

All The King's Horses

By Doug DeVita

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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Anna	A headstrong Swedish Exchange Student	25	F
Hella	A no-nonsense Psychotherapist	65	F
Liz*	An overly charming Egg Broker	40	F
Anna's Mother	Cold, easily exasperated Mother	49	F
Harriet Cooke*	A pot smoking Shrink	50	F

*These roles can and should be played by women of any ethnicity.

A / indicates overlapping dialogue. Words that are struck through (like ~~this~~) indicate a character interrupting themselves.

SYNOPSIS

Foreign exchange student Anna thinks meeting egg broker Liz to be the luckiest break she could have as a struggling actress in Hollywood. And when Anna proves to be quite fertile, the unscrupulous Liz begins shopping her around for donation after donation. But – as Anna recounts to Hella, a court-ordered therapist working through her own personal crisis – when Anna's fertility begins to decline, both she and Liz react in ways that have devastating consequences for both of them.

SETTINGS

As a memory play, no real sets are required. The various locations can be suggested with lighting, sound, and a few pieces of furniture. The action should be fluid and almost dreamlike.

BIO

A two time O'Neil Semi-Finalist (*Fable* and *Just A Rumor*), Doug's other honors include: Semi-Finalist for Barrington Stage Company's Burman New Play Award (*Phillie's Trilogy*); Semi-Finalist for B Street Theatre's New Comedy Festival (*Goddess Of The Hunt* and *Upper Division*); and Semi-Finalist for We Screenplay's Diverse Voices competition (*The Fierce Urgency Of Now*.) In addition he has won Scrap Mettle Arts Emerging Playwright's competition (*Phillie's Trilogy*), and Fresh Fruit Festival Awards of Distinction for Outstanding Play (*Fierce...*) and Outstanding Production (*Fierce...* and *Phillie...*)

Currently an advisory board member for All Out Arts, and formerly Artistic Director for West Side Repertory Theatre, Doug's work has been seen in New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, New Jersey, Connecticut, and London, and has been developed at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC (Marc Bly, Gary Garrison, Jacqueline Goldfinger, and Caleen Jennings; and at ESPA/Primary Stages in New York (Robert Askins, Rogelio Martinez, Winter Miller, and Michael Walkup.) He has also studied with Karen Hartman, Jeffrey Sweet, and Eric Webb.

A member of the Dramatists Guild, he has had work published by Next Stage Press, and Smith Scripts UK.

Los Angeles, circa 2000, and in memory: 1995 – 1999. A harsh white light comes up on Hella, a psychotherapist in her mid-60s. She speaks directly to the audience; there are remnants of her native German accent in her speech.

HELLA

It isn't a particularly violent crime – no one is dead – but the voracious energy, the meticulous planning with which she carries it out is shocking. She isn't a particularly violent girl. Girl? She's nearly 30 now... Dear God, sometimes I wish I still smoked. I know I can't smoke in here, and really, a therapist who smokes like a fiend in private is a cliché, but damn, there are times... She has a drive, a fierceness, a determination to follow her own rules, to be right at all costs, a damn the torpedoes full speed ahead attitude that barely masks her childlike innocence... Innocence? Innocence is not the right word... Petulance.

(She smiles to herself, a little ruefully.)

There is a childlike petulance about her I recognize.

Sounds of surf. Soft, sun-infused light comes up on Anna, a tall, strikingly beautiful blonde, not quite 30. She's sitting on the beach, aimlessly sifting sand through her fingers. She watches as a sand crab scurries across her blanket. She picks it up, gently, placing it on the sand.

ANNA

And how are you today, Sebastian? Crawling into your hole, and pulling it in after you?

Cracking sounds, like an eggshell breaking against the rim of a dish, begin. Soft at first, but they grow louder.

Anna gets up and stretches. She picks up a piece of kelp that's washed up on the beach, and looks around.

ANNA

This place looks like a mermaid's graveyard.

(To the kelp.)

Which one were you? Ariel? Ursula? The great Triton himself? Whoever. Now you're just washed up on the beach. Dried out and useless.

HELLA

A petulance that barely masks the frightened, desperate, lonely child put in front of me. A child I don't want to deal with, but nonetheless have no choice but to take on. An uncomfortably familiar feeling.

ANNA

(To the kelp.)

Dead. Lucky bastard.

HELLA

Session One.

Lights shift. Softer, muted, perhaps as if coming through the slats of wooden blinds or plantation shutters. We're in Hella's office.

HELLA

(To Anna.)

So. Tell me.

ANNA

What?

HELLA

What's on your mind?

ANNA

Aren't you supposed to tell me?

HELLA

That's not quite how it works, Anna. I can't help you if you don't tell me what's going on in your life.

ANNA

Haven't you read the court order?

HELLA

I have.

ANNA

So then you know what's going on in my life. What time is it? Can I go now?

HELLA

You seem angry, Anna.

ANNA

No shit, Sherlock.

HELLA

Hella. My name is Hella.

ANNA

It was a joke, I'm calling you Sherlock / because

HELLA

/ I know why you're calling me Sherlock, and I prefer you call me Hella.

ANNA

Wow. No sense of humor. That's frightening.

HELLA

It must be frustrating for a stand up comic to be stuck in a room with someone who has no sense of humor. Do you like making people laugh, Anna?

ANNA

Look, can't you just sign that damn paper saying we've done this, and let me go back to my life?

HELLA

We have to complete 10 sessions before I can sign this.

ANNA

Yes. I like to make people laugh.

HELLA

Why?

ANNA

The last time I went to a shrink she just signed the form and that was that.

HELLA

I go by the rules. Haven't *you* read the court order?

Anna gets up and starts pacing.

ANNA

I like the power I feel when people are laughing at my jokes. I'm in total control of the room, and when I kill, I really kill. *That's* why I like making people laugh.

Lights shift. Sound of laughter.

HELLA

I see.

Spotlight on Anna, with a mic in hand.

ANNA

So the next time you're sitting on the 405 freeway praying you don't miss your plane and see that blue, yellow, and white factory, just remember IKEA is the Swedish word for shit. Which is probably what you'd been saying for the last hour anyway. Shit! IKEA! Shit! IKEA! Shit! IKEA! Shit! IKEA!

Wild laughter and applause. Abrupt light shift back to Hella's office.

HELLA

I'll remember that the next time I'm on my way to LAX.

ANNA

It's the greatest high. Hearing people laugh at my jokes.

HELLA

Do you make your mother laugh?

ANNA

People love me when I make them laugh.

HELLA

But what about your mother?

ANNA

I could make Liz laugh.

HELLA

(Referring to her notes.)

Yes. Liz Clarke. The woman who arranged all of your donations.

...

How do you feel about being an egg donor?

ANNA

It feels great knowing there are kids out there with my superior Swedish genes.

HELLA

Do you like children, Anna?

ANNA

God, no! I'm never having any of my own. Ever.

HELLA

I see. Tell me about your mother.

ANNA

You're not going to let that go, are you?

HELLA

Of course not.

A stand off, and then gradually the lights shift to Anna's Mother. She's in her late 40s, attractive, and speaks with a Swedish accent. Sounds of an airport; the announcements are in Swedish (and maybe a few other languages TBD.)

ANNA'S MOTHER

You're sure you want to do this?

ANNA

I'll be happier in California, mom. It's sunny and warm there.

ANNA'S MOTHER

You're going to be happier studying in Italy. It's warm there too. That's a fiasco. Teaching aerobics in Stockholm is going to make you happy. That doesn't work out like you planned. Now going to Los Angeles to be an "actress" is going to make you / happy

ANNA

/ MOM! I'm going to finish my studies and finally get my degree. At UCLA. I thought you'd be happy about that.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Another fancy university you can't afford.

ANNA

I got a government scholarship, mom, you know this!

ANNA'S MOTHER

And if you mess this one up you're going to have to pay it all back. Meaning I'm going to have to pay it all back.

ANNA

It's only one more year. Then, maybe, I'll *think* about becoming an actress. AND I'm not going to mess it up this time, Mom.

ANNA'S MOTHER

I'm just afraid this going to end in disaster, like every one of your schemes.

ANNA

I wish you could, just once, be happy for me. Support me for a change.

ANNA'S MOTHER

You're 25 years old, Anna. I can't keep indulging your craziness anymore. This is it. Once you're on that plane, you're on your own.

ANNA

I'll call you when I get to Los Angeles.

Anna tries to hug her mother, but is rebuffed.

ANNA'S MOTHER

There's a nine hour time difference. Don't wake me up.

