

Life Cycles

The Reincarnation Play

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ACT ONE

At center stage is a large ring of chairs, the kind of ugly and uncomfortable folding chairs you find at community centers or dull group therapy.

One at a time, the group members enter and take their usual seats, ELSA first. She, as a good group guide, shuffles the chairs around, sets down a small basket of candies—Werther’s, because her taste is like a grandmother’s. She checks the time, and chats casually with the group as they enter.

ELSA is the group “guide,” as she likes to insist. A mid-fifties spiritual healer turned reincarnation specialist after a near-death experience, Elsa ranges from “off her fucking rocker” to “maybe onto something?” In either case, she is well loved, even if her “sage” advice is often spoken over.

VICKI is a tall, blonde, transgender woman. She wears her hair in a plain ponytail and is neat but not overly made up. While waiting for the others to arrive (neither are impatient – everyone else is always nearly late), Vicki and Elsa might discuss Vicki’s upcoming book tour for her debut novel (really, rather a mediocre work, but it’s a lifelong dream fulfilled). Vicki is quiet but attentive, and rather unfazed by some of the odd quirks of those around her.

CLAUDETTE is the very definition of a middle-aged suburban mom, probably drinks kale juice for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and has a kid named Quaitelynn (pronounced Katelyn). She dresses to match and has a pack of Marlboro reds poking out of her bag (don’t tell her ex-husband, or her beloved son.) Claudette would like you to believe she is exactly as superficial as she appears.

MARIGOLD is in her late twenties, from Brooklyn, wears neat makeup and rather obviously dresses to impress. She’s intense to the point of instigating fear from others – though she sits next to Vicki, the seat to her other side remains empty. Marigold probably hit boys on the playground when she was young (and when she was old enough to know better). Marigold wears an engagement ring.

VERA is an eccentric older woman with dyed hair, three layers of various colored and textured shawls. She finger knits yarn and fidgets in the chair, but everyone knows she’s paying the best attention of anyone here. The group generally treats her like a relative that’s gone a bit funky in the head but who has garnered so much respect no one dares say it out loud.

Finally, EMILY rolls in (fashionably late, to no one’s surprise). She is young enough to be Claudette’s daughter (she isn’t, as she likes to remind Claudette). She plays with a keyring constantly and makes little eye contact. She dresses like the punk she wishes she is.

THE NEWCOMER

ELSA

Now that we have all come together as one beautiful circle, who would like to start us off? Maybe with something positive from the week?

Quiet for a long moment.

CLAUDETTE

Well, I... Like I guess I have something. If no one else does.

ELSA

You know you can always share here.

CLAUDETTE

It's not like it's a big deal or whatever.

ELSA

Please, grace us with whatever pains you this week.

CLAUDETTE

It's not exactly pain—

EMILY

Oh my god, just spill.

CLAUDETTE *(clearly building herself up to say something big)*

Well, I... I... I... picked Michael up from school today.

VERA *(the only one who knows what she's really saying)*

Oh, honey, I'm so sorry.

EMILY

I don't get it.

(An awkward beat.)

ELSA

So, Claudette... can you say a little more about how you're feeling about Michael?

MARIGOLD

Oh my gawd, was he sick? Poor kid, probably home now all wrapped up in bed—

CLAUDETTE

He's not sick.

VICKI

Claudette, I know you know what you mean, but please, *please* fill the rest of us in.

CLAUDETTE

I picked Michael up from school today.

EMILY

Oh my god.

CLAUDETTE

Because I was home all day. Because I didn't really... go to work today.

EMILY

And you lost your job. That's balls.

CLAUDETTE

I'm probably still employed, like it's fine, it happens. I called out, told them I was taking like one of those mental health days, you know? Like to just take a break, and really take care of myself. My manager's all about that, I think. Because it's been like a really hard week. Like, I finished all the divorce papers on Monday, and then all of a sudden, I just couldn't really get out of bed. You know what I mean, like you've probably been there, where you're definitely not depressed—because I'm not depressed, and no one in my family is, but like—moving is really hard? And the shower is so far away and there's like so many steps to turning it on, and if you can't shower, then you can't like... go to work. Anyway. I called out on Monday and told them Michael was home sick—he wasn't, and then I called out on Tuesday and told them I caught what Michael had, and yesterday I just like, worked from home, like on my laptop. And then today, like I knew it was going to be hard because Thursdays used to be, like our date night or whatever, but I looked in the mirror and I told myself that I had to get it together. So I took a shower, and I put the papers in the mail to the stupidly expensive lawyer and I made dinner and then I picked Michael up from school.

EMILY

Fuck.

CLAUDETTE

Watch your mouth.

EMILY

I'm watching it!

VERA

Are you feeling more yellow now?

CLAUDETTE

Yellow, I don't know.

VERA

You look more yellow to me, I could tell as soon as you walked in the door.

CLAUDETTE

Maybe it's just that I actually showered today.

VICKI

Or, maybe it's that the divorce has been weighing on you more than you would like to admit.

CLAUDETTE

Yeah, or that.

VICKI

Do you feel relieved? Is this a good thing?

CLAUDETTE

Like, *no*. I thought I would, you know? Like it's off my back, it's sent off, and it's something I've wanted for like, so long. So I should feel good, right?

(The sound of a door opening and closing echoes loudly and stops anyone from responding. The entire room festers in painfully awkward silence as the culprit, SHILOH enters, looking like a deer nose-to-nose with the grill of a car. She stumbles to the one empty chair (beside Marigold). It scrapes loudly across the floor and she sits down suddenly, causing a bit of a clatter.)

SHILOH is an extremely plain young woman who does nothing to change the fact that she is plain. She crosses and uncrosses her legs often, fiddles with the edge of her jacket (which she did not take off before sitting down) and looks as if she is about to dart away from the circle.

The room waits. And waits. And waits. The weight of the silence could kill.)

SHILOH

Um... Hi.

ELSA

Oh, well, hello. Hi.

SHILOH

Am I... in the right place?

(This seems to break the silence.)

ELSA

Yes, I'm *so* sorry, welcome, of course you're in the right place. Everyone is welcome here, even

if they have never been here before and are a rather unusual candidate. All are welcome to join in the circle.

SHILOH

Okay. Thanks. Is this the reincarnation support group? I saw it advertised.

ELSA

You're in the right place. I'm so glad you've found us.

MARIGOLD

It's destiny, I'm sure.

SHILOH

Well, I don't know about destiny.

MARIGOLD

You were fated to be here today, honey.

SHILOH

I don't really believe in fate—

VICKI

It's not a problem. We all have our belief systems, you're fine.

VERA

So, new girl, blue girl...

SHILOH

Blue girl?

VERA

New girl.

SHILOH

Blue...?

CLAUDETTE

It's her thing, you just nod along.

EMILY

It's like your weird aunt. You just gotta nod along when she says weird shit—

CLAUDETTE

Shh!

EMILY

-- because you know she means well, even if it's not completely clear. That's how it is with my Aunt Barb. We all nod and act like all is good, but she's pretty out of it.

VERA

I am much better company than anyone named Barb, and I am certainly *in* it.

EMILY

That you are, Ma.

SHILOH

She's your mother?

EMILY

God, we all wish.

SHILOH (*Elsa interrupts at the //*)

I'm sorry. Am I in the right place? This is not // what I expected.

ELSA (*interrupting at the //*)

There's no right place, or wrong place. Only the place you are in.

EMILY

So what's your deal, new girl?

SHILOH

My name is Shiloh.

EMILY

Shy-low. Makes sense, you seem shy.

SHILOH

I'm not shy—

ELSA

What has brought you to join us today?

SHILOH

Well, I've been reincarnated.

EMILY

No shit.

SHILOH

This is the reincarnation support group... right?

ELSA

I was right, it was fate.

SHILOH

I just thought this might be the right place to talk about some things that are happening to me.

CLAUDETTE

So like, what's your story? What do you do? Married, divorced?

EMILY

Single as fuck?

SHILOH

I'm single, but I don't think that really—

VICKI

Where do you work?

SHILOH

Well, I write the mechanic's column.

VICKI

Main Line Life or *The Voice*?

SHILOH

Main Line, but I—

CLAUDETTE

Do you, like, have any kids or anything? Or friends or whatever?

SHILOH

I—no kids, a very normal amount of friends, I don't see how—

MARIGOLD

Are you madly in love with somebody? I bet they're // gorgeous.

