'm too much a lady to say it but I so want to] ...

REBECCA

Helen's not a thirteen stepper because Helen hasn't gone through the first twelve yet. As for the sex ...

MARION

Helen's more of a willing participant.

SUZANNE

More than willing.

RAVEN

(Summing it up for them all:)

She's a cougar.

LETTIE

She's a pariah. Our husbands were / [OK, I'm not going to say innocent victims but] ...

SUZANNE

They're men.

LETTIE

But that's not everything. She also [I'll come up with something here:] steals. She also lies.

MARION

She's just not ready for these meetings .. yet.

RAVEN

So, you were what [, doing what here?:]—you were helping her?

LETTIE

Because we help each other, Honey, that's what we do.

SUZANNE

Because she's already helped herself a little too much.

REBECCA

So, now you're up to speed.

RAVEN

... And here we are ...

(A beat.)

RAVEN

So, whaddo we do with Helen?

(A pause.)

MARION

Remember Anthony?

SUZANNE

What about him?

MARION

He once talked about how ... during his drinking / days—

LETTIE

We don't tell other people's stories: we tell our own.

MARION

Seriously?

LETTIE

It's her first meeting.

MARION

Fine.

RAVEN

And you're sure she's just sleeping?

REBECCA

(She'll / be fine.)

SUZANNE

She's not in a coma if that's what you mean.

LETTIE

I think she means maybe she needs medical attention.

SUZANNE

Anybody here a nurse?

There's your answer.

MARION

So, when I was visiting my folks in the Grand Canyon ...

SUZANNE

“You” being “Anthony”?

MARION

No, this is *my* story. I can go to the Grand Canyon too. *My* parents.

SUZANNE

Moved to the Grand Canyon for this story?

MARION

(Stares at her a moment then continues on anyway:)

I was drinking. I fell ... down the mountain.

(Specifically to Raven:)

Not too far, mind you, just enough to scare the hell out of us all. There was no dangling from a cliff but .. *I* stopped rolling about five feet short of the edge. And I got up and I [wait a minute—where was I?] ... how did I get out of there? There was a connection between Helen and ... *myself* at the Grand Canyon—what was it ... ?

REBECCA

While you chew on that ...

RAVEN

If you really think she's just going to sleep it off why don't you just take her home?

SUZANNE

Whaddo you mean?

RAVEN

I mean: take her to her home and put her in her bed. Let her wake up there.

LETTIE

There's a thought: does anybody know where she lives?

(No reply. To Raven:)

It was a good idea.

RAVEN

So, find out. Just take her in her car—somebody else here drives it—

MARION

Do we have to go *into* her home?

RAVEN

Leave her in the car, prop her up behind the driver's seat. Does she black out? Maybe she'll think she had one of those.

SUZANNE

I like [it]—I like how you think.

(Going through Helen's purse.)

And she'll just believe this was all a bad dream when she / wakes up.

LETTIE

What're you doing?

SUZANNE

We need her keys. For her car.

REBECCA

(Also taking her turn at the purse—going for the wallet:)

We need her address.

MARION

Check her driver's license.

REBECCA

(As she does so:)

Thank you. Where would I be without—

(But she is stopped by what she reads.)

LETTIE

What is it; what's it say?

REBECCA

Utah.

SUZANNE
What?

REBECCA
Her license expires in two years. She never had the address changed.

SUZANNE
Where in Utah?

LETTIE
Where *is* Utah?

REBECCA
It's another state.

MARION
Isn't that where they keep the Mormons?

REBECCA
Roy. Roy, Utah.

MARION
Never heard of it.

SUZANNE
They don't "keep" Mormons; it's not like something you put in a jar.

REBECCA
Or a concentration camp.

SUZANNE
It's a religion.

MARION
Not to me.

REBECCA
OK, we're not going there.

LETTIE
(To Raven:)
We never discuss religion or politics. People get a little [testy] ...

SUZANNE
She lived in "Roy"?

REBECCA
Yeah. So?

SUZANNE
So, she's "Helen of Roy"?

REBECCA
... You wanna drive her back to Roy?

SUZANNE
No.

REBECCA
Then nobody cares.

LETTIE
So, what's your next idea?

REBECCA
How long do we have before the Bingo people get here?

MARION
Forty-five minutes.

REBECCA
We have to wake her up.

SUZANNE
Really? Couldn't we just put her in her car? We don't *have* to get her home, do we? Let her think she passed out in the parking lot.

LETTIE
... That could work too.

(There is a silent agreement.)

MARION
Then whaddo we do?

RAVEN
You could go on with the meeting.

LETTIE
Why?

RAVEN

Like nothing happened: in case she does wake up and comes in. Convincing her that this was all, you know, in her head.
And giving you plausible deniability.

MARION

“Plausible deniability”: listen to her.

LETTIE

Do we even know which car is hers?

(SUZANNE opens the door and points the keys out at the parking lot—pressing a button on the key. We can hear a ding-ding-honk response of her car.)

SUZANNE

Black convertible Chrysler.

MARION

Oh, yeah, I think I’ve seen her in it.

REBECCA

... Right.

SUZANNE

(At Helen—carefully helping her stand up.)

So, are we doing this?

LETTIE

Now?

SUZANNE

No, next Tuesday.

(The women start to gather round Helen:)

REBECCA

Whatever we do: don’t wake her up.

RAVEN

Shouldn’t you try carrying her?

LETTIE

They have a dolly or a wheel barrel around here?

REBECCA

Why would they have a wheel barrel or a dolly?

LETTIE

To move things.

REBECCA

We can carry her. There's enough of us. / We can do it.

MARION

I'm not sure about this.

LETTIE

I'll go get the car. Bring it to the door.

MARION

Hurry.

(LETTIE hustles out the door on a mission as the remaining women carefully lift Helen.)

RAVEN

You always have this much fun?

MARION

It's like we said: it's a distraction: keeps us from drinking: you do something else; you feel like having a drink right now?

SUZANNE

Yes.

MARION

Ok, maybe that was a bad question.

(We hear the ding-ding-honk of the car once again.)

MARION

You have her head?

RAVEN

/ Yes.

SUZANNE

No, it's on the floor over there.

MARION
I'm not the one who did this.

SUZANNE
Don't go there.

MARION
I'm just saying.

SUZANNE
So am I.