The lights shift back to Hella and Anna; we're back in the present. Anna is angry.

HELLA

You've talked to her about what's happened?

ANNA

...

She told me it was all my own fault and not to expect her to help me.

...

She said I was crazy.

...

I really am on my own.

...

I never want to talk about her again.

We hear a timer DING.

HELLA

I'm sorry, Anna, but our time is up for today.

ANNA

Good! Because if this is what it's going to be like for the next nine weeks, I'm out. Now.

HELLA

You don't have choice, dear. Not if you want me to help you stay in this country.

ANNA

Shit.

HELLA

Do me a favor, Anna? Whatever dreams you have between now and next week, write them down.

ANNA

I never dream.

HELLA

Never?

ANNA

Never.

HELLA

You may find yourself remembering your dreams now.

ANNA

I just told you. I. Never. Dream.

HELLA

You never dream. You never want children. You never want to talk about your mother again. A lot of absolutes.

ANNA

I'm Swedish. The country of Absolut.

(Unnerved by Hella's lack of reaction.)

You know? Absolut? The vodka?

HELLA

Not everything is a punch line, Anna.

ANNA

Damn, you're a tough audience.

The lights return to the harsh light on Hella.

HELLA

And she is one tough cookie. Brilliant at dodging my questions, it's so clear she's trying to hide behind a mask of false bravado. And as much as I don't want to take on this case she is exactly the kind of challenge I relish. As Freud said, "There are no accidents."

...

I believe that.

The lights fade on Hella. We hear the sound of surf, and as the lights shift to a sunnier, warmer tone, we see Anna sitting on the beach, again sifting sand through her fingers and staring out at the water. We hear the voices in her head.

ANNA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

I'm just afraid this is going to end in disaster. Like all of your schemes.

ANNA

Jesus.

Cracking sounds start again. Anna picks up a piece of kelp and begins playing with it.

ANNA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

I can't just hop on a plane and fly to California, Anna, even if I could take the time from work. Which I'm not sure I can right now. I told you when you left Sweden...

We hear another voice, softer and warmer, cutting in.

LIZ (V.O.)

I don't know what you want from me, Anna...

ANNA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

... I can't keep supporting your craziness anymore...

LIZ (V.O.)

... I can't help you anymore. I'm sorry, sweetie.

ANNA'S MOTHER (V.O.)

Crazy. Crazy. Crazy...

LIZ (V.O.)

Sorry. Sorry. Sorry...

Their voices fade. Anna starts pulling the kelp apart.

ANNA

You're not sorry, Liz, so shut up! You could have helped me. I thought you liked me. And I'm not crazy, Mom. I'm not. I'M NOT!

Anna picks up the pieces of kelp and flings them back into the ocean.

HELLA

Session Two.

The bright light of a Southern California afternoon pours through a large window, illuminating Anna and Liz in its warmth. They are in Liz's office at Wilshire Fertility Group on Wilshire Boulevard in Westwood. Liz is 40-ish, bubbly, warm, forthright.

LIZ

You must be Anna!

ANNA

Yes, ma'am.

LIZ

Oh, call me Liz, Anna sweetie! Ma'am makes me feel so old. So, you want to be an egg donor?

ANNA

Yes, ma... Liz.

LIZ

Do you know anything about the process?

ANNA

I know a little, from what my friend Maja* told me.

(*Pronounced "My-YAH.")

LIZ

Maja? Oh, that's right! You're one of the referrals from my "FSS Exchange!"

ANNA

I beg your pardon?

LIZ

Oh, don't mind me, sweetie. Lately I've been getting a lot of foreign exchange students from UCLA donating their eggs. I call them my "Foreign Student Stock Exchange," or FSS Exchange for short.

ANNA

Oh. That's funny.

LIZ

This will be the first time you're donating?

ANNA

Yes.

LIZ

First of all, Anna sweetie, we are very particular when choosing our donors. We want to make sure we choose women who are primarily motivated by a need to help infertile couples, not ones driven by financial gain. Do you understand?

ANNA

Oh. Yeah. Sure.

Liz hands Anna a thick stack of papers.

LIZ

Good. Now. First, you will have to fill all of these out. Just necessary information about your family history, general health and personality. May I ask if you've ever had an abortion?

ANNA

Uhm... yes... I got pregnant when I was studying in Italy.

...

Does that mean I can't donate now? I really need the money... I mean, I really want to help someone have a child.

LIZ

Oh, no Anna, it's great you've had an abortion! It shows us you're fertile.

ANNA

Oh. Yeah. Of course!

LIZ

Now, you do understand that donating your eggs is not a simple process?

ANNA

(Playfully.)

Don't I just come to the clinic, have my eggs removed and go home with a big fat check? I'm free at 4:00...

LIZ

(Laughing.)

Oh, Anna, you're a funny one. No, sweetie, it's not like a sperm bank. Men have it so much easier: they jerk off into a cup and get 50 bucks.

For us, it's actually a very complicated process. There are quite a few drugs and hormones involved. To start, you and the recipient mother have to take a drug to synchronize your menstrual cycles. When your cycles are in sync you'll have to take another drug to stimulate your ovaries into producing as many eggs as possible. Then the eggs will be surgically removed. It's a simple operation but nevertheless requires a short hospital stay. You may experience some pain and swelling after the eggs are removed, you may experience mood shifts, very similar to PMS...

ANNA

Uhm... I've never had PMS.

LIZ

Seriously?

ANNA

I just bleed for a couple of days, and bing bang boom done.

LIZ

Then you are a very lucky young woman, Anna sweetie. Now. After the operation you'll take a few more drugs to get your hormones back to normal. The whole process shouldn't take more than a few months, hopefully no more than three. But since this would be your first donation it would be prudent to count on at least four months from start to finish.

ANNA

Oh.

LIZ

Is everything all right?

ANNA

Well, yeah, except I'm done with school soon, and if I don't get my green card I might have to leave in less than four months. That wouldn't give me enough time.

LIZ

No, sweetie, it wouldn't. I'm sorry, Anna, but unless you can guarantee you'll be here for the next four months at least, I'm afraid you won't make a viable candidate for us. Such a pity. You're so beautiful, I'm sure I'd have prospective parents lining up for your eggs.

Lights fade on Liz and come up on Hella's office.

ANNA

And that should have been the end of it.

HELLA

But obviously, it isn't.

ANNA

Obviously.

HELLA

I know you have your green card, so I'm assuming it was your overwhelming need to help an infertile couple that drove you back to Liz?

Sound of laughter. Spotlight on Anna, again with a mic in her hand.

ANNA

And that's how I became just another Government funded-Swede at UCLA, a campus overrun with Government-funded Swedes, Orange-haired Asians, and tight-assed East Coast Liberals trying to pass themselves off as Airy-fairy West Coast Radicals. All of them furnishing their off-campus apartments with stuff from IKEA. So remember: the next time you're sitting on the 405 freeway praying you don't miss your plane and see that blue, yellow, and white factory, just remember IKEA is the Swedish word for shit. Which is probably what you'd been saying for the last hour anyway. Shit! IKEA! Shit! IKEA! Shit! IKEA!

(She smiles at the laughter.)

Thank you! Thank you very much!

She bows and runs into Liz as exits.

LIZ

Oh, Anna, sweetie, you are so funny! I love your act!

ANNA

Liz?

LIZ

Maja told me you got your green card, and you're performing here now. That's wonderful, sweetie.

ANNA

"The FSS Exchange" works fast. Yeah, I'm going to be staying in L.A. Maybe get an agent, see where it goes.

LIZ

With your looks, you shouldn't have any problems.

Lights shift. We're back in Hella's office.

HELLA

She actually sought you out?

ANNA

Yes.

HELLA

Oh, she's good.

ANNA

You have no idea.

Lights shift. We're back in Liz's office.

LIZ

Anna sweetie! Thanks for getting here so quickly!

ANNA

It wasn't easy. My piece of IKEA car is in the shop. Again. I had to take the bus!

LIZ

Oh, I'm sorry about that. Anyway, you got here! As I mentioned last night, I think I have a prospective couple for you. Of course, I'll need a few baby pictures to show them... What's wrong, Anna sweetie?

ANNA

I'll have to get the baby pictures from my mother in Sweden. She'll want to know why I need them / and

LIZ

/ And you don't want to tell her. Oh, Anna sweetie, I understand. I don't get along with my mother either. I'm sure you'll think of some clever little white lie she'll believe.

ANNA

I don't like to lie, Liz. Especially to her // She can always tell // She just knows when I'm lying to her.