SHILOH

// I'm a little in love with someone—but—

VERA

And what's made you so royal purple?

SHILOH

Royal purple, what?

VERA

Royal purple, what other color did you think you would be?

SHILOH

I don't understand what that means—

EMILY

What's your thing?

SHILOH

My thing?

EMILY

Do you just repeat everything we say? Why are you here? What's your thing?

SHILOH

Well, I was reincarnated. Isn't that why we're all here?

(The group exchanges an alarmed look, almost in unison.)

SHILOH

This is a support group about reincarnation, right?

(More awkward silence.)

SHILOH

I mean, if I got that wrong, I'll just go, I didn't mean to intrude on something else—

ELSA

You're in the right place. It's just...

(She looks around, unsure what to say.)

EMILY

We got other stuff to talk about.

MARIGOLD

I'm planning a wedding, and my Andy likes to make me all anxious about it, ya know? So I gotta come in here and talk about him and the wedding and all that jazz. But I'm really excited about it. I'm *really* excited about it.

SHILOH

But... so you don't talk about reincarnation at all?

VICKI

We do when it's relevant.

SHILOH

But I need help.

(The group exchanges another look.)

CLAUDETTE

Well, what's your story? Like, why do you need help with the reincarnation part of it all?

SHILOH

Should I just... go for it?

EMILY

Nah, you should let us sit in silence.

SHILOH

Okay, so... A person who looks like my twin died in San Francisco on my birthday.

(A beat.)

EMILY

That all you got?

SHILOH

No, no. I didn't know about him before I started having all these weird memories and things where I'd see this guy who I didn't *know* but I *knew*, if you know what I mean. Maybe you know what I mean. He was like a long lost brother or something, but I definitely knew him. Except I'd only ever seen him when I was sleeping or in daydreams, and I thought maybe I was making it up.

VICKI

You can't make up a face when you dream, every face you see is one you have seen before, even in passing.

SHILOH

Right, right, that's why it was so weird. I'd never seen this guy before but we have the same nose, the same face, the same smile, the same laugh—it was weird. And then I started *knowing* this name and it would cycle over and over in my head: Joel Weiss. Joel Weiss. Joel Weiss. Joel Weiss. Like a heartbeat, but it wasn't coming from me. It wasn't my voice. I thought I was going crazy, so I googled him and this guy died on my birthday, at the exact minute I was born.

CLAUDETTE

Couldn't it be a coincidence?

SHILOH

Maybe, except we look identical, and I know that he had a cat when he was little named Romeo and he started working as a mechanic because he couldn't afford to fix his car, and his first kiss was a girl named Regina and none of that is in his obituary.

MARIGOLD

How do ya know it's true at all?

SHILOH

I wrote a letter to his mother. She's still alive, because he died a week before his twenty-sixth birthday.

VICKI

How old are you?

SHILOH

Twenty-five. My birthday is in two weeks.

A LOVE STORY?

(The following lines are delivered overlapping, in a rush of WTF)

EMILY

Oh, shit.

VERA

You must be so frightened.

SHILOH

Well, I—

MARIGOLD

I don't get it.

CLAUDETTE

She's going to, like, die or something. Right?

SHILOH

I hope not—

VERA

Darling, you must feel so dark green!

EMILY

She's not going to die.

CLAUDETTE

I didn't mean for it to come out like that—

SHILOH

Can you slow down—

MARIGOLD

How tragic!

ELSA *(quietly)*

Could we come back together as one circle, as a team?

VICKI *(louder)*

Could you all stop shouting for five minutes and let the girl breathe?

(Quiet.)

MARIGOLD

Honey, you were just right to come here. It makes sense that you were all scared 'bout all this.

SHILOH

That's not exactly why I came. I'm not finished—

CLAUDETTE

Dying's a really normal thing to be scared about, like most people are afraid of dying.

SHILOH

I'm not—

CLAUDETTE

If we weren't scared about the end and all that, we wouldn't be afraid of getting hurt, and that's really important.

VERA

You might be young and blue and nowhere near the end, but feeling green is—

SHILOH *(loudly)*

I'm not afraid of dying.

(beat.)

ELSA

This might be beyond my expertise.

SHILOH

No, I'm not... suicidal or anything. It's just... It's not the end that scares me, I'm in love.

MARIGOLD

She's in love! And she's dying! Oh, it's so romantic.

EMILY

What's romantic about that?

MARIGOLD

It's star-crossed lovers! Honey, it's so beautiful. Oh my god. She's in love!

SHILOH

I've never said that out loud before.

MARIGOLD

Isn't it just a wonderful feeling, darling? Oh my god. I love love.

A beat.

MARIGOLD

So, who is he? Is he handsome? Is he smart? Is he good to you, 'cause honey if not, we'll get rid of him for you.

SHILOH

I'm in love. I'm in love!

MARIGOLD

Isn't it beautiful how the threat of death can bring ya such emotion?

SHILOH

No—I— I don't know her.

MARIGOLD

Her?

SHILOH

I've never said this out loud before.

EMILY

That you're gay? 'Cause I got that impression the second you walked in.

SHILOH

I've said that before.

EMILY

Too cool to say you're in love?

SHILOH

I haven't met her.

MARIGOLD

Oooooooooohhhhhhhh. Now it's getting good. You fell in love at first sight and had to wait until you were a week away from death to let 'em know!

SHILOH

Well, I've met her, but I haven't.

MARIGOLD

I can see it now! You approach and she saves you from death at the last second so you can spend the rest of your lives together!

SHILOH

It's not really like that.

MARIGOLD

And then—

VICKI

Let her breathe!

ELSA

Yes, yes, of course, dear sweet new girl—what was your name? – oh, no matter. You have experienced the greatest feeling of any emotion: *LOVE*—

CLAUDETTE snorts.

ELSA

Love, which binds us all together, which makes us one cohesive human experience, which allows us to feel compassionate, empathetic, *LOVE!*

SHILOH

She doesn't know I exist.

EMILY

Shit. Well, that's step one.

SHILOH

I don't even know how to approach it.

VICKI

Who is she?

SHILOH

Joel Weiss' wife.

EMILY

Joel Weiss, your past life?

SHILOH

The very same.

MARIGOLD

You're in love with a widow? That's kind of kinky.

SHILOH

Is she a widow if I'm alive?

EMILY

Fuck, dude.

SHILOH

Well, she doesn't know I'm alive.

CLAUDETTE

That sounds made up. How old is she now, like fifty? Double your age?

SHILOH

Double my age exactly.

CLAUDETTE

So you're fantasizing about a fifty year old woman in your head?

SHILOH

No, no. I wouldn't fantasize about someone I've never met—

MARIGOLD

I would. I do—

SHILOH

And mostly I remember her when she was younger. My age.

CLAUDETTE

Is she like a real person, or just in your head?

SHILOH

Angeline Weiss. She kept her married name.

(EMILY whips out a phone and starts googling.)

CLAUDETTE

How did you even find her?

SHILOH

Just, some searching. Normal searching.

CLAUDETTE

This just sounds like a coincidence, like maybe you shouldn't be worked up about it. Just like, make it through the next two weeks, celebrate your birthday and like, move on with your life.

SHILOH

But it's real. She's alive. I-I'm pretty sure of it, at least. It all makes sense, it all adds up.

EMILY

"Angeline Weiss, Professor of American History at UPENN, recently won an award for her new book, *The Great American Prophecy // Political Cycles of the Past and What Happens Next...*"

SHILOH

// Political Cycles of the Past and What Happens Next.

EMILY

She's been a professor at UPENN for a long fucking time, got her doctorate from – fuck—from the University of San Francisco in 1994. How bout that for a coincidence?

SHILOH

At some point it's got to stop being just coincidence.

EMILY

She's what, fifty? A tenured professor, publishing like mad—oh, shit, she's here. "Joel Weiss is survived by wife of two years, Angeline Weiss, a San Francisco native." Damn, new girl.

CLAUDETTE

You coulda just read that yourself or whatever. That's not legit evidence.

SHILOH

Except I didn't read it before, that was published when I was an infant. There's no way I would have even known *to* look for it.

EMILY

She's engaged.

SHILOH

Yeah.

EMILY

Shit.

SHILOH

I guess twenty-five years is long enough to move on.

EMILY

Shit.

SHILOH

It's not like she knows I even exist.

EMILY

Shit.

(Beat.)

EMILY

Look, I'll take the fiancé out.