REBECCA
Quiet.

(LETTIE hustles back in:)

MARION
What's wrong?

LETTIE
She's got a breathalyzer.

REBECCA
So? Breathe into it.

LETTIE
Doesn't it have to be *her* breath?

REBECCA
It's not like a finger print.

LETTIE
Oh.

REBECCA
So?

(There is an awkward silence.)

REBECCA
(Resigned to the obvious:)
Who here can pass a breathalyzer?

(The women start to raise hands but realizing they will lose half their grip on Helen answer with an array of "me" "I can" "I can too, why?: can't you?")

REBECCA

I'm the strongest here, I'm holding her up the most. Somebody trade places with Lettie.

MARION

I'll go.

LETTIE

Thank you.

(MARION and LETTIE carefully change places; MARION takes the keys and heads for the door:)

LETTIE

Sorry, [girls.]

SUZANNE

I am so disappointed in you.

MARION

(Stopping everything to offer her support:)

She's at the right place. You did the right thing.

REBECCA

Do we have to do this now?

LETTIE

Thank you.

MARION

One day at a—

(There are no words to describe the thoughts behind REBECCA nor SUZANNE's eyes but still MARION gets the message and swiftly leaves.)

LETTIE

(To them all—but specifically to Raven:)

I wouldn't have normally. It's just [you have no idea how hard this has been for] ... this intervention meeting was a little bit too much for me.

(Starting to tear up:)

And then there's Brian ... He called me and ...

(As they wait upon Marion: we again hear the “ding-ding-honk”.)

SUZANNE

I'm sorry.

LETTIE

I am too.

(Again: “ding-ding-honk”. A beat. Again: “ding-ding-honk”. A beat. Another “ding-ding-honk”.)

SUZANNE

(Hollering out to Marion:)

Open the door, you idiot.

(REBECCA pulls a hand free long enough to hit Suzanne and the return to hold up the [thankfully] still sleeping Helen.)

RAVEN

So, you were saying this was all planned?

LETTIE

What? This? Oh yes. More or less.

REBECCA

But not until all other avenues were exhausted.

SUZANNE

It’s like your judge: throwing you into the deep end.

RAVEN

But don’t you all come here—aren’t you all here voluntarily?

LETTIE

Are you?

RAVEN

Am I what?

LETTIE

Court ordered you, right? We’re all here because we were about to lose something.

SUZANNE

Or did.

LETTIE

Nobody’s here because they want to be; it’s because we need to be; nobody comes here voluntarily.

RAVEN

(Lets it start to sink in ..)

(hunh.)

LETTIE

We're here because what we were doing didn't work. [Well,] it did: ..we *pretended* it did and then it took over and took away everything. You ever hear about Mocking birds? Mocking birds lay their eggs in other bird's nests, (I'm talking about) smaller birds. When their chick hatches (the mocking bird chicks), the new parents (who aren't mocking birds): well, it's all they can do to keep up with the demand. As soon as their own chicks (who *also aren't* mocking birds) are big enough: the mocking bird baby (who *is* a mocking bird) kicks them (the *not* mocking bird chick) out of the nest till she's the only one left and still the would-be parents (again, *not* mocking birds) tend to her (the actual mocking bird) as if she were their own. Drinking's kind of like that.

REBECCA

I don't know where you come up with these analogies.

LETTIE

It is.

RAVEN

Actually [if I followed you right], I think you're talking about the Cucabarra bird.

LETTIE

The What?

RAVEN

The cuckabarra—

LETTIE

The cookoo bird? I don't think so.

RAVEN

Yes, I think so. From / Australia?

LETTIE

That's not the point, really, now is it?

SUZANNE

Do you / have to—

(We hear the car pulling up close by.)

SUZANNE

(Seeing the car:)

Thank god. Saved from another one of your mindless prattles.

REBECCA

We move ... on three .. quietly ... don't wake her.

(Whispering:)

“One” ...

(Mouthing it:)

“two ...

(They slowly, awkwardly, move out the door; Lettie closes it behind them. A beat.)

REBECCA (FROM OUTSIDE)

What did you just do?

LETTIE (FROM OUTSIDE)

What?

MARION (FROM OUTSIDE)

Hurry up.

SUZANNE (FROM OUTSIDE)

Shhhh.

(There is the sound of struggling and then everything goes very quiet.)

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

I've got it from here. Just gonna park it over there and scoot her in place.

(We can hear the car driving slowly away. Pause. There is a jiggle at the door. A beat. Another jiggle.)

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

(Lettie ... ?)

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

What?

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

(Did you lock the door?)

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

No.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
(Then why is the door locked?)

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)
I didn't lock it. / I told you I—

MARION (OUTSIDE)
Don't look at me. I was in the car.

RAVEN (OUTSIDE)
... I did.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
What? When?

RAVEN (OUTSIDE)
.. You told me to ...

MARION (OUTSIDE)
That's right. You did tell her.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
(Jiggling again at the handle.)
Well, who has the key?

MARION (OUTSIDE)
I do.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
Well? Where?

MARION (OUTSIDE)
In my purse ... Inside.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
So, we're locked out?

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)
What's going on?

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
She locked the door.

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)
Who locked the door?

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

Sweet Jesus, I didn't know it was locked when I closed it.

MARION (OUTSIDE)

It's really not her fault.

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

So, what're we supposed to do now?

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

Is she still asleep?

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

For now. But if she wakes up and sees us all / huddled here—

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

Don't change the subject.

RAVEN (OUTSIDE)

Maybe I can— .. Does anybody have a credit card?

MARION (OUTSIDE)

In my purse.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

She means on them.

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

I have a bobby pin.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

Really?

LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

What?

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

Helen.

REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

What about her?

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

You were in her wallet ...

I didn't take anything. REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

I didn't say / you— SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

Oh, right: *her* wallet. MARION (OUTSIDE)

(A slight beat.)

Ohhhhhhh. RAVEN, LETTIE & REBECCA (OUTSIDE)
(As they all share the same realization:)

(Otherwise the pause continues.)

So, who's going to ... MARION (OUTSIDE)

Oh for godsakes. SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

Don't wake her up. REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

Shut up. SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)

(A small beat.)

You're an idiot. REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

Why am *I* an idiot? LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

You closed the door. REBECCA (OUTSIDE)

... I have been trying ... I have been trying to hold it together ... LETTIE (OUTSIDE)

Why are you picking on her? MARION (OUTSIDE)

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)
What's wrong now?