LIZ

You seem like a smart girl. You'll find a way to get them, I'm sure. Let me go ahead get you scheduled for a physical with our doctor, and I'll make an appointment for you to see our psychiatrist...

Lights shift. We're in Hella's office.

HELLA

And that would be the shrink you mentioned in our last session?

ANNA

Yeah. Dr. Harriet Cooke.

HELLA

Harriet Cooke?

ANNA

Yes. Do you know her?

Lights change to the harsh light on Hella.

HELLA

Harriet Cooke. That knocks me for a loop; no one's told me Harriet is involved in this mess. There's no mention of her anywhere in the case file. Just four photo-copies of the same less-than-thorough mental evaluation with a rubber stamp signature from a "Dr. Frederun Bösen-Blum." Who, I've now ascertained, does not exist.

Lights switch back to Anna and Hella.

ANNA

Tell me how you know Dr. Cooke.

HELLA

I don't know Dr. Cooke.

ANNA

Yes, you ~~do~~ // I saw the look ~~on~~ // your face when I mentioned her name.

HELLA

You're dodging my question, Anna.

ANNA

You're dodging mine. Tell me how you know Dr. Cooke.

HELLA

I don't have to answer your question. You, my dear, do have to answer mine.

(She shows Anna the form.)

If you want me to sign off on this session.

ANNA

That's blackmail.

HELLA

That's right. So tell me about your mother and the baby pictures.

ANNA

You're relentless.

HELLA

(Smiling.)

Yes. I am.

Lights shift to isolated spots on Anna and her mother, each on the phone. Anna's light is warm and sunny, her mother's is cold and drab.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Do you know what time it is here!?!

ANNA

Sorry, I forgot.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Uh huh. What do you want?

ANNA

I need you to send me some of my baby pictures.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Why do you need your baby pictures?

ANNA

Do you really want to know?

ANNA'S MOTHER

What are you doing I'm not going to like?

ANNA

Mom!

ANNA'S MOTHER

Well?

ANNA

...

Fine. I'm going to donate my eggs to an infertile couple, and they need to see what I looked like as a baby.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Are you crazy?

ANNA

What's crazy about getting \$3,000 for something I'm not going to use?

ANNA'S MOTHER

I don't know about this. Are you sure it's safe?

ANNA

Of course it's safe, mom. They do it all the time.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Why do you need that much money, Anna?

ANNA

I need a new car. A new apartment. Groceries.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Aren't you teaching aerobics at that health club?

ANNA

It doesn't pay enough.

ANNA'S MOTHER

You have to learn to live within your means.

ANNA

MOM!

ANNA'S MOTHER

I just don't think this egg thing is a great idea.

ANNA

Then maybe you can pay for my car repairs?

ANNA'S MOTHER

No, Anna. I told you when you left Sweden you're on your own.

ANNA

Just send me the damn pictures.

Anna hangs up on her mother. The lights switch back to Hella's office.

ANNA

It takes her a month, but she sends them. With a five-page letter begging me not to donate my eggs, telling me if I wanted children I shouldn't have had an abortion, and a bank note for \$500.

HELLA

And how does that make you feel?

ANNA

Manipulated. Like always.

HELLA

Have you always felt your mother manipulates you?

ANNA

Listen, are you going to tell me how you know Harriet Cooke?

HELLA

Did Liz ever make you feel like she was manipulating you?

Lights switch, and we're back in Liz's office. Liz puts a small white box on her desk, opens it and pulls out a large needle.

ANNA

WHAT THE HELL IS THAT!?!

LIZ

Don't you remember, Anna, I told you you'd need to take a bunch of fertility drugs and hormones?

ANNA

WITH NEEDLES? I thought it would be a few pills or something. And that thing... it's so BIG!

LIZ

Don't you worry, sweetie, you won't have to inject all of this, only about half.

ANNA

Wait a minute, I have to inject *myself*?

LIZ

Well, yes. Or you can have a friend do it. Worst case, you can always come to the clinic and a nurse can do it for you. But you'd have to come every day for the duration of the process. And if your piece of IKEA car is in the shop again, it means taking the bus. Every day. At the same time.

ANNA

But... NEEDLES?

LIZ

I told you there was a lot of work on the donor's part, Anna.

ANNA

Yeah, but you never told me I'd have to inject myself. EVERY DAY! Maja never told me ~~that~~ // No one *ever* told me about the needles!

LIZ

(Laughing her sweet laugh.)

Oh, Anna, you're so dramatic! It's just a tiny little needle, and it'll just make a tiny little prick, you'll hardly feel it.

ANNA

That is NOT a tiny little needle! I'm sorry, I'm not usually such a wimp, but I really, really, really, really hate needles.

LIZ

It's \$5,000, Anna.

ANNA

\$5,000!?!

LIZ

\$5,000. That's tax-exempt, of course, since your donation is considered a gift, and the recipients pay my fee.

ANNA

Wow, that's a lot more than I was expecting. Maja told me she got \$3,000.

LIZ

Maja isn't as pretty as you. Not that she isn't a perfect match for her couple, but you... with those eyes, your bone structure, that gorgeous blonde hair... I'm sure I can match you at least twice, maybe even three times.

ANNA

I can do this more than once?

LIZ

Of course you can, sweetie. Isn't that great? But first you need to see Dr. Cooke.

ANNA

I don't believe in all that psycho mumbo jumbo.

LIZ

Truthfully, neither do I, sweetie, but we need a mental evaluation on file or you can't donate.

ANNA

Seriously?

LIZ

Very seriously.

ANNA

But what if I / signed a

LIZ

/ I'm sorry, there's no negotiating this. Don't worry, Anna sweetie, it's really just a formality. She'll ask you a few questions, sign the form, and you'll be in and out in less than 5 minutes, I promise. And we'll be on our way!

ANNA

I don't know about // I mean, needles // Shrinks...

(Looking for any way to get out of this.)

Liz, remember when I told you I don't like to lie? I have to be totally honest with you.

LIZ

You're only doing this for the money, right?

ANNA

Well, yeah. But, my hair... I mean, it is blonde, but... I do lighten it.

...

I'm sorry. Maybe I shouldn't donate now?

LIZ

Oh hush, sweetie.

(Winking.)

It's that California sun, right?

(Leaning in to Anna, whispering
conspiratorially.)

And by the way, Anna sweetie, *everyone* does it for the money. But thanks for telling me.
We should always be honest with each other.

(She looks at an appointment book.)

Now, how about I set you up with Dr. Cooke for... next Tuesday at 3:00? You'll like
Harriet, I know you will.

Lights shift back to Hella's office.

HELLA

I like your mother better. And I generally don't like mothers.

ANNA

You don't like Harriet Cooke either.

The lights return to a harsh spot on Hella.

HELLA

Oh, she is a tenacious creature; it's going to be a tough tiptoe around this whole Harriet
Cooke thing, and I can tell Anna is not going to let it go. For a moment I think I might
have to recuse myself, but then I realize I'll be able to help her more because of my
history with Harriet.

Session 3.

Lights shift back to Hella's office.

ANNA

Listen, are you going to tell me how you know Harriet Cooke?

HELLA

How was your week, Anna? Have you had any dreams you can recall?

ANNA

I told you, I don't dream. Tell me how you know Dr. Cooke!

HELLA

(She laughs.)

Why don't *you* tell me about *her*?

ANNA

There's not much to tell.

HELLA

Do try.

...

You can sit here and say nothing, Anna, or you can tell me. Your choice. It's your time your wasting. Not mine.

She holds up the sheet, and her pen. Anna sighs, angrily.

Lights shift to Dr. Cooke's home office. Soft candlelight infused with sunlight coming through partially closed blinds. Dr. Cooke is an attractive woman in her early 50s; she has an intense stare. She is chugging from a water bottle.

ANNA (OFF)

Hello? Dr. Cooke?

DR. COOKE

I'm in here, dear.

Anna rushes in.

ANNA

I'm sorry I'm late. The 405 was backed up all the way to The Marina.

DR. COOKE

You must be Anna. How are you today?

ANNA

Uhm... good?

DR. COOKE

That's nice. Would you like anything? Some water, perhaps?

ANNA

No, thank you.

DR. COOKE

Are you sure? Keeping hydrated is very important, you know.

ANNA

Look, I'm only here because I have to be. I don't believe in all this psycho mumbo jumbo, so can we get this over with?

DR. COOKE

I see. And how are you and Liz getting along?

ANNA

We're fine. She's fine. What has that got to do with anything?