VICKI *(interrupting EMILY)*

Let me get this straight. You're in love with someone you've never met, who happens to be basically old enough to be your mother and who has no idea that you even exist, let alone are the *reincarnation of her dead husband.*

SHILOH

Well. Yeah.

VICKI

And you know all of this because of some feelings you have had, some weird images popping up in your head.

SHILOH

It's a little more than that.

VICKI

And you expect us to think that you're not completely off your rocker—maybe dealing with

some kind of Freudian mess—or maybe just scared to be getting older, all of this isn't supposed to make us concerned for your mental wellbeing?

SHILOH

This *is* a reincarnation support group.

(A beat.)

SHILOH

I don't know where else to go.

(A beat.)

SHILOH

Maybe it is all in my head. If you think I haven't thought of that, you must think I'm stupid, or gullible. If you think I haven't spent just as long doubting every little thing in my head—fuck, I don't even believe in god! If you think I'm anything but at the end of my rope, anything but completely desperate, then I don't know what to tell you. Now I don't know if any of this is true, but it's getting worse and it's taking over my life and somehow my body is convinced it's going to die in a week, so if that's true then I might as well go and talk this woman. If it's true, then at least I got to talk to her before I died again, and if it's not, then there's another person who thinks I'm completely crazy. At least I have an answer. At least I have something. The way things are right now doesn't work. I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't work, I can't even think. I've lost... I've lost so much time over this. I've lost so much. I feel lovesick, love-stupid, like everything in my life is revolving more and more around her and if I don't talk to her, if I'm not with her, it's like resisting gravity.

(A long pause.)

EMILY

Fuck, dude.

SHILOH

I haven't been sleeping, because it feels like the bed is too small, too cold. I was dating this girl I really liked, but... she was sure I was cheating because I kept saying 'Angeline' in bed and – how did she say it? I look at her like I'm trying to figure out why her face isn't the one I'm in love with.

(A beat. No one speaks.)

SHILOH

I'm sorry I'm talking so much. I didn't even know I had so much in my head, I've just—I've never said any of this out loud.

VERA

Stop apologizing, blue girl.

SHILOH

Blue...?

VERA

We're going to help you.

EMILY

Oh are we?

CLAUDETTE

Hush. It's the right thing to do.

MARIGOLD

It's such a beautiful love story.

SHILOH

How do I talk to her? Should I?

ELSA

I dislike saying no, but—

EMILY

Then don't. We've finally got a real problem!

MARIGOLD

I have real problems—

THE DECISION

VICKI

Look, this sounds nice and all, but why should we believe it?

VERA

Why ever not?

MARIGOLD (*nodding to Vicki*)

This is just about the most exciting thing that's happened here since you came out.

ELSA

I agree. This group is for support and care, but we must remain focused and not care too much about one singular group member's rather odd situation.

SHILOH

This is a reincarnation group! It's supposed to be odd!

ELSA

But not this odd.

EMILY

Look, we can sit around gossiping like old farts—

VERA

Now, don't be yellow, young lady.

EMILY

—Or we can actually help someone.

VICKI

I just don't, believe it. Reincarnation... honey, it's a nice idea.

SHILOH

Reincarnation. Support. Group??

VICKI

Yes, but...

(She exchanges a look.)

VICKI

It's not like it's real.

ELSA

Reality is a relative term, really, we all make our own realities each and every day that we're alive.

VICKI

But there's no scientific evidence for it. Nothing that would make it anywhere near factual, and in fact it makes little actual sense.

CLAUDETTE

Yeah, but, like, why not?

VERA

Love is patient, love is red, love is all around us and unknowable.

VICKI

That doesn't mean anything—

EMILY

No, she's onto something.

MARIGOLD

Even if I can't define how I feel when I look in my Andy's eyes, I know it in my heart.

VICKI

You have some barely legitimate evidence that doesn't prove anything. There's no good reason we should believe you at all.

EMILY

That's not fair—

SHILOH

You're right.

(A beat.)

SHILOH

You're right. You have no reason to believe me. I have no reason to believe me. I'll go.

EMILY

Wait—

SHILOH

No, it's fine. I thought I had found a group of like-minded people who could help me, but clearly I was wrong. I'll go.

MARIGOLD

Honey, we can—

SHILOH

Thank you for your time.

(She stands, straightening the jacket she still hasn't taken off and shoves the chair back, exiting the circle and awkwardly knocking against the chair. The group exchanges an alarmed glance. A beat.)

VERA

Well that's rather chartreuse.

VICKI

Good riddance.

CLAUDETTE

That was maybe the most exciting thing that's ever happened.

(Another beat. Shiloh's almost out the door.)

EMILY

Goddamn it, I don't know about you all but I want to know how this story ends.

(She stands, waiting a moment to see if anyone will stop her. MARIGOLD stands with her. They rush off after SHILOH.)

(overlapping:)

MARIGOLD

Shiloh!

EMILY

Yo, new girl!

VICKI

We're wasting our time—

CLAUDETTE

Would you *shut up*?

(VICKI sputters)

CLAUDETTE

I get this is all, like, unusual or whatever, but I'm kind of bored of talking about what color Marigold's bridesmaid dresses are going to be.

VICKI

I just don't see any evidence—

CLAUDETTE

Then forget the evidence.

VERA

The new girl is blue, after all.

CLAUDETTE

See? If the new girl can be blue, you can, like, sit down and try to help her, or whatever.

VICKI

Fine.

ELSA

And you really ought to be kind about it. Every new circle, when welcoming someone new, ought to open themselves up first in order to be truly opened.

VICKI

I'll be open.

CLAUDETTE

Even if it's fake, it'll be a great story to tell your boyfriend, won't it?

VICKI

I suppose that's true.

VERA

I would call you a green-old-grump, but you're far pinker than I am.

VICKI

Thank you?

(MARIGOLD and EMILY re-enter, SHILOH between them, looking a bit like she's been coerced back in the room.)

EMILY

We have decided.

VICKI

Oh have we?

EMILY

Yes, we've made a democratic decision.

CLAUDETTE

Doesn't that mean we all get a vote?

EMILY

Not in this democracy.

SHILOH

I don't think that's a democracy.

EMILY

Alright then, we've made an oligarchic, monarchical, tyrannical, whatever-you-wanna-call-it decision.

VICKI

Have you?

EMILY

We are going to be wing-women.

VICKI

We're what?

EMILY

Wing-women. We're going to get Shiloh here and her wife-to-be to hook up.

SHILOH

I don't know about hook up.

EMILY

Do the dirty.

SHILOH

I don't think—

EMILY

Whatever. *Talk* to each other.

MARIGOLD

Besides, I know I'm just dyin' to find out if it's all true.

SHILOH

I'm not lying—

MARIGOLD

No, honey, I don't think you are.

VICKI

Just crazy.

VERA

We're all a little fuchsia in the face from time to time.

ELSA

Crazy is an othering word. We all experience things at different levels of reality. You don't need to be crazy to be wrong, or right, or anything in between.

SHILOH

Was I supposed to understand that?

EMILY

No, sit.

(SHILOH sits, Marigold again to one side.)

MARIGOLD

So. What are your goals for therapy?

ELSA

Not therapy—

MARIGOLD

What do you want outta all this?

(A beat.)

SHILOH

Should I talk to her? What do I say? What do I do if she thinks I'm completely crazy? What do I do if she thinks I'm not crazy? What if I am... crazy? What if I'm not, and I only have a week left? What if this it? What if I die again and have to try again? What if—

EMILY

Woah. Reasonable goals, we've only got one session this week.

SHILOH

You're right. Damn. Okay.

MARIGOLD

We know you've gotta talk to her.

SHILOH

Yes. I think so. Yes.

EMILY

So how about: what do I say to her to make her think I'm not completely crazy?

SHILOH

What do I say to her to make her think I'm not completely crazy and maybe hear out my story and maybe tell me if she remembers me?

EMILY

That's a good question.

VICKI

What's your plan?

SHILOH

Uh.

VICKI

You have no idea?

SHILOH

I've never even said any of this out loud before.

EMILY

Well, she's a professor, right?

SHILOH

Yes. Yes, so I could go to UPENN.

VICKI

Convenient, that it's so close.

SHILOH

Or maybe the universe was looking out for me.

VICKI

Maybe.

EMILY

Well, all my profs have office hours.

MARIGOLD

You could bring her flowers to office hours!

CLAUDETTE

Or you could, like, not do that. That would scare anybody.