MARION (FROM OUTSIDE)
Rebecca is picking on her.

SUZANNE (OUTSIDE)
Dry up. Here.

RAVEN (OUTSIDE)
Ok, I can't promise anything but—

(And that easily: the door swings open, revealing all five women in the doorway. Rebecca and Lettie are both smoking cigarettes, while Suzanne has just finished lighting up her own.)

SUZANNE
Who the hell *are* you?

(A beat. Marion enters, followed by Raven.)

REBECCA
Alright ladies, put 'em out.

(REBECCA leads by example and re-enters. Followed by a compliant LETTIE and a not so compliant SUZANNE [still smoking].)

MARION
(Heading to the coffee pot:)
So, we just carry on; business / as usual?

REBECCA
Suzanne?

SUZANNE
What?

REBECCA
You know what: No smoking.

MARION
She's right, we'll lose our deposit.

SUZANNE

I know she's right and I don't care. I need a cigarette, ok?

LETTIE

Well, if she gets to smoke, so do I.

REBECCA

No one gets to smoke. There is no smoking.

SUZANNE

Well I think / I—

REBECCA

I think you've done enough.

(MARION takes Suzanne's cigarette from her and dumps it into a half filled coffee cup.)

SUZANNE

What is it with you and coffee?

REBECCA

Everybody take a seat.

RAVEN

Where should I [—where do you want me to sit] ... ?

LETTIE

Anywhere you want, Sweetie.

SUZANNE

By the door. Newbies always sit by the door.

MARION

True.

RAVEN

You want me to sit by ... ?

REBECCA

Sit where you want.

RAVEN

... Right.

(The women take seats.)

RAVEN

What happens next .. in a regular meeting .. How do we / ... ?

LETTIE

No, you're right: we don't: we—we're e half way through. We should just jump in?

RAVEN

Just like that?

MARION

Just like that. You want to start? Do you want to tell us something about yourself, tell us your story, or do you want to hear a couple of ours first?

LETTIE

... This is what we call sharing.

RAVEN

“Sharing” ... got it.

SUZANNE

I'll go: I'm Suzanne.

(The women respond back with “Hello, Suzanne.” Or something similar.)

LETTIE

This is where we say, “Hello, Suzanne.”

REBECCA

She'll catch on.

SUZANNE

I'm an alcoholic and pill popper and a foodie.

LETTIE

This is where—

REBECCA

Lettie?

RAVEN

Hello Suzanne.

SUZANNE

Hello. I want to apologize to the group here for ... zapping the bitch. But she needed to be zapped. I thought this would help. I thought this would .. uh .. Helen has been sleeping with my husband for ... off and on for—I've known about it for three weeks—who knows how long it's been going on. But I didn't take a drink. I took action. I brought us together. Before I would have taken a drink and hope it all passes. And I when I heard about it—rumors—when I knew I *had* that same urge .. to just let it slide. Climb into a bottle of pills or booze or eat it away.

LETTIE

(Aside to Raven:)

(We don't really talk about other addictions we have here; just the elbow.)

REBECCA

Lettie?

LETTIE

What?

REBECCA

No cross talk.

LETTIE

I'm not; I'm / explaining—

MARION

(Adding her two cents into instructing Raven:)

(Cross talk is when two or more people talk over each other.)

REBECCA

Marion.

MARION

What?

REBECCA

She'll figure it out.

SUZANNE

This is my turn and I have a right to talk about what I'm dealing with, is that alright with you?

SUZANNE (Continued:)

(Not waiting for affirmation:)

I didn't. I didn't eat. I didn't drink. I didn't .. wish it away. I did something. So ... maybe what I did was a little more drastic than it needed to be but it was ... I'm not going to apologize: I'm not because ... Because I made a positive step in a positive direction. I have lost jobs and .. the respect of my family but I'll be damned if I'm going to go backwards and if that means frying her ass a little: so be it—(I don't think I should have started this off.)

(She sits down.)

(There are a couple halfhearted “Thank you, Suzanne”s from the group.)

SUZANNE

I'm going to have a cigarette now.

REBECCA

No. You're not.

(Very matter of factly, SUZANNE lights up a cigarette and takes in that first intoxication of tar and nicotine. She exhales triumphantly. She repeats the process and then dumps the cigarette out in MARION's cup of coffee herself. She then sits back down. Pause. MARION sets down her coffee, which LETTIE then picks up and stares into the coffee, trying her best to hold it in ...)

LETTIE

It's funny you should do that [just put out the cigarette like that] ...

(Fighting to contain her tears:)

... because that's how I feel inside ... just [like that cigarette] ...

(A deep breath.)

I'm Lettie.

(The group echo back their acknowledgements.)

LETTIE

.. Just like that [cigarette] ... [that cigarette is me] ...

(She tries to continue ... the group is appreciatively patient if not for her, in respect to the program ... she tries to start several times and finally passes her turn back to the group ...)

MARION

(“helping”:))

Brian ...

(LETTIE points to her as if playing charades: on the nose.
She tries again to start but still can't. She sits back down.)

MARION

That happens sometimes.

SUZANNE

That's not my fault: that's Helen's.

REBECCA

Suzanne?

MARION

Suzanne?

SUZANNE

(Ignoring Rebecca—responding only to Marion:)

What?

MARION

When you say "drastic": you did just slide Helen into the driver's seat, didn't you? You didn't "do" anything to her?

SUZANNE

Oh my god: no; I was talking about the—

(With hand movements she imitates using her stun gun.)

What? You don't believe me: go look for yourself.

REBECCA

We believe you.

MARION

(Is already up and peering out the window:)

She *does* just look like she's sleeping.

SUZANNE

See? God, whaddo you think I am?

(LETTIE tries to start again ... but no.)

MARION

Have a cookie, Lettie.

REBECCA

I'm Rebecca.

(A round of acknowledgement.)

REBECCA

I'm an alcoholic. And while I'm not here—we're not here to throw Helen under the bus.

SUZANNE

Although she *has* spent enough time on her back.

REBECCA

But she *is why* we are here. Raven, you need to understand ... I believe God brings us together to help each other. We are here for each other and we are here to hold each other accountable. God—

(Responding to Suzanne's eye rolling:)

As I understand Him (in our Lord, Jesus Christ) has brought you here today to remind us why we're all really here.