DR. COOKE

How do you feel about becoming an egg donor, Anna?

ANNA

I feel great. It's nice to help someone. I guess.

DR. COOKE

And how do you feel about another woman carrying your child?

ANNA

But it wouldn't be my child.

DR. COOKE

If it isn't your child, Anna, whose is it?

ANNA

Well, genetically it is, but since I'm not giving birth to it or raising it, I don't really consider it "my" child.

DR. COOKE

Then whose child is it?

ANNA

Jesus, do I have to spell this out for // It's the recipient's child // Look, I'm not planning to ever kidnap any of these kids if you're afraid // I don't like kids. I don't want kids.

Dr. Cooke calmly pulls a plastic bag and some rolling paper from a pocket.

DR. COOKE

Then why do you want to become a donor, Anna?

ANNA

It's a win-win. Someone who wants a kid gets a kid, and I get the money to buy a new used car!

Dr. Cooke rolls a joint.

DR. COOKE

Would you like a toke?

ANNA

No. Thank you.

Dr. Cooke lights her joint.

DR. COOKE

Well, that's all I need to know. Thank you very much for coming all this way.

(She offers Anna a bottle of water.)

Are you sure you wouldn't like some water? For your trip home?

Lights shift back to Hella's office.

ANNA

A two hour drive there and back for five minutes.

HELLA

Two hours?

ANNA

She's way the hell up in Sylmar.

HELLA

(Almost to herself.)

The valley, now. I see.

ANNA

And with traffic // What do you mean "now?"

HELLA

Never mind.

ANNA

You *do* know her, don't you?

Hella's phone rings.

HELLA

Let's just say I know *of* her and leave it at that.

(She picks up the phone, but speaks to Anna.)

Excuse me.

(To the caller.)

Hello? ... Yes. ... I'm in session right now, but the short answer is yes, I need you to be there. ... Yes, do try.

(She disconnects.)

I'm sorry, Anna. I used to let all calls go to my voice mail during a session, but I had one experience... If I'd answered the phone the outcome would have been much different. So now I do answer the phone during session. Where were we?

ANNA

You were telling me how you know Harriet Cooke.

HELLA

(Laughing.)

Nice try, sweetie.

ANNA

(Reacting violently.)

DON'T YOU EVER CALL ME "SWEETIE" AGAIN!

There is a moment of silence, during which Hella stares calmly at Anna, perhaps with a slight smile on her face.

HELLA

Such a violent reaction to such a simple term of endearment, Anna.

ANNA

You called me that on purpose, didn't you?

HELLA

Was it because Liz called you "sweetie?"

ANNA

You know she did.

HELLA

Did you feel I manipulated you just now?

ANNA

You're still dodging my question, Hella.

HELLA

Anna, I'd like you to do something for me.

ANNA

Depends.

HELLA

I'd like you to start keeping a journal. I'd like you to start writing down your feelings. When something pisses you off. When you feel like everything is spinning out of control. When you're feeling manipulated... Start writing how you feel.

ANNA

What good will that do?

HELLA

It may just help you remember your dreams.

ANNA

Maybe.

HELLA

Do try.

DING

Lights shift to Anna, with the mic. Throughout the following routine, we hear "appropriate" reactions from her audience; perhaps some gasps, some groans, titters of nervous laughter, etc...

ANNA

See, this is why I like this idea of donating my eggs. I get to spread my genes around, someone else gets to do all the work bearing and raising the kids, and then they take all the blame when they go bad. But those needles... I can't say I like them. That first time I have to stick myself... See, it has to be done the same time every day, and where am I when I have to do it? On the 405. In traffic. Of course.

(She sits, pretends to be in a car, miming and talking through the following. She takes a disinfectant wipe and a needle out of her purse. After she wipes her thigh with the disinfectant, she stares at the needle, frozen in terror.)

Come on, Anna, you can do this...

(Taking a few deep breaths, she just stares at the needle.)

Stop. Being. Such. A. Baby!

(She slowly brings the needle to her thigh, but stops just about an inch above the skin. She pants.)

JUST STICK IT IN!

(She slowly starts to inject the needle, but just as the tip touches her thigh, she pulls back quickly, and the needle flies out of her hand. She watches it fly out of the car.)

DAMMIT!

(Closing her eyes and panting wildly, she tries to collect herself and takes a new needle out of the box.)

OK, Anna. Pretend you've done this hundreds of times and it's not that big a deal!

(She disinfects herself again.)

Stick it in NOW! Don't think, JUST DO IT!

(Again closing her eyes, she makes a quick, determined movement. Missing her thigh completely, she embeds the needle into the car seat.)

GODDAMMIT!

(Angrily taking the needle out of the plunger, she replaces it with a new one. Poised with the needle above her thigh, she looks out at the audience.)

And then I see them: a mother and her three kids, in a convertible in the next lane, all of them staring at me in horror.

(Putting a big smile on her face, she waves with her free hand and shouts to the "other motorist.")

Oh, it's okay. I'm an Egg Donor!

(To her audience.)

That woman guns her car so damned fast, and then I realize everyone is honking at me!

(The sudden blast of car horns jolts her.)

Jesus Fucking Christ!

(A big smile crosses her face when she notices the needle has been injected, and she pushes in the plunger. Taking the needle out of her thigh, she stands with the microphone.)

And that, Ladies and Gentlemen, is how *I* get stuck on the 405.

She acknowledges the laughter and applause.

Lights switch to Hella's office.

HELLA

Session Four.

(To Anna.)

Have you written how you were feeling this week?

ANNA

No.

HELLA

Why not?

ANNA

I don't want to.

HELLA

I see.

ANNA

She gave me a plant.

HELLA

I'm sorry? Who gave you a plant?

ANNA

Liz. She gave me a plant.

Lights shift. Anna in a hospital bed. Liz enters, holding an envelope and a potted begonia.

LIZ

Anna, sweetie, I heard everything went great! You had so many eggs!

ANNA

I know. I'm a freak.

LIZ

Oh hush, you're not a freak, it just means you could be one of my Super Donors!

She hands Anna the begonia and the envelope.

ANNA

Thanks, I guess?

(Opening the envelope.)

What's this? I thought you said they were paying me \$5,000! What happened?

LIZ

Well, for one thing the recipients were so happy with how many eggs you produced that I was able to convince them you deserve another \$1,000.

ANNA

Really? Thank you *so* much! I love you!

LIZ

I love you too, sweetie! It really wasn't so hard after I told them the drugs had made you so hyper-stimulated you couldn't teach your aerobics classes and should be reimbursed for those lost days of pay.

ANNA

I'm fine, Liz.

LIZ

But you really should take a few more days off, Anna sweetie. It's not safe for you to be bouncing around when your ovaries are still so enlarged.

ANNA

I don't know, Liz. I've been athletic since before I could walk. I'm pretty sure I can handle two enlarged ovaries.

Liz puts her hands on Anna's shoulders, gently.

LIZ

Listen to me, Anna. It's your body, and I can't do any more than tell you to be careful. But the next few weeks are going to be rough as your body gets back to normal. I care about you, Anna. I don't want you to hurt yourself.

Lights switch back to Hella's office.

ANNA

And I think she really does care about me. She calls me her "Super Donor."

...

She's right about the next few weeks being rough. And she does call to check up on me several times.

Lights switch to a spot on Anna, holding the mic. Again, during her routine we hear the audience laugh, or gasp, or respond in other appropriate ways.

ANNA

So yeah, I'm now officially an egg donor.

(She looks out at the audience and smiles.)

Have any of you done that?

(She makes eye contact with someone.)

You have, haven't you?

(If the audience member says yes, Anna says this:)

So you know what I'm talking about, right? Yeah, there are easier ways to make six grand...

(If the audience member says no, Anna says this:)

No? Well, it's not the easiest way to make six grand...

It's so much simpler for men. 50 bucks and they cum. For us... A few drugs, a few hyper-stimulated ovaries, an operation, a day or two in the hospital, not to mention those damn scary big ass needles... But then... WHAM! I'm walking out of there and on my way to the bank with a shit-load of tax-free money and a potted begonia. Or should I say waddling to the bank. Jesus Christ! The water retention! The bloating! The back pain. I get home, and none of my clothes fit. I can't get into anything! A week later I'm getting dressed for an interview with a potential agent, and I can still barely fit into my skirt or button my shirt. Sitting in the car on my way to meet her, I feel the tightness, praying the whole way nothing will rip from the pressure. But it doesn't. It holds up. Right up until I sit down in her office. And then... PING!