MARIGOLD

You could bring her chocolate to office hours.

CLAUDETTE

What if you start with a conversation?

SHILOH

A conversation?

EMILY

Just... talk to each other.

SHILOH

I could have a conversation.

EMILY

Oh good.

MARIGOLD

With *one* flower?

EMILY

Maybe as a back-up.

SHILOH

But... I don't even know when her office hours are. Maybe she's on sabbatical. Maybe she doesn't have office hours.

EMILY

I wanted to be a detective when I was little. Bet I can do it ten minutes or less.

VICKI

Bet you ten you can't.

EMILY

Well now I definitely have to.

(She whips out her phone and begins typing quickly.)

VICKI

I'm counting seconds.

EMILY

Whatever. Alright, the hours aren't on the UPENN website...

SHILOH

I did check that. I wasn't entirely lost, just...

EMILY

Bradley Chance is a senior history major. Bet he's in one of her classes if I just...

MARIGOLD

Did you just add him on facebook?

EMILY

What of it?

MARIGOLD

That's a little weird, y'know?

EMILY

We have a problem and a solution. I'll do whatever it takes.

SHILOH

But even if we can figure out when she's in her office, I have no clue what to say.

VICKI

"Hi, I'm a nut who thinks I'm your wife."

EMILY

Not that.

MARIGOLD (*dramatically*)

"Hello, lover. I have arrived, finally, to take my rightful place as your soulmate."

EMILY

Definitely not that.

ELSA

Being honest and straightforward with our feelings is the only true path to deep and intimate communication. You should open your heart to her and share all you have to give.

EMILY

And that will absolutely scare her off. I'd just start with 'hi.'

SHILOH

And then what?

EMILY

You know what? We're going to roleplay.

SHILOH

We're going to what?

EMILY

Roleplay.

SHILOH

Uh.

EMILY

Come on, it's nothing kinky. Go, move those chairs.

(The room erupts into a flurry of movement. ELSA drags her feet in helping, but then jumps it like it was her idea all along. VICKI, grumbling, helps. VERA remains seated, and the others respectfully arrange the chairs around her. When all is said and done, there is a semi-circle and two chairs facing each other.

EMILY grabs VICKI's sleeve.)

VICKI

What?

EMILY

You're going to play the professor.

VICKI

No way, why me?

EMILY

One, you're a heartthrob, and two, new girl needs to be prepared for a tough subject.

VICKI

Ugh.

(She plops into the 'professor' chair and assumes a haughty professor type.)

EMILY

Now, Shiloh, sit.

(She sits.)

SHILOH

Now what?

EMILY

Go for it. I'll jump in only when needed.

SHILOH

Uh, hi—

EMILY

Too uncertain.

SHILOH

Hello.

EMILY

Much better.

SHILOH

Could we just try it a little first?

(EMILY, huffily, sits down beside Marigold, who is watching with rapt excitement.)

IMAGINE ME & YOU

(Shiloh and Vicki exchange a glance during an awkward beat.)

SHILOH

So. Uh. Hi.

VICKI

Hi.

SHILOH

Well, I'm...

VICKI

Are you one of my students? – is that what a professor would say? I never went to office hours.

SHILOH

I think so, I don't know. I don't know.

EMILY *(whispered)*

Stay in character!

SHILOH

I'm playing *myself*.

EMILY

Shhh.

SHILOH

Alright, alright. Uh. No, Professor Weiss, I'm not your student.

VICKI

Look, you can't audit my class, it's full. Sorry.

SHILOH

No, I—I'm here for personal reasons.

VICKI

Oh, *personal* reasons?

EMILY

God, no, no just stop there.

VICKI

What did I do wrong?

EMILY

That's not how professors talk.

MARIGOLD

That's not too far from how all of my profs talked.

EMILY

Well, let's try again anyways.

VICKI

Hi, welcome... to my office hours...uh.

SHILOH

Hi. Thank you for letting me come to your office hours.

CLAUDETTE

You don't have to thank her for letting you come to office hours.

SHILOH (*huffily*)

Okay, fine. Hi.

VICKI

How can I... help... you? – is that *better*?

SHILOH

Well, I have a personal question. Or two. Or more than two.

CLAUDETTE

This is, like pretty horrible.

SHILOH

God, I shouldn't talk to her at all, should I?

CLAUDETTE

No, come on. Vicki, just—you know what, just like, switch with me.

EMILY

I can do it.

CLAUDETTE

You can have a turn in a minute.

EMILY

Always have to butt your nose in when it's not welcome.

SHILOH

I mean, if you can help—

EMILY

Whatever.

(VICKI happily gives the seat over to Claudette, who plops down and crosses her legs primly, embodying a snooty professor type.)

SHILOH

What do I do?

CLAUDETTE

Hello, student, and welcome to my office hours. What can I do for you today?

EMILY

'Sounds like Elsa.

ELSA

I would be a wonderful professor if that was the right profession for me.

CLAUDETTE

Hello, student—

SHILOH

Hi.

(She cuts CLAUDETTE off and sticks out a hand.)

CLAUDETTE *(aside, out of "character")*

Good, pushy, I like it.

CLAUDETTE

So... like,

SHILOH

I'm your wife. Your husband. Well, I suppose now—

CLAUDETTE

What?

SHILOH

What I mean to say is that we were married. Once.

CLAUDETTE

Who the – *heck* – are you?

SHILOH

Well, I’m... my name is Shiloh—

CLAUDETTE

Are you one of my students? Is this like, some prank?

SHILOH

No, I—

CLAUDETTE

Because that would be like, pretty messed up.

SHILOH

I’m not!

CLAUDETTE

Coming here all like “I’m your wife.” Shiloh, whatever your name is, whatever your *game* is, I am not even, like, a lesbian or whatever the word the kids use for it. Besides, I don’t date students.

SHILOH

I’m not a student.

CLAUDETTE

How did you even get in here?

SHILOH

I walked.

CLAUDETTE

Yeah, like, alright.

(She turns and mimes dialing a phone.)

SHILOH *(halfway out of the scene)*

What are you doing?

CLAUDETTE

What do you think I'm doing? *(to the "phone")* Yes, hi, campus security, please come down, like right away.

(End the "scene." Claudette slouches out of her prim professor look and grins at the room.)

CLAUDETTE

How did I do?

EMILY

Better than Vicki.

SHILOH

Hopeless.

CLAUDETTE

I don't think—

SHILOH

Not you, me.

CLAUDETTE

Well, yeah, like it's pretty hopeless looking right now.

SHILOH

Fuck.

EMILY

She said *right now*.

VICKI

You've got four minutes left, Emily.

(EMILY looks at her phone)

EMILY

Whatever. He'll accept my friend request—

MARIGOLD

From a stranger...?

EMILY

—and we'll be fuckin' golden.

SHILOH

This is not going to work.

EMILY

It's definitely going to work.

SHILOH

I shouldn't even bother. I don't know why I bother. I'm better off just letting the next two weeks pass and chalking all this up to being completely off-my-rocker crazy—

MARIGOLD

Woah. I know that panic voice, honey, you gotta take a deep breath. Shiloh, honey, you've got a beautiful love story. We just have to figure out how to tell it.

VERA

Well said. And Claudette, if this person loved Shiloh—or Joel—like Shiloh seems to, she is probably red over heels, blue eyes and gold over her. Or him.

SHILOH

Red over heels?

EMILY

Crazy about you too.

SHILOH

This is stupid. I feel stupid.

ELSA

We all feel stupid sometimes, this is a natural part of life. What matters most is what we do with that feeling. We can let it dominate our lives, or we can make concrete changes to be present and welcome new people into our lives.

EMILY

In short, you might be gone in a week anyway, so YOLO.

SHILOH

YOLO?

EMILY

Well, you might live again. But you're fucked if you do because she'll be gone or really wrinkly by then, and if you don't then you're definitely fucked.

VICKI

That's one way to put it.

EMILY

I'm not wrong. You said it yourself, worst case she thinks you're crazy. Best case, you're right.

MARIGOLD

I wanna be the professor this time.

CLAUDETTE

I was a perfectly good professor.

VICKI

I don't think I want to know what kind of traumas you experienced in college to try to show that sort of professor. That was just mean, Claudette.

(CLAUDETTE, huffily, rescinds the professor chair. MARIGOLD pulls some brightly colored papers out of her bag and excitedly rushes over and plops down into the chair.)