(To Suzanne:)

“Vengeance is mine sayeth the Lord”—for a moment I forgot / that.

SUZANNE

(Oh please.)

REBECCA

We don't cross talk.

SUZANNE

We don't preach a sermon either.

LETTIE

Brian left me.

(Slight pause. The women don't necessarily react as if this is news:)

MARION

We know.

SUZANNE

It happens.

MARION

(Aside to Raven:)

He left her three months ago.

LETTIE

Well, it's still new to me... He called and it--it brought up ... My husband ...

Brian ...
MARION

No. Rick.
LETTIE

(To this the women actually react.)

I know.
MARION

It's just so ... hard.
LETTIE

I know.
MARION

"Rick"?
RAVEN

Her first husband.
REBECCA

... Did he .. die?
RAVEN

Took the kids.
REBECCA

Oh ...
RAVEN

LETTIE
(Waving the meeting to go on again:)
... Somebody else ...

REBECCA
Right. Yes. Alright then, [I'll continue].

(A beat. REBECCA stands again.)

SUZANNE
Are you going to preach a sermon? 'Cause if you're gonna preach a sermon: I'm gonna smoke.

MARION

(To Raven:)

Suzanne considers herself a recovering Catholic.

REBECCA

I have control issues. I admit it. And these control issues led me .. down a path. A path that was filled with alcohol. [That was filled with] parties [and] wild abandon. Because if I wasn't going to be in control, dammit, I was going to make sure I let loose. I became a Jekyll and Hyde. But I was in control of when I let Wild Becca out and when I kept her in check. The key and the lock to letting her out was always alcohol: Long Island Iced Teas to be exact—and I would keep track of just how much I needed to let her peak. Or so I thought. Because if I went a little too far letting Becca [have the reins] then Bex came out. And Bex didn't like being controlled; and I thought—I was convinced—I was going crazy. I was the—what was the name of that movie?—Three faces of Evelyn?—That was me: but three faces of Rebecca. And none of them were in control. Bex saw to that. Bex saw to that very well. I kept control of my other selves by compartmentalizing—everything in my life—in my lives. That was how I functioned and it was exhausting. So, I'd take a drink to just ... relax. I switched to beer. Becca found her way out. And behind Becca came Bex and behind her was ... someone I think I named Reba; and Reba scared me. Reba wanted to hurt people. Reba wanted to come out today. And that isn't right: because I have Not been drinking. I have not had a drink in fifteen years—[alright, let me clarify that:]—I have not had a *hard* drink in fifteen years; I haven't had a *beer* in *twelve*; I haven't had *wine* for about that same time; I haven't had [even] *cough syrup* in ten: And what scares me is I'm afraid my selves are still separated somehow and ... I just need you here with me to keep me together, you know? And I *need* God. I *need* my Lord—you may not but I do and I need to give Him control because I can't trust me. So, thank you, Raven, for ... whatever forces brought you here today. I believe God ... you may believe ... whatever you believe. Use the group. Use a doorknob. It works. We're not perfect. I'm not perfect. And Helen [is definitely not] ... none of us are perfect. Thank you. Thank you for listening.

(REBECCA sits back down to a round of automatic “Thank you, Rebecca”s. There is a pause. LETTIE blows her nose. MARION is all but staring at RAVEN . The pause, and Marion's peripheral persuasion becomes slightly awkward.)

RAVEN

Am I supposed to say something then ... ?

MARION

Only if you want to.

SUZANNE

You don't have to.

MARION

Whatever you want.

(After a slight pause.)

But it only works if you work it.

(Another pause.)

RAVEN

... Hello, I'm Raven.

(The group echo back their acknowledgements.)

RAVEN

... I'm a ... Do I have to stand?

MARION

Not if you don't want to.

RAVEN

I don't.

(She fumbles with her purse ... buying time.)

MARION

State your name and your addiction.

RAVEN

My name is ... [ok .. here goes nuthin'] ...

MARION

State your name.

RAVEN

[Or we can go with that:] "State my name"

MARION

And your addiction.

RAVEN

"And my addiction."

MARION

... That'll do for now.

RAVEN

(Taking it seriously:)

... Wow. This is harder than I thought it'd be.

MARION

It's cathartic.

REBECCA

(No cross talk.)

SUZANNE

(Let her be.)

RAVEN

(Decides what to say and launches in:)

My problem is my parents. They want me to do well in school. They mean well. But it is too much at times. And ... They taught me well ... They drink every night and ... Sometimes I think we shoulda been French. I grew up with wine at lunch and a beer in the afternoon and a hair of the dog in the morning. [OK, jokes: no .. this isn't the time for jokes .. so ...]

(Stops ... regroupes ...)

My problem isn't my parents: my problem is me. I ... do ... *want* to be perfect. For them [my parents]. And for myself ... And perfect isn't easy. And I ... [wanted to just make everybody happy and proud and] ... Because all of my friends [were doing so well and making their parents happy and proud and] ... And *they* were [killing it while I was just] ... So ... I ... And this ... this is realer than I thought ... Can I go again later?

MARION

We're not going to grade you, Honey. You did fine.

(Followed by an acknowledgment [of "thank yous"] from the group.)

LETTIE

Brian is an asshole.

REBECCA

Amen, Sister.

SUZANNE

I kicked Bob out myself when I found out about them.

REBECCA

We're still working on it.

SUZANNE

Meaning?

REBECCA

Meaning we're still working on it. It complicated.

SUZANNE

Kicked him to the curb. Good riddance. I'm worth more than that.

MARION

We all are.

REBECCA

Well, Amen to that.

SUZANNE

Do you have to?

REBECCA

She's [Marion] been saying Amen all meeting long / [you never once objected to that] ...

SUZANNE

She didn't bring up god.

REBECCA

Who do you think amen is for?

MARION

It's more difficult for me—it's more difficult when there are children involved. And a parent in diapers. We're stuck in the middle and it's just too much to deal with right now. After all, I have to be the stable one. So, I'm thinking of the children first. For a change. I'm here for them. I'm here for me—but I'm here for them. And there's their grandmother (his mother) and he is their father, after all ... Or so I let him believe—

(To Raven:)

That was a little joke.

(No reply.)