(Taking a handful of colorfully wrapped Chocolate Easter Eggs from a pocket and tossing one into the audience.)

PING!

(Tossing another one.)

PING!

(Tossing a few more.)

Buttons here! Buttons there! They're flying around that agent's office like bullets on a Saturday night in Compton! And when I get up to leave...

(Tossing a whole bunch into the audience.)

There goes the skirt. Rips right up the back. The woman who *doesn't* become my agent gets a great look at my fatter-than-usual ass as I waddle out, mortified. It takes a month to get back into my clothes comfortably, and then I get a phone call: "Hey Anna, want to do another donation? I have another couple interested in your eggs." "NO FUCKING WAY!" "They're willing to pay you \$7,500, sweetie."

(Pausing for effect.)

“What time do you want me to come by for the needles?”

Anna tosses a few more chocolate eggs into the audience, smiling at the laughter and applause.

Lights switch to Hella's Office.

ANNA

How many more of these sessions do I have to do?

HELLA

This is our fifth session, Anna. You know you have to complete ten. So, tell me, why do you decide to do another donation, if the first one is so terrible? And don't tell me it's for the money.

ANNA

It's a lot of money.

HELLA

There has to be something more than that. Tell me.

ANNA

Are you ever going to tell me how you know that shrink in Sylmar?

HELLA

You're a persistent little thing, aren't you?

ANNA

We've got five more sessions after this one. If you don't tell me now.

HELLA

Let's get back to the reason you're here. Why did you assault Liz?

Anna is very quiet for a moment. Then she pulls out a notebook.

ANNA

I've started writing down my thoughts.

HELLA

Good for you. And... ?

ANNA

It's hard. It... makes me feel bad.

HELLA

Good.

ANNA

You want me to feel bad?

HELLA

I want you to feel, Anna.

ANNA

I wrote this on the beach the other day. I love the beach. Every time things go bad, I go to the beach. Once, when I'm twelve and my parents are fighting again, right before he leaves for good... I run away to Malmo, and I spend the night on the beach. And who comes to pick me up? My father. Not my mother, my father. I'm still a kid but even then I know I have to get away from her... get out of Sweden.

We hear the cracking sound again.

The lights switch to Anna on the beach, sitting forlornly and letting the sand sift through her fingers as she reads from her journal.

ANNA

Everything has gone wrong. My body is betraying me. I've never felt this way before, the endless, blinding headaches, the nausea, the nagging feeling my mother may have been right...

A few more cracking sounds. Anna stands and begins pacing as the cracking sounds persist, louder and faster.

ANNA (CON'D)

Everything is spinning out of control... Liz... The person who helped create this monster I'm becoming... Is she trying to make me believe she has no part in this? If I want her to help... I am going to have to make her realize what she's done. And that's when I make up my mind.

We hear a car start, then frantic honking, and a crash.

LIZ (V.O.)

Anna! What the hell are you doing?

Lights switch back to Hella's office. Anna is staring at Hella intently.

ANNA

That's all I wrote.

HELLA

And what do you expect Liz to do, Anna?

ANNA

I thought she likes me. I thought she really, really likes me.

HELLA

What has she ever done to make you think she "really, really" likes you?

ANNA

She gave me a potted begonia!

(Bursting into tears.)

Dammit. I never cry.

HELLA

You do now. And it's good.

ANNA

You're crazy, you know that?

Hella laughs.

DING!

HELLA

Keep writing. You *will* feel better.

ANNA

You might not if I write down what I'm feeling about you right now.

HELLA

Do you care about how I feel?

ANNA

Do you care if I care?

HELLA

I'll see you next week.

ANNA

Maybe.

Lights shift to the harsh light on Hella.

HELLA

When she tells me about the begonia, I begin to dislike Liz to such an extent I wonder if I can retain my objectivity. Should I recuse myself? The trouble is... I don't want to now. This girl touches me. I want to help her.

(Reaching into her purse she takes out a pack of cigarettes, and struggles with herself. Ultimately, she puts it back.)

Not today.

Session Six.

Lights shift to a spotlight on Anna. We see Liz sitting in the audience, laughing and clapping at Anna's routine.

ANNA

...There goes the skirt. Rips right up the back. The woman who *doesn't* become my agent gets a great look at my fatter-than-usual ass as I waddle out, mortified. It takes a month to get back into my clothes comfortably, and then I get a phone call: "Hey Anna, I have another couple interested in your eggs. Want to do another donation?" "NO FUCKING WAY!" "They're willing to pay you \$7,500, sweetie."

(She pauses for effect.)

"What time do you want me to come by for the needles?"

Anna tosses a few chocolate eggs into the audience, smiling at the laughter and applause.

LIZ

BRAVO! BRAVO!

Anna notices Liz, and her smile broadens. She sits at Liz's table.

ANNA

Liz! You came to my show again!

LIZ

Oh Anna, sweetie, you're wonderful! I haven't laughed so hard in such a long time! And the eggs! The chocolate eggs! That's a brilliant touch!

ANNA

Thank you so much for coming! It means a lot to me!

LIZ

Of course, Anna! You're my SUPER super donor. Please don't repeat this, but of all my girls you're my favorite.

ANNA

Do you really mean that?

LIZ

Of course I do, Anna sweetie!

Liz discretely gives Anna the small white box. The lights switch to Hella's office.

HELLA

You do realize she was playing you, don't you?

ANNA

I do now.

HELLA

Good.

Lights switch to Anna and Liz, now in Liz's office.

ANNA

I don't understand. What do you mean I'm only allowed to donate three times!?! Please don't tell me my mother was right about damaging my health!?!

LIZ

Oh, no sweetie. It's not that at all! You'll be perfectly fine. It's just the doctor who runs Wilshire Fertility Group finds it unethical to use a donor more than three times.

ANNA

That seems silly.

LIZ

It's completely silly, sweetie. They shouldn't be able to set such arbitrary rules, but they can. And they do.

ANNA

Well, thanks for telling me in person, instead of on the phone. It was nice while it lasted, I guess. I do wish I could've done a fourth, though. I need a new used car.

LIZ

Why on earth can't you continue?

ANNA

Didn't you just say...

LIZ

There are other agencies, Anna sweetie. Other doctors, other hospitals... I have contacts in all of them.

ANNA

Really?

LIZ

Really! Now, I've already told my friend at the Brentwood Health Center about you; she said she has a couple you'd be a perfect match for. If you want to, of course. And Dr. Kovalcik is lovely, you'll like her.

ANNA

I'm not going to have see that shrink again, am I?

LIZ

(Laughing.)

Oh no, Anna, you won't ever have to see a shrink again if you don't want to.

ANNA

When can we get started?

Liz gives Anna the white box.

LIZ

No time like the present, is there?

ANNA

You're a genius, Liz. What would I do without you?

LIZ

The feeling is mutual. Oh! But don't let Dr. Kovalcik know how many donations you've already done, okay Anna sweetie?

ANNA

Oh... but...

LIZ

(Very quickly.)

By the way, Anna, are you doing anything for Thanksgiving? I'd love to have you join us, I hate the thought of you being alone, without any family to celebrate with.

Lights switch to Hella's office.

ANNA

That's when I went from egg donor to serial egg donor. And Liz and I got closer and closer every time I donated.

Lights switch. We see a montage of Liz and Anna in a Starbucks. The White Box is always present.

ONE: Liz and Anna, after seeing a movie.

ANNA

I don't blame her; I used to date guys just to piss my mother off too.

LIZ

Oh, sweetie, I think we all do that.

ANNA

But if it were me I'd have married the rich guy and cheated with the poor guy. It's not like the rich guy was going to be faithful to her either, right?

LIZ

You would cheat on your husband?

ANNA

Oh, I'd tell him. It's not lying if there's an understanding, right? Although I have to say, that actor who plays the rich guy is kind of dreamy.

LIZ

You know Billy Zane is bald in real life, don't you?

ANNA

Who cares!?! Those eyes!

LIZ

That's true. He does have bedroom eyes.

ANNA

Totally! And I'll bet his car isn't a piece of IKEA!

Liz laughs, and discretely pushes the box towards Anna.

TWO: Liz and Anna on a sunny afternoon.

ANNA

I don't understand what the big deal is. It's just a blow job!

LIZ

But he lied under oath, Anna sweetie!

ANNA

About a blow job! C'mon, Liz, all politicians lie!

LIZ

Aren't you the one who always gets on her soapbox about telling the truth?

ANNA

Yeah, but I'm not an elected official.

LIZ

So you'd be completely truthful if you ever went into politics?