MARIGOLD

I'm ready.

EMILY

Alright, I'm going to come and coach you this time.

SHILOH

I don't know about all this.

MARIGOLD

You should exit and come back in. Make it feel real.

SHILOH

I don't know—

EMILY

Yes, good plan.

(EMILY pushes Shiloh towards the door. Shiloh, stumbling slightly, exits the circle. MARIGOLD begins "grading" papers in earnest, her pink frilly pen an odd image for the resolutely academic expression she attempts to embody.)

ANOTHER LIFE

(SHILOH re-enters the room, faking confidence and seemingly determined to get this right. She mutters something to herself as she enters, and only hesitates when she is a foot away from the chair across from MARIGOLD. MARIGOLD continues to grade papers, fluffy pink pen darting back and forth across the page. She might even mutter aloud to herself “James, you idiot, it’s clearly 1974, not 1973” because Marigold was, of course, a method actor in her college years. Shiloh pauses outside the “door.”)

SHILOH

Knock, knock.

MARIGOLD *(uninterested)*

Come in.

SHILOH

Hello, Professor Weiss.

MARIGOLD *(still not looking up)*

Sit, sit. You know where the coats go, yeah?

(SHILOH, a little taken aback, finally takes off the awkward tan coat. It slumps over the back of the chair revealing a neat, modest outfit, lacking eccentricity or bright colors.)

MARIGOLD

How can I help you...?

SHILOH

Shiloh Stevenson.

MARIGOLD

Miss Stevenson. *(beat, finally looks up from the grading)* Which of my classes are you in? I don't remember that name on my roster.

SHILOH

Well, I'm not yet in one of your courses.

MARIGOLD

Then maybe you could come back next semester. It's a bit late to add you in, I think.

SHILOH

I'm... I'm actually here on more of a personal matter.

MARIGOLD

What kinda personal matter? Maybe the Counseling Center—

SHILOH

I—Well—Professor Weiss, I know about your husband.

MARIGOLD

My husband?!

EMILY

Wait, pause, pause. Shiloh, too fast, too much. You can't scare her away before she hears you out.

SHILOH

You're right. Damn it. What should I say?

CLAUDETTE

Something not creepy.

VICKI

Lead with something else, anything else. Maybe just get her attention or something.

SHILOH

Okay. Okay.

EMILY

Okay?

SHILOH

Do I need to start from the beginning?

EMILY

Go from where you are. Marigold, your line.

MARIGOLD (*assuming her role again*)

What kinda personal matter? Maybe the Counseling Center would be better for you.

SHILOH

It's a... a bit of an academic survey I'm doing.

MARIGOLD

I don't really have the time right now.

SHILOH

Please. Please, it will only take a few minutes, I swear.

MARIGOLD

Look, I'm glad you're excited—

SHILOH

I need a history professor's opinion! It's for a grade. I'm sorry for interrupting you.

(A phone dings, but Shiloh and Marigold are entranced in their "scene.")

MARIGOLD

How long will it take?

SHILOH

Five minutes. Tops. You can cut me off if it takes long than that.

(Marigold looks at her watch (she's not wearing a watch) and nods once.)

MARIGOLD

Shoot.

SHILOH

Do you believe in reincarnation?

MARIGOLD

I might.

(EMILY is no longer watching the scene intently, instead, is staring at her phone, typing furiously.)

SHILOH

As a historian, do you feel there is evidence for reincarnation?

MARIGOLD

As a historian? Girl, I don't know.

VICKI *(hushed)*

Stay in character!

MARIGOLD

Uh... yes. Uh huh, yes, as a historian, I do indeed, uh, believe in reincarnation.

SHILOH

You think it might be plausible?

MARIGOLD

Yes, I think so.

SHILOH

So if someone were to report to you that they were reincarnated... you might believe them?

EMILY (*loudly*)

Oh, *shit* yes!

(Everyone turns to the interruption. EMILY does not notice for a moment.)

EMILY

Shit, what day is it? This is today. Shit this is today.

VICKI

Your time's up anyway.

EMILY

No, I have it. I have it!

VICKI

No way.

EMILY

Yes way.

VICKI

How did you even...?

EMILY

Bradley Chance accepted my friend request.

VICKI

And?

EMILY

And I sent him a very sweet message: “hey, brady—that’s what his friends call him on his facebook timeline—I’m in Weiss’ history class and I majorly bombed the last *thing* for her—because I don’t know if there was an exam or a paper but either way, there’s got to be something—what are her office hours again?”

(Showing the phone to the group.)

SHILOH

That’s brilliant.

EMILY

I know.

MARIGOLD

Damn. That’s impressive.

VICKI

I suppose.

EMILY

So we’re going now.

SHILOH

What?

EMILY

We have forty-five minutes before office hours end, Claudette’s got a minivan with room for seven—thanks soccer mom—and you’ve got a week left to live.

VICKI

We don’t know if she actually has a week—

EMILY

It’s a fuckin’ adventure. And... according to Waze, it’s only twenty-five minutes. Leaving twenty minutes for pure seduction.

MARIGOLD

This is so romantic!

SHILOH

I don't know about this—

EMILY

Well I do, so let's go.

VICKI

She's going to end up arrested.

CLAUDETTE

Or worse, heartbroken.

ELSA

I am not sure this an appropriate use of our group time.

EMILY

Let's take a vote. All in favor of following a beautiful love story to its end and connecting two soulmates separated by time and making the world a more wonderful place, raise your hand.

(EMILY puts two hands in the air. MARIGOLD also sticks a hand up, then VERA cautiously joins. CLAUDETTE, sighing, puts her hand up.)

CLAUDETTE

Why not? This will be, like, an adventure or whatever.

(SHILOH looks around the circle.)

SHILOH

I guess...I can't live without knowing.

(SHILOH puts her hand up. ELSA looks at her, then around the group, and finally raises her own hand.)

ELSA

If the goal is really to support each other, and this is the best form of support for your troubles... I am ethically obligated to help you gain spiritual enlightenment in this way.

SHILOH

Thank you?

CLAUDETTE

C'mon, Vicki. Don't be a grump.

VICKI

I'm not a grump. Fine.

(She begrudgingly puts a hand up.)

VICKI

I still think you're crazy, and I don't think talking to her is a good idea, but damned if I'm going to be left here while you all go off on an adventure.

EMILY

Yes! Yes! Okay, let's go!

(She dashes out of her seat, hauling Shiloh up by the hand.)

VERA

This has turned to a rather greeny-blue day after all.

(The group leaves the chairs behind, led by CLAUDETTE, who pulls a brightly-colored keyring out of her bag, and EMILY, who drags Shiloh behind her as Shiloh tugs the bulky tan jacket back on.)

ACT TWO

ANGELINE WEISS

Angeline Weiss' office is an absolute mess. Two comfortable chairs sit close to the desk—or there's probably a desk under there. No one has seen it in under least three years' worth of low-scoring essays, article ideas, manuscript drafts, and – is that a coffee cup or an animal? There is also a rather lumpy two-seater couch in the corner between two overflowing bookshelves. The space feels smaller than it is because of so many precarious stacks of books against each wall. A door divides The Office from the other half of the stage.

ANGELINE sits at the desk, wearing a pair of reading glasses. She is, like Shiloh, rather plain-looking. She is dressed neatly if eccentrically, as if she got dressed in a rush (she did) and perhaps could have done with a second glance in the mirror. She isn't too over-the-top, but if one were to look close, she would notice mismatched socks, a messy bun, and a stain on the collar of her shirt. Angeline is rather erratic. She picks up a book, sets it down, picks up a paper, sets it down, then returns to the book to find her lost page, then sifts through a stack of papers hanging on the edge of the desk and scribbles herself a note.

After a few moments of Angeline's shuffling, the Support Group enters.

A loud thump reveals SHILOH being shoved on stage. She skitters forward and ends nearly nose-to-nose with Angeline's door. The culprit, EMILY is close behind, aided by MARIGOLD. CLAUDETTE, keeping a close eye on VICKI enters next. Finally, ELSA helps VERA onstage. VERA sits in a chair usually reserved for students just outside Angeline's office.

SHILOH

Oh god. Oh god. Take me back.

(She tries to exit. EMILY and MARIGOLD catch her easily.)

SHILOH

Uh-uh. This isn't happening. I can't do it.

MARIGOLD

Honey, it's true love.

SHILOH

Nope, I'm crazy.