(I'm done.)

LETTIE

(A beat.)

Well ...at least you have your kids.

MARION

I didn't / mean ...

LETTIE

I'm lucky if I get a call. I'm lucky if I get a postcard.

SUZANNE

They're teenagers. Teenagers hate their parents.

(To Raven:)

You're a teenager: do you hate your parents?

RAVEN

I don't know if you really want me to answer that.

SUZANNE

Mine can't stand to be in the same room with me.

MARION

I don't think you're helping.

LETTIE

Actually, she is. Mine are horrible little rug rats that I just want to pinch their little cheekies—and losing them was my wakeup call—although I did hit the snooze button a couple times. I thought raising kids was “who I was”; it was the hardest and most rewarding work of my life. And I either consoled or congratulated myself for it. Daily. I'm Lettie and I'm an alcoholic.

(A round of acknowledgements)

LETTIE

And then when Rick left with my two kids I thought I was going to die. I know I wanted to. But instead I hit “snooze” and continued to console myself. He took the kids, we split up everything else, including our friends; and one day I realized all the sober ones had sided with—had gone with Rick. I looked around one day and all I saw was different versions of me. Me in ten years. Me ten years ago and one or two versions of me today—not “today” today .. but “that” today—you understand. It *is* hard [, Raven]. It's harder than it should be, I know—but you are the company you keep, Raven. I woke up: I saw that: I wanted to go back to sleep but I [didn't; and] ... Instead I decided to let them go.

RAVEN

... Your kids ... ?

LETTIE

My friends. God no, I would never let go of my kids—I'd sell them once in a while—but no, no: my friends: I had to choose to let the few friends, I still thought I had, go. I had to start over. I had to choose to walk away even if that meant I had no one. Until I, I had this group (then I really knew I'd hit bottom).

LETTIE (Continued:)

I found you people. And now I see me in ten years and me ten years ago and there's hope. No one tells you when you [start on this downhill slide] ... but I had to choose. And I also found Brian. It's not a straight uphill climb; sometimes you need a buddy system. And Brian and I helped each other. We ... it's what we had in common: the struggle; Brian and me. And for a while that was enough—that was what we focused on. I can't say—I'm not going to say I don't blame him—he's an asshole. He's a ...

SUZANNE

He's a perv, that's what he is.

LETTIE

Let me say it, thank you. Yes, he is. He is a pervert. He .. and I ... we would rent movies ... How was I to know? But we kept each other sober. We got each other sober first; then we worked at keeping each other sober and I have to admit sober Lettie and sober Brian didn't have much in common; sd ...

MARION

So, you're saying that Helen actually helped you ... ?

LETTIE

(A beat ...)

I wouldn't go that far yet. I still blame him. And I blame her.

SUZANNE

Damned right. It takes two. Or in your case / [maybe three.]

REBECCA

Ok; what happened to the rules about cross talking? If we don't stick to the program: / we have chaos.

SUZANNE

Oh really? What about "amen to this" and "amen that"?

REBECCA

We were talking then. Right now Lettie's trying to share.

SUZANNE

I don't see a difference.

REBECCA

(To Marion & Raven:)

You see the difference, don't you? The announcement: "I'm Lettie, I'm an alcoholic" and then she started sharing—that means shuddup.

SUZANNE

Ya vohl.

REBECCA

Don't do that.

LETTIE

It's alright. I'm comfortable / with it.

REBECCA

Well, I'm not.

MARION

(And this is a moment we have in every session: rebelling against the rules.)

RAVEN

(You don't like the rules?)

MARION

We hate the rules. Nobody drinks because they like to follow the rules. We need the rules, yes, but nobody likes the rules.

RAVEN

This is ... not what I thought it would be ...

(There is a jiggle at the door handle. The women all notice and brace themselves.)

REBECCA

(To Marion:)

Did you?

MARION

(Getting up to get the door:)

I never unlocked it.

(As she crosses the room:)

Hello?

(There is a single blast of gunfire as the door blows open. HELEN enters pumping a double chambered pump-action rifle as she steps inside—bringing the next round of ammunition into the chamber.)

HELEN

Hello, Bitches.

(Everyone reacts—each in their own way but no one remains unaffected by the moment ... and the impending threat. “What the f—“ “Holy shit, Helen!” “It’s not what you think”, uncontrollable crying, are all real possible responses, which but for the briefest moment of registering what just happened are also all pretty much immediate and overlapping to the point of who knows who’s said what—over which comes Rebecca’s mantra:)

REBECCA

Calm down, Calm down, calm down, calm down, calm down, everyone just calm down.

(To which the room eventually becomes quiet.)

REBECCA

Helen? I need you to put that away.

HELEN

Fucking zap me now, bitch.

SUZANNE

(... It’s worth a try:)

I don’t know what you’re talking about.

(HELEN stares at her in disbelief a moment ... or is she buying it? ... The rest follow suit:)

MARION

What’re you talking about, Helen?

REBECCA

Helen, put the gun away; Before someone gets hurt.

HELEN

It’s not a gun: it’s a rife. “This is my rifle, this is my gun, this is for shooting, and this is for fun ...”

LETTIE

You’re making me nervous.

HELEN

Good. Good. It’s good to be nervous. It means you’re alive.

REBECCA

And we would like to stay that way: could you put the rifle down now?

HELEN

What? So you can tie me up again?

SUZANNE

I really don't know what you're / talking about.

LETTIE

Maybe you dreamed it.

HELEN

(Indicating Raven:)

Who's she?

RAVEN

(A beat. All eyes are on RAVEN.)

I knew this was a bad idea. I shouldn't've come ... You have your own issues to deal with. I can [just go and let you work out whatever it is you need to]...

HELEN

Siddown.

(RAVEN does.)

REBECCA

Helen?

HELEN

So. Tell me about yourself.

REBECCA

Please.

RAVEN

Whaddo you Whaddo you wanna know?

HELEN

Not me. Them. They wanna know. They wanna know everything about you.

They wanna know everything that makes you tick.

So, spill.

RAVEN

... I'm uh ...

LETTIE

... She's my daughter.

HELEN

(Takes this in a moment—switching gears: she shows them her wrists:)

You think I dreamed these?

MARION

... These what?

HELEN

These fuckin' welts: where you tied me up.

MARION

... I don't see anything.

HELEN

They're right there.