ANNA

First of all, that's never going to happen, and second...

LIZ

Yes?

ANNA

Maybe.

They laugh.

LIZ

Of course you would, sweetie. I do believe you'd be a politician to reckon with, using truth like a sword!

ANNA

With a vengeance!

LIZ

I'm glad you're on my side, Anna sweetie.

ANNA

I'm glad you're on mine!

LIZ

Why, of course I am! Why wouldn't I be?

She discretely taps the box, gently pushing it forward.

THREE: Anna and Liz have been shopping, and are enjoying a post retail-therapy coffee.

ANNA

I have to stop with these Iced Mochas. They're too fattening.

LIZ

But they're soooo good.

ANNA

I know.

LIZ

I wouldn't worry. You're still young enough, and you're an exercise Goddess. I'd kill to have your body.

ANNA

You hold your own in my class.

LIZ

Yeah, but I damn near die every time. By the way, I'm sending a few more girls your way. Gotta keep my super donor just as popular at the health club, right?

ANNA

That's great! Thank you, Liz!

LIZ

Oh sweetie, it's my pleasure!

ANNA

I want another one of these.

LIZ

Well... you did get a small one.

ANNA

And... I guess I could get it without the whipped cream this time?

LIZ

There ya go! That'll save a hundred calories, at least.

(Putting the white box into one of Anna's shopping bags.)

Now remember, this new doctor and clinic are in Pasadena. I know it's a hike, but they don't know you there. You're going to adore Dr. Estevez, she's just lovely. And I was able to get you \$10,000 for this one.

ANNA

\$10,000!?!

LIZ

It's an older couple. This may be their last chance for a child. They're willing to pay almost anything.

ANNA

Oh, that's so sad!

LIZ

But see, Anna, you really are helping an infertile couple have a child! Isn't that a wonderful thing?

Lights switch back to Anna and Hella.

ANNA

We'd talk for hours, we'd have wonderful, deep / conversations.

HELLA

/ Excuse me, Anna, but what about any of these conversations is "deep?" They sound like idle chit chat to me.

ANNA

Well, I thought they were deep... At the time...

HELLA

It never occurred to you she was just doing her job? And involving you in her lies?

ANNA

...

Lights switch back to Anna and Liz, at "their" Starbucks.

LIZ

Anna, sweetie, I'm afraid I have some bad news. Doctor Weinberger at Pomona Valley Hospital called; your eggs aren't developing as much as they should. She suggests we abort this donation.

ANNA

Is it serious? Am I in danger?

LIZ

Oh heavens no, Anna; you're probably just a little anemic.

(Handing Anna an envelope.)

I was able to get the couple to give you half the fee, though; considering all the work you've put in so far, I think \$6,000 is fair compensation.

ANNA

Oh. Well that was nice of them, I guess. Do you think this has something to do with those headaches I've been having?

LIZ

I don't think so, Anna, but if you're worried maybe you should see your own doctor?

ANNA

Maybe. Do you think I'll be able to donate again?

LIZ

Don't worry about that right now, Anna sweetie. You just rest a while, and we can talk about that in a month or two, okay?

ANNA

Are we still on for dinner Friday night?

LIZ

Oh, Anna, sweetie, I forgot to tell you, my mother is coming for a visit on Friday.

ANNA

Oh. How about Thursday, then?

LIZ

I wish, sweetie, but I have so much to do before she gets here. My house is a mess, and she's a bitch and a half! Mothers, right? Look, I'll give you a call when she leaves, and we'll get together after that, okay?

ANNA

I really enjoy our time together, Liz. You're my best friend.

LIZ

Oh, that's so sweet of you to say. I have to run now. I'll talk to you real soon, sweetie.

Liz smiles at Anna, and leaves. Lights switch back to Anna and Hella. We hear the cracking sounds again.

ANNA

I don't hear from her for weeks. She keeps dodging my calls, she doesn't answer my messages. Emails aren't returned. She stops coming to my aerobics class. I'm getting angrier and angrier. And the headaches are getting worse.

HELLA

And did you go to your own Doctor?

ANNA

All she says is it's probably severe PMS and tells me to take some Midol. I never had PMS before, so I don't know // The feeling it had to be something worse never goes away // Nobody is taking me seriously!

Lights shift to a spot on Anna's mother, on the phone.

ANNA'S MOTHER

What do you think I can do, Anna? I used to get headaches before my period too. Just do what the doctor says, take the pill, and stop calling me at 2:00 in the morning!

DING

We hear a very loud crack as the lights switch back to Hella's office.

ANNA

OH FUCK THAT FUCKING DING!

HELLA

I'm sorry, Anna.

ANNA

You don't understand! I still need to talk to you about my mother. She's coming. From Sweden.

HELLA

And how do you feel about that?

ANNA

She's only coming because wants me to give up and go home with her so she can tell me for the rest of my life that she was right and I was wrong and this is my biggest fuck up and I CAN'T LET THAT HAPPEN. EVER!

HELLA

We'll have to talk about this next week.

Crack.

ANNA

I don't want to wait until next week! She'll be here next week.

(Bursting into tears.)

Dammit. I never cried until I met you.

Hella goes to Anna and holds her.

HELLA

Then I must be doing something right.

ANNA

I don't want to go back to Sweden with // I can't. I just can't.

HELLA

I don't want that to happen either.

ANNA

You're not against me?

HELLA

(Breaking away from her gently.)

No, Anna. I'm not against you. I'm doing everything I can to help you work through this. But sometimes I do think you are your own worst enemy.

ANNA

You sound like my mother. I don't need the two of you picking on me at the same time.

HELLA

How long will she be here?

ANNA

Too long. I don't know. As long as it takes for her to wear me down, I guess.

HELLA

You can always call me if she gets to be too much. You know that, don't you? *I'll* try not to pick on you.

ANNA
(She mimics Hella.)

Do try.

HELLA
You're keeping your sense of humor. That's a good sign.

ANNA
If I don't have that, I really will go crazy.

HELLA
If you want, you can bring your mother to our next session.

ANNA
She doesn't even know about you, about this part of the law suit.

HELLA
Isn't it time she does?

ANNA
I don't know.

HELLA
Yes, you do. I'll see you next week. Keep writing. Try remembering your dreams. Try writing *them* down. You may be surprised what you'll discover about yourself.

ANNA
(As she leaves.)
Yeah, yeah, yeah.

(Turning back to Hella.)
I'm my own worst enemy. That's a horrible thing to say to me just as I'm leaving.

HELLA
(Smiling.)
Yes, I know.

ANNA
Sometimes I hate you.

HELLA
(Smiling more.)
Yes, I know.

Lights switch. Cold commercial lighting, sounds of a busy airport. Anna and her mother in the baggage claim at LAX.

Now we see Anna's Mother in person, and not in memory; not precisely as difficult as Anna has portrayed her, Anna's Mother – awkwardly – tries to hug her, but is rebuffed. A moment of tense silence.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Anna...

ANNA

You told me I was on my own. You told me you couldn't take the time ~~from work~~ // You told ~~me~~ // Why the hell are you here now?

ANNA'S MOTHER

Anna... please. I've been on a plane for 13 hours. I'm tired. I have a headache. Can we just discuss this without screaming at each other?

ANNA

Try living with one for weeks and weeks...

ANNA'S MOTHER

You almost killed someone.

ANNA

...

Okay, yes, I did something I shouldn't have done. And if I get kicked out of ~~here~~ // If you think I'm going to just give up and go back to Sweden with you on the next ~~plane~~ // I'm not a quitter. Like you were with dad.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Anna... There are so many things about your father you ~~don't~~ // Not here...

(Whispering.)

Everybody is listening to us.

ANNA

Fine. We'll talk about the weather. See that stuff out there? It's called sunshine. At 4:00 on an afternoon in November. Different from Göteborg, huh?

ANNA'S MOTHER

You are so difficult. Just like your ~~father~~...

ANNA

Yeah, tell it to my shrink.

ANNA'S MOTHER
You're seeing a shrink?

ANNA
Court ordered.

ANNA'S MOTHER
This is even worse than I'd imagined.

ANNA
She wants you to come to a session.

ANNA'S MOTHER
What did you tell her about me?

ANNA
You can come with me or you can sit in the car.

ANNA'S MOTHER
You're going now?

ANNA
Yes.

ANNA'S MOTHER
And you'd just leave me sitting in your car // after I've flown halfway around the world?

ANNA
I'll leave the window cracked.

ANNA'S MOTHER
Not funny, Anna.