CLAUDETTE

We didn't drive all the way over here for nothing, like, c'mon. Get in there and, like, make us proud. That's what works on my son.

SHILOH

Nope, this is definitely worse than not doing anything—

VICKI

Even I think you should do it.

SHILOH

Oh my god—

EMILY

New girl!

SHILOH

--my god—

EMILY

Get it together!

(SHILOH, startled, pauses.)

EMILY

Close your mouth, stop waffling, and go and get your girl!

(EMILY, sensing an opportunity, spins SHILOH around and pushes her boldly at the door. CLAUDETTE, a conspirator, opens it, and EMILY shoves SHILOH inside, slamming the door closed behind her.

ANGELINE does not look up, nor does she look phased by the commotion.)

ANGELINE

Come on in, take a seat.

EMILY

Go, new girl!

ANGELINE

You've certainly waited 'till the last minute of my hours.

SHILOH

Uh.

ANGELINE

What is it?

(SHILOH still has not moved from her spot just inside the door. She's awestruck, falling head over heels, love at ~~first~~ second sight kind of in awe.)

ANGELINE, annoyed, finally looks up. She takes off her reading glasses, stashing them in a shirt pocket which she'll soon forget.)

ANGELINE

You good?

SHILOH

Hunghdayou.

ANGELINE

Was that English?

(ANGELINE stands up, concerned, and knocks a giant stack of papers off the side of her desk and onto the ground.)

ANGELINE

Shitdamn.

(SHILOH, snapped out of it by a distant memory brought suddenly forward, rushes forward to help pick up the papers. ANGELINE bends to help, and they are suddenly very close. SHILOH stares at the papers.)

SHILOH

Sorry. Sorry, I, uh... have low blood sugar. Sometimes. I got a little dizzy.

ANGELINE

Thank you, here.

(She takes the papers from Shiloh and catches her eye. There's something oddly familiar about Shiloh that she can't quite place.)

ANGELINE

Well, pull up a chair if you're dizzy.

(SHILOH begins to sit down on one of the chairs, on top of some papers.)

ANGELINE

Wait!

(SHILOH stands quickly, anxiously. ANGELINE pulls a few papers out from behind her and sticks them back on the still-teetering pile.)

ANGELINE

There. Now we can get you sorted. What is it?

SHILOH

I just had a few questions.

ANGELINE

Right. Which of my classes are you in again? The history 103, 105—is it 102? No, it can't be. Whatever, the big one on American History, right?

(ANGELINE is sifting through papers again, not paying total attention.)

SHILOH

Well—

ANGELINE

And... hmm.. I don't remember you being one of the really bad exams. I remember the F's quite well, let me tell you. You didn't get an F, right? I'm usually better at keeping track of names, sweetheart, I'm sorry yours just hasn't stuck yet.

SHILOH

It's Shiloh. Shiloh Stevenson.

ANGELINE

Mmm, yes, yeah, I'm sure I've seen your name on that roster.

SHILOH

I'm not—

ANGELINE

You know, a C or even a D really isn't that bad for the first exam of the semester. Are you a Freshman?

CLAUDETTE

She doesn't, like, look like a freshman, does she?

SHILOH

No. Sir. Professor. Ma'am.

EMILY

I don't know, she's kind of young looking.

VICKI

You're young looking.

EMILY

Shut up.

ANGELINE

God, I'm not that old, am I? Just Professor is fine, none of that ma'am crap.

SHILOH

Not old. Definitely not old. You look very young actually—

ANGELINE

Flattery won't up your grade.

SHILOH

That's not what I was trying to do!

ANGELINE

You know, I see it all the time. Sweetheart, you're very bright, obviously. Anyone can see that. A B or a C is a perfectly good grade, really. You shouldn't be so hard on yourself. This isn't high school anymore.

SHILOH

I'm nearly twenty-five—

ANGELINE

Getting an A takes a lot more work. Very few students actually get A's anyway, so really, take your B or your C and study a little harder next time. And don't get so worked up about it, okay?

SHILOH

But—

ANGELINE

I won't be changing the grade.

SHILOH

I just—

ANGELINE

Did you have other questions? My office hours are almost done, and I'm meeting my fiancé very soon.

SHILOH

Your fiancé?

ANGELINE

Yes. My fiancé.

SHILOH

I see.

EMILY

Oh, honey.

(SHILOH stands.)

SHILOH

I should be going.

ANGELINE

Glad to hear it. And don't worry too much about the grade, sweetheart.

SHILOH

I won't.

(SHILOH exits through the door, walking straight into EMILY, MARIGOLD, and CLAUDETTE.)

MARIGOLD

What are you doing?

EMILY

Get back in there!

SHILOH

I'm sorry to drag you all here.

CLAUDETTE

Don't be ridiculous.

SHILOH

You heard her. This was a waste of time.

CLAUDETTE

She doesn't know what she's got.

SHILOH

She clearly does.

MARIGOLD

Honey, I don't know where ya went wrong.

VICKI

You didn't go wrong.

(Everyone turns, surprised.)

VICKI

She didn't. You just stopped before you really got started. Get back in there, do your thing, and don't come back out until you've won her back. If you break down at the first obstacle, you're certainly not going to achieve your goal and damned if I'm driving back to that godforsaken community center before you achieve it.

SHILOH

I—

VICKI

Stop your stuttering and believe in yourself.

VERA

You're an orange soul.

VICKI

Get in there and show her your orange soul.

ELSA

We should form a circle so you know we support you.

VICKI

Nah.

SHILOH

I don't—

(VICKI pushes her forward as EMILY opens the door.)

SHILOH

—Know about this.

LET'S TALK ABOUT JOEL

(ANGELINE looks up as SHILOH stumbles in backwards, nearly falling over.)

ANGELINE

You're back?

SHILOH

I remembered a few questions I had.

ANGELINE

You know, that's really odd.

SHILOH

My questions?

ANGELINE

Which class of mine did you say you were in?

SHILOH

I didn't.

ANGELINE

And?

SHILOH

I'm not in one of your classes.

ANGELINE

That's even odder.

SHILOH

What is it?

ANGELINE

Sit down and let me look at you.

SHILOH

Look at me?

ANGELINE

Yes, look at you. Sit.

(SHILOH sits.)

SHILOH

Like this?

ANGELINE *(studying Shiloh)*

When you first came in, I thought you were familiar, but there's something more here.

SHILOH

Oh?

ANGELINE

Are you a history major?

SHILOH

No.

ANGELINE

Have I seen you around?

SHILOH

I'm not usually around this part of campus.

ANGELINE

I swear I know you from somewhere.

(She is now leaning over the desk. SHILOH stopped breathing several minutes ago.)

SHILOH

Don't you wear glasses?

ANGELINE

No one's supposed to know that, shush up.

SHILOH

Oh, sorry.

ANGELINE

You caught me with them when you walked in, no?

SHILOH

You've always needed them for—I mean. Obviously I saw them when I walked in.

ANGELINE (*putting the glasses on*)

Since you already know my secret.

SHILOH

What do you see?

ANGELINE

Nothing out of the ordinary.

(She takes off the glasses.)

ANGELINE

What was it you needed?

SHILOH

To ask you a few questions.

ANGELINE

Didn't we already do that part? My hours did end at 3.

SHILOH

It will be very quick, I promise.

ANGELINE

If you're not a history major, nor in my class, what questions could you possibly have?

SHILOH

Uh.

EMILY

Stay on target.

SHILOH

I'm conducting a survey.

ANGELINE

I don't do surveys.

SHILOH

It will only take a few minutes of your time.

ANGELINE

Too many questions.

SHILOH

Please. I really need a history professor's opinion.

ANGELINE

Couldn't you go ask Andrews, down the hall? He always seems to have time on his hands.

SHILOH

I want your opinion.

ANGELINE

Fine. Fine.

(She pulls out her phone.)

ANGELINE

Alright, sweetheart, you've got five minutes, and then I really have to go. I'm setting a timer.

SHILOH

I'll keep to it. Thank you. Thank you.

ANGELINE

Time's already ticking.

SHILOH

Okay. Uh. Do you... believe in reincarnation?

ANGELINE

What?

SHILOH

Do you think people, if they die, could be born again?

ANGELINE

Well, I'd have to think about it.

SHILOH

And if you thought about it?

ANGELINE

I mean, anything is possible right? Do we ever really know what happens after death?

SHILOH

Maybe not. What's your answer?

ANGELINE

A firm maybe.