MARION

(Pretending to look—and coming to the same conclusion:)

I'm sorry.

HELEN

(Holding the rifle on her, perhaps under her chin:)

Do you see them now?

MARION

... Oh those—I thought that was a reaction to one of those copper bracelets; my niece gets that.

LETTIE

Remember those POW/MIA bracelets we wore / when we were kids?

HELEN

I'm not an idiot.

REBECCA

No one said you were.

HELEN

(HELEN pulls the rifle back from Helen. Taking in the room a moment:)

Your daughter, hunh? What's her name?

LETTIE

rrr ...

(Trying not to look at the others for help:)

Robin.

(But she can see by their reactions that she's wrong.)

(I knew it was a bird.)

RAVEN

Raven. It's Raven. But I changed my name. When I left home. When Dad took me away ...

HELEN

I thought your daughter's name was Marissa?

LETTIE

You're right, / it wa[s, Marissa, I didn't think you were listening—how nice of you to remember] ...

RAVEN

But I changed it. And and and and I kept the "R".

HELEN

... whatever.

(A beat.)

SUZANNE

So what're you going to do now?

HELEN

I don't know; I haven't thought that far yet; what were *you* going to do to *me*?

LETTIE

We just wanted you to face the truth.

HELEN

Whose truth? Yours?; Yours?; Certainly not hers.

(Raven:)

Yours maybe? Who the hell knows what the truth is?

LETTIE

We wanted to help you find it.

HELEN

By tying me up and poking me with a cattle prod.

SUZANNE

Ok .. some things may have went a little too far.

HELEN

You think?

REBECCA

She's trying to say, "she's sorry."

MARION

We all are.

HELEN

Bullshit.

REBECCA

.. Let the girl go.

HELEN

And separate the Family; you just found each other again?

(A beat.)

LETTIE

Or you could, *you* could go. We won't [say anything to anyone, will we, girls?]

...

REBECCA

You know, she's probably right: someone may be coming.

SUZANNE

Someone could have heard the shot.

LETTIE

You still have time to get away.

RAVEN

We won't tell anyone.

(But HELEN just stares at her: argument over.)

HELEN

I'm sure in this neighborhood no one thought it was anything but a car backfiring.

(There is a long pause.)

SUZANNE

So ... we're supposed to just sit here? Kumbaya?

(No reply.)

LETTIE

Helen?

(No reply.)

HELEN

I'm thinking.

(A beat.)

LETTIE

You do that; you go ahead and think. Take all the time you want.

MARION

The bingo people come here at five.

REBECCA

You're not helping.

(Pause.)

SUZANNE

You do know, if you want to get logical about it: there's only one of you. There's one of you and there's ... five of us. And by what I know of firearms you only have one chamber left. So ... you may get one of us but the rest of us? We have you out numbered.

HELEN

(Calmly:)

Go for it.

(Again: a standoff ensues. HELEN remains untrumped.)

HELEN

No sacrifice? None of you? Mom?

MARION

Could you at least just let her go?

HELEN

Her daughter? Mom, why aren't you asking for that?

(To Raven:)

What's your father's name?

RAVEN

Rick.

HELEN

Brothers? Sisters?

RAVEN

(Catching the smallest movements from Lettie.)

No—Yes—no.

HELEN

Which? How Many?

RAVEN

One.

HELEN

Name.

RAVEN

(It's a fifty-fifty shot:)

What his name used to be or what he calls himself now?

HELEN

I'm tired of this.

MARION

Tired of ?

HELEN

This. This.

MARION

“This?” : The liquor? The whoring?

HELEN

I could shoot you, you know?; it might be worth it.

Then again: how sure are the rest of you that any of you could get to me before I managed to reload again? You wanna test it?

(Dead silence.)

HELEN

Yeah, I didn't think so.

(Pause.)

RAVEN

Why would you keep a gun in your car?

MARION

(Correcting her:)

Rifle.

HELEN

Protection.

REBECCA

Why do you need protection [,Helen]?

HELEN

I know what you're trying to do.

REBECCA

We're not trying to do anything.

HELEN

You're trying to get me to open up. To see you as people not the needy, two faced scum that you already know you are. I listen to your stories and I just wanna go "wa-wa-wa, I promise not to drink if you'll just shut up." I mean, come on. Ladies. You lost a job. You lost a house, a family. Your pet. Who cares? Everybody loses. Oh my god if I have to hear / the same stories out of your same mouths—

(LETTIE is trying so hard to segue into saying, "And what have you lost, Helen?")

HELEN (Continued:)

—You still want to hear my story? You think that'll magically change everything—and suddenly everyone'll love me, and I'll love you, and this'll end up in one big hug? It doesn't work for some people. Some people are unlovable.

LETTIE

I don't believe that.

HELEN

Bullshit. Hitler was unlovable.

MARION
You're not Hitler.

HELEN
How do you know?

REBECCA
Can you put down the firearm?

HELEN
No.

SUZANNE
We're not going to jump you.

HELEN
You think I'm stupid?

REBECCA
I think maybe you're out of options. I think you grabbed the gun because you didn't know what else to do. Then you shot your way in here: made a great entrance and then ... what?

(Lets the non-answer linger a moment.)

You were at a loss for what to do next.

HELEN
And?

REBECCA
And you still are.

SUZANNE
(welcome to my life.)

REBECCA
And now you're holding us hostage waiting for that next great moment to come and rescue you from all of this.

(A beat.)

REBECCA
What's that moment going to be?

(A long silence filled with unknown possibilities.)

HELEN

Oh, you are good. You and your Florence Nightingale speech—

SUZANNE

(Florence Nightingale?)

HELEN

—are just going to have to take a pass on this one: I'm not in the mood for your Community College psychobabble. So, sit down and shut up ... while I make up my mind.

LETTIE

I say let go of a hostage.

HELEN

What if I say “who do I shoot first”?

LETTIE

I say take your time.

SUZANNE

So, if we're hostages, what are your demands?

HELEN

Who said you're hostages?

MARION

She [Lettie] did.

LETTIE

Well, I only did because she [Rebecca] did.

HELEN

Will everyone just shut up!? I do the talking: I have the gun: only I do the talking.

LETTIE

... So, the one with the gun is the / only one—

MARION

She wants to call it a rifle.

LETTIE

—Rifle, yes—but she just called it / a gun.