ANNA
It wasn't meant to be.

ANNA'S MOTHER
(Pointing.)
There are my bags.

ANNA
All those // How long are you staying!?!)

ANNA'S MOTHER

As long as it takes.

ANNA

(Sarcastically.)

Great! C'mon. I'm late.

Taking one of the bags, Anna exits, leaving her mother standing there confused, angry, embarrassed.

HELLA (V.O.)

Session Seven.

Light switch. Anna with the mic.

ANNA

My mother once asked me why I wanted to be an egg donor. She knows I don't want kids. Which is true. I don't. I don't like 'em. Can't stand 'em. But I like pissing off my mother. And I like money.

(Looking at a young woman in the audience.)

Oh, you too? I should introduce you to Liz. My egg broker. What's your name?

(If the person answers:)

[NAME], it doesn't matter...

(If the person doesn't answer.)

It doesn't matter, whoever you are...

Liz will forget you once you pass your expiration date. 'Cause that's how she works. She searches for her pigeons, she gets all kissy-kissy friendly-friendly, calls you her "Super Donor," shops you around hospitals and doctors all over Los Angeles, gives you potted begonias, and then when the eggs go bad, she moves on to her next "Super Donor." 4, 6, 12 donations, however many she can get away with, and WHAM! The Super Donor isn't super anymore, and now you're just a *dead* pigeon. And someone else's problem.

(Violently hurling handfuls of chocolate eggs into the audience.)

Here, Liz sweetie, TAKE THE REST OF MY FUCKING EGGS!

We hear people saying things like "Ouch!," "What the fuck?," "Watch it, bitch!" Perhaps a glass or two smashing from being hit with such force.

Lights switch to Anna and Hella in her office.

ANNA

I never lose control like that. Later I find out there's an agent in the audience. She passes on me because... well, you're not an idiot.

...

You're right: I am my own worst enemy.

(Suddenly snapping.)

BUT WHERE THE HELL HAS LIZ BEEN? WHY THE HELL WASN'T SHE TRYING TO SEE ME? WHY WASN'T SHE HELPING ME?

A moment of silence.

HELLA

I thought you were going to bring your mother to our session today?

ANNA

I told you. She won't come.

HELLA

Did you ask her?

ANNA

Of course I asked her.

HELLA

Where is she now?

ANNA

In my car. Sulking. Don't worry, I left the windows cracked.

HELLA

Your mother isn't a dog, Anna.

ANNA

No, but she is a bitch.

HELLA

That's not funny.

ANNA

It wasn't meant to be.

HELLA

Ask her again.

ANNA

Maybe.

The lights return to a harsh spot on Hella.

HELLA

I want to smack the crap out of her. Every time I think we're close to a breakthrough, that she's putting two and two together and getting four, she retreats behind that cold, snarky, Nordic shield of hers.

...

And then it happens: having her mother constantly around pushing her buttons cuts a few huge chinks in that armor. Because she has a dream. And she remembers it. It's as thrilling a moment for me as I've ever known with a client.

Session Eight

Lights up on Anna and Hella. Anna is extremely tense.

ANNA

I really don't want to be here this week.

HELLA

Tell me.

ANNA

I can't.

HELLA

Because...

ANNA

I just can't.

HELLA

Do try.

ANNA

Will you stop with this "Tell me" and "Do try" shi...

She stops. She can't bring herself to say the word "shit."

HELLA

Why did you stop yourself from saying "shit," Anna?

ANNA

I don't know.

Hella smiles to herself. She knows.

HELLA

Anna, let me ask you: are you having any disturbing dreams lately?

ANNA

I told you I don't dream. Or if I do, I don't remember.

HELLA

Bullshit.

ANNA

Excuse me?

HELLA

I'm calling bullshit. Everybody dreams, Anna. Whether you remember the dream or not, you do dream. I suspect you recently had a lulu. *And* you do remember it.

ANNA

SHIT. Okay, I said it. Stop with the "Tell me" and "Do try" SHIT! Okay?

HELLA

Tell me about the dream, Anna, and then maybe I'll stop with the "Tell me" and "Do try" shit. Deal?

ANNA

You are so annoying!

HELLA

So are you.

(Softly.)

I know you're having dreams that upset you, and I suspect I know what they are.

ANNA

You fucking think you know everything, don't you?

HELLA

So, see if I'm wrong: let's talk about the dream.

ANNA

No.

Anna shuts up like a stubborn Swedish clam.

HELLA

It's your time your wasting, Anna. We can talk about it now, or... I can suggest you need another 2 or 3 three sessions before I'll sign off on anything...

ANNA

BUT...!

HELLA

(She smiles sweetly, but slyly.)

You already know I'm not above blackmail.

ANNA

For someone who's so interested in how I let Liz manipulate me, you're pretty damn good at it yourself.

HELLA

Good. You're starting to recognize when you're being manipulated. So... Do try to tell me about the dream.

Anna sits quietly for a moment. We can almost see her deciding what to say.

ANNA

(Almost too confidently.)

I'm doing my standup. My mother's in the audience. And she's laughing at everything I say. It's very weird, because you know she never laughs at anything, and then she / starts to

HELLA

/ Don't underestimate me, Anna, I know that's not it. Now cut the bullshit and let's start again, shall we?

Anna again hesitates, then blurts out.

ANNA

It's awful. I'm at a party in a house high up in the Hollywood Hills. All the walls are floor-to-ceiling glass, and all the other houses on all the hills are glass too, and everyone can see everyone, and everyone is partying. It's Liz's house, but it's not Liz's house because she lives in Santa Monica. And she's there, and my mother is there, and Maja is there, but then they aren't. I start looking for them and I see my mother glaring at me from all the other glass houses, and then I see Liz in a house across the canyon, partying with a bunch of other girls, handing out white boxes like Jultomten* on Christmas Eve. She points over at me and laughs. All the other girls look at me and laugh too. And then Maja is pregnant, and she starts bleeding eggs.

She just keeps bleeding eggs, all these eggs mixed with blood and skit**... (*Jultomten is the Swedish Santa Claus, pronounced “yultomten.” **Skit is the Swedish word for shit, and is pronounced “hwint.”)

HELLA

Skit is the real Swedish word for shit, I’m assuming? Not IKEA?

ANNA

Yes, not IKEA. Sorry. It’s just easier for me if I say it in Swedish, I guess.

HELLA

If it’s easier. Continue.

ANNA

Suddenly I’m on the 405, driving like a maniac, all the other cars are stuck and not moving, but I’m racing past them, and they’re all shouting and throwing needles at me. I feel sick to my stomach. I’m in a bathroom. Everything is blue. The walls, the floor, the toilets, the sinks... And everything is... this is so disgusting.

HELLA

Go on.

ANNA

I can’t. I’ll gross you out.

HELLA

Go on, Anna. You won’t gross me out, I promise.

ANNA

The bathroom is covered in skit. It’s everywhere. On the walls, on the floor, all over the toilet seats, in the sinks, the faucets, the handles... And I really have to pee. I can’t hold it, and as much as I want to get the hell out of there I can’t. There’s no door, no window, there’s no way out. Just four, blue, skit-covered walls hemming me in, and I just can’t hold it anymore. But I don’t pee. I just started to bajs*... (*Bajs is the Swedish word for poop, and it’s pronounced “bice.”)

Bajs means poop... I start to bajs all over the place. I can’t stop. The bajs doesn’t stop, and the walls are now glass, and I see all the party people laughing at me. Liz. My mother. Maja. All of The Foreign Student Stock Exchange. Harriet Cooke. I think even you’re there and laughing. I start smearing my skit all over the glass so nobody can see me, but everyone keeps laughing, and I start to sink down into the bajs. But it isn’t skit anymore. I’m in a ball pit filled with those chocolate eggs I throw into the audience during my routine, and I’m drowning in a sea of foil-wrapped chocolate eggs. I go under, sinking lower and lower and lower. I start screaming, and suddenly the foil comes off all of those eggs. They start going into my mouth and coming out of my vagina*.

In my mouth and out my vagina, in and out, like there was a conveyor belt between my mouth and my vagina, and I still keep sinking. And pooping. Eggs out my vagina and bajs out my stånga**. The foil is wrapping itself around me, tighter and tighter, and still the bajs and the eggs keep pouring out of me. I feel like I'm going to burst. And even though I can't breathe, I keep screaming and screaming, until just before I explode, my own screams wake me up.

(*Anna uses the Swedish pronunciation, which is "Va-GIN-ah." Hard G. **Stånga is the Swedish word for "Butt," and is pronounced "Ston-YAH.")