SHILOH

If someone you loved had passed away, could you believe that someone new could be a reincarnation of that person?

ANGELINE

I've never really thought about it.

SHILOH

Have you ever lost someone and wished they would come back?

(beat.)

ANGELINE

Yes.

(Outside, everyone has reacted except VERA.)

VERA

Girl can't speak up. Blue like everyone else.

SHILOH

I-I'm sorry to hear that.

ANGELINE

This was a long time ago.

SHILOH

I'm sure.

(beat.)

ANGELINE

What did you say this survey is for?

SHILOH

Uh.

EMILY (*Loudly at the door*)

PSYCHOLOGY.

SHILOH

It's a psychology survey. For a class. About... spiritual beliefs.

ANGELINE

And you needed me... why?

SHILOH

... Well... Telling you why would mess up the survey.

ANGELINE

I see.

SHILOH

So you have someone... in your past... who you wished was reincarnated?

ANGELINE

I don't know if I would go that far.

SHILOH

But you would be glad if he was?

ANGELINE

Yes, I would be glad if he was.

SHILOH

And if he were sitting here right in front of you, you would be happy to see him?

(This has sent ANGELINE into a train of thought far from the present. She looks intently at Shiloh, but only seems to half-hear her.)

ANGELINE

I would be happy.

SHILOH

Even if he looked very different?

ANGELINE

Even if he looked different.

(beat.)

ANGELINE

You look so familiar. Are you certain we haven't met?

SHILOH

No, Professor.

ANGELINE

Your eyes, I think that's it. They remind me of someone I used to know.

(beat.)

SHILOH

I have one last question.

ANGELINE

Ask.

SHILOH

If he—if Joel was reincarnated, if he was here in front of you, but looked different. If he told you who he was—or who he had been, would you believe it?

ANGELINE

I'd want to believe it.

(The phone alarm goes off. Angeline is shaken from her thoughts.)

Both stand up. Angeline begins to pack her things, not really paying attention as she crumples papers in the bag.)

ANGELINE

That's time, then.

SHILOH

Thank you.

(ANGELINE stops packing.)

ANGELINE

What was that last question again?

SHILOH

If the person you said you would want to be reincarnated—if he was here and reincarnated, would you believe him?

ANGELINE

That's not how you said it.

(She pulls out her phone and begins dialing.)

THE CLUSTERFUCK

ANGELINE *(to the phone)*

Yes, hi. I'm here in room 303 in Madison Hall, and I'd like a security escort down to my car.
Yes. Angeline Weiss, I'm a professor. Well, I seem to have a stalker.

(SHILOH stands, clearly upset and with no idea what to do)

Yes. Well, she's right here in my office. Yes. Great. Please do. Shiloh Stevenson is her name, possibly a psychology student, or maybe just a weirdo. Thank you.

(she hangs up.)

ANGELINE

How the hell do you know about Joel?

SHILOH

Intuition?

(ANGELINE, clearly shaken, throws the bag over her shoulder and begins to walk towards the door. SHILOH rushes the door and throws herself flat in front of it.)

SHILOH

Wait!

ANGELINE

Get out of my way.

(The entire support group is pressed against the other side of the door. If it opens, they will all fall inside.)

EMILY

Fuck, fuck, fuck!

ANGELINE

I don't know who you are or what this is really about, but I'm not hearing another word.

(She tries to push SHILOH or get to the door.)

ANGELINE

Move!

SHILOH

It's me! I'm Joel. I'm Joel.

(ANGELINE steps back like she's been struck. A long beat.)

SHILOH

That's how I know about anything, I swear.

(Outside the door, EMILY is foreseeing a problem.)

EMILY

Alright, that guard is going to come any minute.

MARIGOLD

But she's done it now!

EMILY

We have to let them talk for as long as we can.

(VICKI steps forward and links arms with CLAUDETTE)

VICKI

We'll make a wall.

ELSA

Now we can make the support circle!

VICKI

Something like that.

(All six of them, including VERA stand and link arms. They form a linked circle, backs to the door and standing firmly.)

ANGELINE

I don't believe you. Move from the door.

(SHILOH remains plastered against it, arms out, holding herself up with the weight of blocking Angeline from leaving.)

SHILOH

You just said you would believe it.

ANGELINE

I said I would want to believe it. But I don't. I think you're crazy and a stalker, and I hope to god you're still here when they come so they can arrest you.

SHILOH

You said I look familiar.

ANGELINE

I must have seen you in passing in the halls.

SHILOH

But I'm not a student.

ANGELINE

Then I have seen you around the city. I don't care. It's not the truth.

SHILOH

How do you know?

ANGELINE

I don't care. It's not the truth. It can't be.

SHILOH

We got secretly married before the wedding. No one knew about it except me, you, and your best friend.

ANGELINE

The court published the marriage certificate after Joel died. That's just more evidence of your stalking.

SHILOH

Or my memory.

ANGELINE

Where is that security guard?

CLAUDETTE (*to EMILY*)

You don't think she just, like, looked at old documents, do you?

EMILY

Shut up.

SECURITY

What, exactly, are you all doing outside this office?

MARIGOLD

Defending true love.

SECURITY

I'm going to need to ask you to move.

ELSA

... Please don't?

SECURITY

Now.

EMILY

Look, officer, I'm sure you're just trying to do your duty and all that, but we are defending this woman's right to an absolutely beautiful love story, and really you should be up for that. That whole defending people's rights thing. Isn't that your job?

SECURITY

What did you say your name was?

EMILY

I didn't say it was anything.

CLAUDETTE

And she's not going to!

SHILOH

What can I tell you to convince you? Anything?

ANGELINE

I'm going to be late to dinner. This is your fault.

SHILOH

Do you even want to go?

ANGELINE

Of course I do.

SHILOH

But you hate dinner. Breakfast is your favorite meal.

ANGELINE

Maybe when I was twenty-five.

SHILOH

That's what I'm saying!

ANGELINE

But certainly not anymore. And not when dinner with my *fiancé* is on the table.

SHILOH

Are you happy with him?

ANGELINE

Of course.

SHILOH

As happy as you were with me?

(ANGELINE crosses her arms, eyeing the door. SHILOH is no longer plastered against it, and she might just be able to get out.)

SECURITY

If you do not move, when my reinforcements arrive, we'll arrest all of you—

MARIGOLD

'Scuse me, sir.

SECURITY

And who are you?

MARIGOLD

You're wearing a wedding ring, aren't ya?

SECURITY

Stay where you are.

MARIGOLD

D'you love your wife?

EMILY

Maybe he's gay!

SECURITY

I'm not gay, and yes, I love my wife, thank you very much. Now *step back*.

MARIGOLD

Would you be happy if your wife just up n' died?

SECURITY

Does this one ever stop talking?

MARIGOLD

If you're truly in love with your wife, if ya really love her, then you must believe in true love. Don't you?

SECURITY (*to his walkie-talkie*)

Could I get an ETA on that back-up? We've got a bunch of hysterical women here.

MARIGOLD

I believe in love! I believe in love!

ELSA

I believe in love! I believe in love!

EMILY

Wait.

(The support group falls silent.)

EMILY

Give us five minutes.

SECURITY

I will give you nothing—

MARIGOLD

We're not moving either way, so ya might as well try it, honey.

SECURITY

Absolutely not—

EMILY

Listen to this.

SECURITY

I will not! I'll have you know—

(EMILY and CLAUDETTE decide to fully commit to the life of crime and grab the SECURITY GUARD by either arm, finagling him into their arm-in-arm line until he is facing the door, unable to reach for the handle and get to Angeline.)

SECURITY

Campus police are real police! I will have you arrested and charged with assaulting an officer—

VERA

Listen, son, you're all scarlet-yellow and ugly and I can promise you would do well with a bit of good green listening.

SECURITY

I'm *what?!*

(EMILY clamps a hand over his mouth.)

MARIGOLD

It's for a good cause, I promise you.

SOMETHING CRAZY

ANGELINE

Fine. Fine. Tell me something. Tell me something only Joel would know.

SHILOH

Anything?

ANGELINE

No, no, this is ridiculous.

SHILOH

Wait.

ANGELINE

That I even entertained the thought—

SHILOH

You're not crazy. You always call yourself that when you get worked up and all emotional, but you're not crazy. Or if you are, then at least you've got me.

ANGELINE

That's something Joel would say.

SHILOH

Weird, isn't it?

ANGELINE

It's not weird, it's...