MARION

She can call it whatever / she wants.

(HELEN repumps the rifle to make her point. The room quiets.)

HELEN

Thank you.

RAVEN

(... After what seems an appropriate pause ... :)

How long were you in the service?

(No reply from Helen—while the other ladies' provide a mixed bag of silent responses.)

My brother was overseas—well, he was stationed in Hawaii, so I don't know if that's technically overseas or not. It's .. uh .. basic training: "This is my rifle, this is my gun"...

HELEN

Ohhhh, we got a Nancy Drew here, do we? So sorry. Never served.

RAVEN

Army brat?

HELEN

Just something I picked up—God—Why does everything have to have some hidden meaning for you all, here? And Nancy, you're / drinkin' the Kool-Aid.

LETTIE

Raven.

MARION

Raven.

HELEN

Raven.

MARION

(Can't help but correct herself:)

Marissa.

RAVEN

... It's Raven, actually.

HELEN

I know it's Raven. I know you're not her daughter. Who makes up a name like that for themselves? Nothing against your parents, I'm sure they had some fine reason to name you after Edgar Allen Poe but I doubt you'd choose it yourself.

LETTIE

How'd you know she's not my daughter?

HELEN

Her eyes are too close together.

LETTIE

It could be her father. Between us we / could—

(HELEN repumps the rifle again—gaining the result she was after: silence.)

(Long pause. Having nothing left to lose—but her own dignity ... however if anyone laughs: she can shoot 'em—so ... what the hell)

HELEN

What next?

Round of hands: who wants a drink?

So, you were just ... carrying on as if everything was normal. Your little meeting ... You [pitiful batch of bitches]. Sharing stories.

[How did I get to my car—no never mind, who cares, right?] Who cares?

Whaddo you really wanna know? [And no one has the guts to say it ... right ...]

OK. What the hell:

WHY? WHY DID I SLEEP WITH YOUR HUSBANDS?

Well, I'll tell ya. Because they asked me to. For the record I never seduced any of them; I just didn't say no.

(To Raven:)

You got a boyfriend in the game, honey?

(RAVEN doesn't know exactly how to answer ...)

HELEN

(Referring to her rifle:)

I'm not going give you the boom boom but when the one with the boom boom asks the questions it's best you answer.

REBECCA

Please, she's not a part of this.

HELEN

(Considers her options then continues unabated:)

When I was drinking I used to go to bars to get picked up for sex. Because ... I really don't care about sex—it's just ..I don't know: no big deal. For me, anyway. So. But not being the prettiest—or the only girl in the room—hell, nowadays you don't even have to be a girl—what I'm trying to say is: too often I'd find myself waiting for the room to start to thin and a few drinks to kick in. Funny thing is I never cared too much about the act itself—it was about all the time spent leading up to it. It's all about getting them to give you their time. Make some ugly man's night, a plain man's fantasy come true: they look at you. That you're just talking to them it's [you can see it in their eyes—the plain ones: they're in heaven] ... and they ask if they can buy you a drink and of course you say, "Why sure, what're you having? Really—me too? I'll try one of those." Then two of those and before long you're talking and drinking, and staring and drinking, and laughing and, he's looking. Not for the door. Unless he wants to take you through it. Because by now he wants you. And you just want another drink. It's like foreplay. It's the romance part. It's ... Because you have grown up in a world where everybody says, "shut up you're blocking the TV" and no one has the time .. (or maybe that's just me). I grew up in that and I had no—I never learned to socialize. You just learn to *want*. So, I wanted. I wanted so bad and so I figured I wanted to be wanted. A welcome distraction. And they? They earned it. They earned the sex: they bought it with their time and attention; I didn't have to; I just didn't say "no". But I started drinking a little too heavy as the years go by and you wake up a few times with the wrong stranger and you make some more stupid choices for what you mistakenly thought was "love" and you figure: why not start over? So, I moved away. I moved away and started again. And I did the same damned thing; you repeat: Slowly: crossing the country. Till you end up in Bumfuck, Iowa and figure out: you know, maybe if you just stop the drinking—because you don't really care about that drink. And he doesn't care about the drink. And you do your steps and you pay your dues. And damn: men are men. And an alcoholic on his program wants the same thing any other man wants, right? Without the hangover in the morning. And if you feel like drinking again: you just go to another meeting where maybe you'll meet another lush: trying to keep from drinking.

So. You love me now? We hug this out one at a time or in a group?

LETTIE

I didn't know.

HELEN

Now you do.

(A beat.)

Does it change anything?

SUZANNE
(As if she was saying “yes”:)

No.

HELEN

Exactly.

LETTIE

Thank you for sharing.

HELEN

Right. How do you know it wasn't another lie just to get you all to stop?

LETTIE

We all lie.

HELEN

I'll give you that one.

(Then she sees something left out on a table:)

What's that?

MARION

What's—What [what're you talking about]—

SUZANNE

What's what?

REBECCA

I don't know.

LETTIE

(Knee jerk response—having no idea what she's talking about:)

Nothing—it's nothing.

MARION

What is ... ?

(But HELEN has gone over to the item and picked it up to verify. She picks up the credit card Raven used to open the door. She holds it up to the women requesting a response. None is offered.)

HELEN

This is my credit card. How did one of you get my credit card?
Which one of you ...

(She takes full grip of her rifle again.)

I bared my soul to you.

LETTIE

We / know ...

(But HELEN again has repumped the rifle. No reply.
Another standoff. She repumps it again. No reply.)

HELEN

One of you.

(She repumps the rifle again. Nothing. Again. Nothing.
Again. Nothing. Again. Nothing. Again ... most of the
women start to become oddly more at ease as the empty
evidence of Helen's weapon is becoming apparent. Most
of them but not MARION:)

MARION

(Indicating Raven:)

It was her.

HELEN

What did I do to you?
Empty your purse.

SUZANNE

Helen ...

HELEN

Empty it.

REBECCA

There's nothing in the gun.

MARION

Show her your purse.

SUZANNE

She didn't take your credit card; I gave it / to her.

REBECCA

Helen, the gun's empty.

I really didn't—

RAVEN

Show her!!

MARION

Marion, there's nothing in the gun.

LETTIE

(Grabbing Raven's purse and dumping the contents.)

MARION

IT'S A RIFLE!

(And among the contents of Raven's purse is a small digital recorder which lands with a THUNK and a digital screech from the its speaker. A beat.)

SUZANNE

(Calmly:)

What is that?

RAVEN

... It's nothing.

SUZANNE

(Keeping her tone:)

What is that?

RAVEN

(Carefully picking up the device and then turning it off.)

... It's a .. recorder—a recording device—it's a / recorder.

LETTIE

It's not a tape recorder: there's no / tape.

REBECCA

It's digital.

RAVEN

... I use it for school.

REBECCA

I know, I've seen them at choir rehearsal.

HELEN

(A beat: back to Raven:)

And it was on?

RAVEN

... Apparently.

(Pause. RAVEN quietly sets the device back down on one of the chairs then steps away from the machine. Another pause.)

MARION

Shoot it.

(A beat. HELEN finally relinquishes the weapon to the REBECCA who sets the weapon aside while the two of them, SUZANNE and LETTIE quietly focus their attention on Raven.)

RAVEN

I can explain. / It's actually quite .. amusing ... if you think about it ...

(While MARION has gone to retrieve the rifle: aims and fires it into the tape recorder. But, of course, the gun IS empty: nothing. She fires a couple more times, tries repumping then one more vain attempt.)

MARION

It's empty.

REBECCA

Who *are* you?

HELEN

"Raven"? Is that actually your name?

RAVEN

Yes, actually, that is actually—that's actually my name.

SUZANNE

Do you think if that wasn't her name that this would be a time to she would actually tell / us?

MARION

(Has opened Raven's wallet and looked at her driver's license:)

It's her actual name.

HELEN

So, Raven, *who* are you?

LETTIE

(After no reply.)

And why are you taping us?

RAVEN

... I'm ... [how do I put this?] ...

SUZANNE

You say it.

RAVEN

... I'm ... an alcoholic?

REBECCA

With a tape recorder.

LETTIE

You said there isn't a tape.

SUZANNE

(Steering her away from the addiction declaration:)

Are you a ...

(Searches for the word.)

MARION

(Looking at another ID card:)

She's a reporter. School paper.

SUZANNE

A reporter?

MARION

(Referring to the card:)

That's what it says. This is you, isn't it?

HELEN

So, we're a story for your school paper?

RAVEN

.. Not exactly.

LETTIE

High school or college?

SUZANNE

Is that really what's important here?

HELEN

Are you looking for a joke? Did you get a good laugh?

RAVEN

... I never laughed. I ...

SUZANNE

(To Marion:)

Your face when that door blew open; that was pretty classic.

MARION

Hey, I could've gotten hurt.

RAVEN

But no one got hurt.

HELEN

(As calmly as anything said this whole afternoon:)

Our lives, little girl are nothing *but* pain ... bitch.

RAVEN

... I get that.

(MARION is handed the tape recorder and drops it into an all but empty cup of coffee. Pause. The women wait for a reaction from Raven.)

REBECCA

That'll just dry out, won't it?

RAVEN

Probably. I may have to put it in rice.

(A beat.)

SUZANNE

(To all of them but landing on Helen:)

Whaddo you want to do?

LETTIE

Why does she get to decide?

SUZANNE

Tie her up; shoot her?

HELEN

Why do I have to decide?

(Pause. There is a silent agreement among the women.)

HELEN

I think she should leave.

RAVEN

What?

SUZANNE

Done. We want you to leave.

RAVEN

Please, this is [really] just a misunderstanding.

SUZANNE

Now.

RAVEN

... This ... [if you give me a moment to explain] ...

REBECCA

Is the best option you're gonna get. I'd take it if I were you.

(But the women are united on this. RAVEN considers her options as she gathers her things into her purse. Once this is done she goes to the door—which won't quite operate right—either turning on its hinge awkwardly or won't stay shut or ... it doesn't matter ... RAVEN turns back to make a final statement.)

RAVEN

I'm not going to publish this.

REBECCA

Of course you are.

LETTIE

What; we're not exciting enough for you?

(A beat.)

REBECCA

(To Raven:)

of course you are.

(RAVEN politely refuses to offer a lie or further apology and exits. The door unable to close properly behind her—though she does try to close it several times. She exits. The door quietly swings open again. There is no one there.)

LETTIE

Well, you're certainly not getting your security deposit back now.

(SUZANNE lights up a cigarette.)

SUZANNE

What? What she said.

(There is a moment of silence. Both REBECCA and HELEN light up as well.)

HELEN

Great.

(Toasting her cigarette:)

I'm Helen, and I'm an alcoholic.

(The other women toast their cigarettes back at her in a round of acknowledgement. As the scene progresses: MARION refuels on cookies and coffee as does LETTIE—who may also light up a cigarette.)

SUZANNE

It's what we do.

REBECCA

No cross talk.

SUZANNE

She wasn't making a speech; she said one word.

HELEN

Don't think of me as one of you yet. It's not ...

SUZANNE

We don't.

HELEN

Good.

LETTIE

You're still the enemy.

HELEN

Good. That's where I'm comfortable.

REBECCA

You tired of being comfortable?

HELEN

... Shuddup ...

REBECCA

Then you're one of us.

HELEN

It's not like that. It's not ... Don't think we're friends. I'm not ... I'm not a good person.

SUZANNE

None of us are good people. There isn't a decent person in this room.

MARION

Hey—

REBECCA

When you stop drinking you don't suddenly get a moral compass; you just get vision.

LETTIE

And you usually don't like what you see. (That's on a flyer somewhere around here.)

HELEN

I'm not saying anything more.

REBECCA

It's a step.

MARION

Good. Cause the Bingo people'll be here at five. Anybody wanna stay for a game?

SUZANNE

Why the hell would I do that?

MARION

Because it's fun.

(Light begin to fade. However the women continue talking, smoking, drinking stale coffee and cookies ...)

SUZANNE

It's like watching paint dry.

LETTIE

You mean watching "paint-by-the-numbers" dry.

HELEN

Oh my god, are they all like you?

REBECCA

Stick around and you'll see.

HELEN

I've seen; I've seen; I'd rather ... oh what the fuck, why not ...

LETTIE

See? Why not?

HELEN

God, this sucks.

SUZANNE

No one said it was gonna be easy.

(As the light fade to black:)

REBECCA

Amen to that.

SUZANNE

... Do you have to?

END