SHILOH

Crazy.

ANGELINE

But Joel is dead. God knows I've spent enough time pretending he was ever going to come back. That's all this is. I'm sliding backwards. That's it. I'll make an appointment with Margie and talk through it. That's all this is.

SHILOH

I'm right here.

ANGELINE

I'm hallucinating, or making this up—it's a backslide. I'm under a lot of stress right now, that's it.

SHILOH

Look at me.

ANGELINE

And with planning this *stupid* wedding, I'm just having flashbacks. PTSD, whatever it's called. That's it.

SHILOH

Look at me.

ANGELINE

Tell me something only Joel would know.

(beat.)

ANGELINE

See, you don't know anything.

SHILOH

The apple tree.

ANGELINE

What apple tree?

SHILOH

It's this stupid memory I keep having any time I eat apples. There's a random apple tree in the middle of nowhere—near Windy Hill? I don't know. It's not supposed to be there, I don't think, but maybe some kids dropped an apple and it somehow sprouted up there. And there's you and me and your hair was in that ridiculous bob you got—and I don't think it's even anything important at all—but, but we're just standing there at this random tree and I decided to show off and climb it. And I know we knew each other a long time, but we hadn't been a *couple* for so long and I think I just wanted to impress you but then I got up there in the branches and there was a *squirrel* who was very angry that I was in his home and then suddenly the world is just upside down and I'm hanging on by my feet and hoping—I can almost hear the thoughts—*this girl is going to dump me if I break an arm like this. This girl is going to dump me when I fall out of this stupid tree*—and by some cupid-like miracle, I didn't fall. The squirrel got distracted. I managed to make it look graceful—or I thought I looked graceful—and I landed on my feet.

And those apples. Those apples! They were the freshest thing I'd ever tasted so we just kept eating them and eating them until, we were just sitting there surrounded by apple cores and I thought I was going to throw up. That's how I knew you were the one. That stupid, ridiculous moment under an apple tree that wasn't supposed to be there, but I knew that there had to be somebody out there, some kind of love god or cupid or whatever making sure I didn't crack my skull or throw up on the girl I was supposed to be with for the rest of my life.

(A long pause. ANGELINE makes a decision. She steps forward and kisses SHILOH. SHILOH, momentarily surprised, takes a moment to react before throwing her arms around Angeline and kissing back.

The kiss breaks. Angeline steps back, aghast. Shiloh looks stunned.)

EMILY

No fucking way.

MARIGOLD

Told ya it was true love.

CLAUDETTE

Did they just, like—

SECURITY

I think you ladies have some explaining to do.

EMILY

Shut up.

ANGELINE

Shitdamn.

SHILOH

Uh.

ANGELINE

No one knew about that.

SHILOH

Yeah.

ANGELINE

No one was supposed to know about that.

SHILOH

Yeah.

ANGELINE

How the hell...?

SHILOH

You know how.

ANGELINE

Shit.

SHILOH

Was it that bad a kiss?

ANGELINE

No. No it was... it was...

SHILOH

Muscle memory.

ANGELINE

But—

SHILOH

Can I kiss you again?

ANGELINE

Maybe one more time. Just to check.

(SHILOH moves back into her personal space.)

SHILOH

Just to check.

(Just as SHILOH is about to kiss her, ANGELINE's phone rings. She drops the phone trying to answer it, fumbling and cursing.)

ANGELINE *(on the phone)*

Hi. I know, I'm running late... No, I'll be there when I can... No, I can't talk... I'm... I'm with a student. *(to herself)* Shit. Damn. *(to the phone)* Look I'll be there as soon as I can, I swear. No. Bye.

(She sets the phone on the desk with shaky hands.)

A REALITY CHECK

(No sooner has the phone landed on the desk as the SECURITY GUARD, sensing an opportunity, breaks the line and shoves open the door, rushing inside.)

He finds ANGELINE leaning against the desk looking extremely stressed, SHILOH standing anxiously nearby, and the pile of papers, yet again, knocked off the desk.)

SECURITY

Professor Weiss, I'm here to be your escort.

(The entire support group stumbles in after him. ANGELINE appears even more alarmed than she already was (though no one thought that possible.))

SECURITY

I'm sorry it took so long to get to you.

ANGELINE

Uh.

SECURITY

There are reinforcements on the way to arrest all of these hysterical women.

ANGELINE

Yes. No. Wait.

SECURITY

Can I help you with your bags?

ANGELINE

No.

SECURITY

You seem very shaken up.

(He moves closer to her. She sits on the desk, pushing the papers out of the way.)

ANGELINE

No, I'm not leaving.

SECURITY

Excuse me?

ANGELINE

I'm staying right here.

(SHILOH leans against the desk next to her.)

SECURITY

I will not have that—

ANGELINE

I'm the one who called you, and now I'm un-calling you. Leave.

SECURITY

I still have to arrest all of these—

ANGELINE

I'll tell them you're harassing me.

SECURITY

But—

ANGELINE

Now.

SECURITY

You can't be serious.

ANGELINE

Deadly.

(The SECURITY GUARD exits, and EMILY proudly shuts the door behind him.)

EMILY

Men.

SHILOH

I was a man, y'know.

EMILY

But you're not now.

ANGELINE

Who are all of these people?

(All at once:

EMILY

Friends of Shiloh's.

MARIGOLD

Agents of true love.

VICKI

Fed up, bored, and waiting for you all to get together.

ELSA

A circle of those who believe in true love.

(Then:

CLAUDETTE

We're like, a reincarnation support group. For women.

ANGELINE

You're a reincarnation support group.

CLAUDETTE

For women.

(ANGELINE sits down at the desk, amid a sea of papers.

The support group, after a beat, sits down on the couch and the chairs, giving deference (of course) to VERA. SHILOH hovers awkwardly beside the desk, unsure of where things stand.)

ANGELINE *(to VERA)*

What about you? You look wise and you haven't spoken. Do you believe all of this?

VERA

It's quite clear, isn't it?

VICKI

You're not going to get a whole lot of clarity—

ANGELINE

I'd like to hear her.

VICKI

Wisdom doesn't necessarily come with age.

VERA

My husband had a violet gasket in his heart ten years ago, and now my bed is big and blue and gray. Sometimes, it looks like there might be something there, something like all the lights turned on and shining vital gold. And sometimes, like there might be something there in the big blue bed but all that might be has nothing to reflect off of, so there simply isn't anything there. But it being big and blue and foggy gray doesn't mean I don't wish my husband were there in the green. I think he might be there sometimes, but the light can't reflect off of nothing, so I'm not able to see him even if he's there. But I would want to think him yellow. I would want to believe all his yellow yarns and red tales. Even if he showed up like a blue girl in a tan coat.

(beat.)

SHILOH *(quietly)*

And here I am. A blue girl in a tan coat.

ANGELINE

Here you are. But...

(beat.)

EMILY

But what? You've found your long-lost love, what could possibly be a 'but'?

ANGELINE

But I'm engaged and you're twenty-five, and...

MARIGOLD

And you've been waiting your whole entire life to get back to this person you were supposed to spend your life with, and here she is: right in front of your face, and you have *doubts*? Honey!

ANGELINE

My fiancé is a good man.

MARIGOLD

I'm a good woman! You shouldn't go off and marry me, right?

ELSA

No one's getting married here.

ANGELINE

I'm meant to be!

VERA

Meant to be, meant to be. Only one thing here that's meant to be.

ANGELINE

He's not perfect, but we're good for each other. That's what a relationship's supposed to be, right? Good for each other.

CLAUDETTE

Maybe there's one right person for you. Maybe there's, like, twenty-seven. It's all, like, whatever, when you find *a* right person for you.

ANGELINE

But—

ELSA

Saying 'but' is a good excuse for not moving forward.

ANGELINE

But there are so many reasons not to just stop and *think* for a moment.

SHILOH

That's it then. You're overthinking, like you always have. You have to remember to turn off your brain sometimes.

ANGELINE

That's ridiculous. And precisely how Joel says it. Said it.

(A beat. A decision. Another beat.)

ANGELINE

But it's been years. *Years*. I'm not the same person I was twenty-five years ago. I'm not the same person I was *yesterday*. I'm not... I'm not the Angeline you fell in love with.

SHILOH

And I'm not Joel. I'm someone new.

SHILOH offers Angeline a hand. ANGELINE takes it. They clasp fingers. The circle is complete, and thus: the end.