HELLA

Oh, that's WONDERFUL!

ANNA

ARE YOU CRAZY?

HELLA

That's a wonderful dream, Anna!

ANNA

WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH YOU? It's disgusting! Why would I dream about letting myself shit all over the place?

HELLA

It's interesting you can now say shit outside of the context of your dream, Anna. Why do you think that is?

Again, Anna stops, a look of confusion on her face.

ANNA

It's two different things.

HELLA

Is it?

ANNA

Of course it is. One is just a word I say, but in the dream it's intensely personal, and disgusting.

HELLA

Because it's coming out of you? And everybody is watching?

ANNA

Yes! Everybody is watching me, and laughing. I don't like when people watch me bajs.

HELLA

Poop?

ANNA

YES! POOP! SHIT! SHIT! Shit, Poop, Shit, okay? I just don't like feeling that exposed, the way I do in the dream.

HELLA

But don't you like everybody watching you and laughing when you're performing?

ANNA

Of course I do.

HELLA

So what makes the dream so different?

ANNA

Oh for Christ's sake! When I'm on stage, I'm in charge. In the dream, I'm... I'm...

HELLA

Vulnerable?

ANNA

YES, dammit. Yes! I don't like feeling powerless, and that's how I'm feeling. Powerless, with a lot of shit to deal with... and... and...

HELLA

And...?

A moment as Anna struggles, and then finally has her "Rain In Spain" moment.

ANNA

I'm dealing with a lot of shit, holding a lot of crap inside of me, and...

...

It's time to let it go.

...

Isn't it?

HELLA

YES, Anna, YES!

ANNA

That's it?

HELLA

Mostly.

ANNA

I can't believe that's all it is!

HELLA

Sometimes, to paraphrase Freud, shit is just shit, Anna. And once you start letting go of it all, don't you feel better?

ANNA

In the dream?

HELLA

In the dream, in life... It's not an uncommon dream; you'd be surprised how many people have that exact same dream. Or variations of it.

ANNA

Do you have it?

Hella hesitates a moment, and then decides to answer.

HELLA

Yes. I've had it. And I've had it more than once.

ANNA

Jesus! I can have it again? No fucking way! NO!

Hella struggles with herself whether or not to divulge something to Anna. She starts speaking, slowly.

HELLA

Anna... I am going to tell you something... About me... When I first started as a therapist, I had that dream often. I was holding on to a lot of stuff from my past. Painful shit...

(Speaking now with a sort of determined hesitation.)

I'm a little girl in Berlin, during the war. Maybe six, maybe seven... One afternoon I see Marta, my best friend, beaten to death on the street. And I just stand there, watching from my window, unable to help her. Afraid to shout STOP, even though every fiber of my being is shaking with rage. And my mother is holding her hand over my mouth. She doesn't let scream, she doesn't let me go downstairs to stop... I watch Marta die, and I can do nothing. I watch as they take her whole family away, and leave her bleeding to death on the street. Her beautiful little face all smashed...

ANNA

(Quietly.)

Oh. My. God. That's awful.

They sit in silence as Hella takes a moment to regain her composure.

HELLA

After the war I try to forget it, and for the most part I do. I move on. I come to the United States on a student visa – like you – and I go to university, get my degree, get married, become a U.S. Citizen, and I start to have that dream. And I have it many times. It isn't until I start going through my own therapy that I realize what that dream means. And once I start letting go of all that shit from the war, I stop having the dream.

ANNA

You've never had it again?

HELLA

Once or twice, but I know now that when I have it, I have a problem I have to face.

ANNA

I don't want to have that dream again.

HELLA

So? What are you going to do about it?

ANNA

Write it down?

HELLA

And...

ANNA

Face the problem?

HELLA

Yes.

Anna gets up, crosses slowly to Hella, and then hugs her. Hella is surprised, but hugs back.

ANNA

I'm so sorry you had to... that poor little girl...

DING!

Anna grabs her tightly, and won't let go. Hella begins to stroke her hair.

HELLA

You'll be surprised how much easier it's going to be from now on.

Anna looks up at Hella, and smiles.

ANNA

If you say so.

HELLA

(Gently.)

Have you asked your mother again? About coming to a session?

ANNA

Will you just let that go...

(Sighing.)

I'll try.

HELLA

Do.

Anna rolls her eyes. Switch to the harsh light on Hella.

HELLA

Of course, I can't tell her I'm having the dream again. But I know why, and as much as I don't want to face that woman who was responsible for my own daughter's death... I still have a lot of shit to deal with myself. I have to go after Harriet Cooke again, and stop her from hurting another young girl. It isn't enough I'd had her license taken away, that obviously didn't stop her. And I have to stop her. And Liz. I have to stop her too. The two of them have to be stopped. Somehow. And yes, I know I should recuse myself immediately, but I'm too far into this "skit" myself now. There's no turning back.

Lights change. Anna and her mother, sitting in the patio area of a Starbucks.

ANNA'S MOTHER

How many more of these sessions do you have?

ANNA

Two.

ANNA'S MOTHER

I can make better coffee than this. And it's too expensive.

ANNA

I'm paying for it, mom. And you could've just gone back to my apartment instead of waiting for me. I told you I'm sorry I'm late, traffic was / terrible

ANNA'S MOTHER

/ And have you yell at me when you get home because I'm not here waiting for you?

ANNA

Mom! What do you want from me? Why the hell did you come here, anyway?

ANNA'S MOTHER

I'm beginning to wonder that myself. Anna, why can't you ever let me / try to

ANNA

/ You can go home, you know. Any time you want, just say the word and I'll drive you to the airport. I'll even pay for the ticket.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Not until I know you're going to be okay.

This goes right over Anna's head.

ANNA

Then stop bitching about everything...

Anna suddenly stops. She's seen someone go into the store, and it's shaken her.

ANNA'S MOTHER

What's the matter?

ANNA

It's nothing. I just thought... I saw someone who looks like someone I know, that's all. C'mon, let's get out of here.

Lights shift. Hella and Anna in Hella's office.

HELLA

Session Nine.

ANNA

It is her. She doesn't see me, thank God. And I can't tell my mother it's Liz. That would just make everything worse.

HELLA

I'm assuming you haven't told your mother about the restraining order?

ANNA

Oh, she knows. It wouldn't have stopped her from making a huge deal anyway. I can just hear her: "They didn't give me a restraining order!"

HELLA

It's interesting you leave your mother to wait in that particular Starbucks.

ANNA

Why? She won't come to a session, she doesn't want to wait in the car, and it's close enough to my apartment she can walk home if she gets too bored. Not that she would. She'd rather sit there and get angry.

HELLA

It's also the Starbucks where you used to meet Liz, isn't it?

Lights shift. Anna and Liz in Starbucks. Anna is quite on edge, Liz is quite obviously wishing she were somewhere, anywhere else.

ANNA

You have to help me, Liz.

LIZ

I don't know what you want from me, Anna.

ANNA

You got me into this mess.

LIZ

You could have always said no to another donation. Any time. I'm sorry, sweetie, but I can't help you.

ANNA

Yes you can! You have to help me! YOU HAVE TO HELP ME, DAMMIT!

Anna gestures wildly, knocking her drink to the floor. The ambient Starbucks noise stops.

LIZ

(Embarrassed.)

Anna, please. You're making a spectacle of yourself.

ANNA

I thought you were my friend. Can't you give me some pills or something? Something stronger than that Midol crap?

LIZ

I can't give you any medication other than what's in my little white box... I know how you feel about seeing shrinks, Anna, but... Dr. Cooke can help you with that. She can give you something that will make you feel better.

ANNA

Yeah. A bottle of water and a joint?

LIZ

Just see her. I'll call and let her know you're coming. Trust me, this is the best I can do.

Lights shift to the soft candlelight of Dr. Cooke's office.
She is smoking a joint as Anna walks into the memory.

DR. COOKE

Anna, right? Liz said you'd be coming.

(Offering her a hit.)

Would you like a toke?

ANNA

No. Thank you.

DR. COOKE

Are you sure? You seem tense.

ANNA

I am tense, Sherlock!

DR. COOKE

All the more reason to take a hit. C'mon, it will help you relax.

ANNA

Just give me the damn prescription and let me get the hell out of here.

DR. COOKE

(Offering her a bottle of water.)

How about some water?

ANNA

JESUS! What is it with you and the water? I'm an aerobics instructor, you think I don't drink my weight in water every day?

DR. COOKE

I'm glad you're staying hydrated, at least.

ANNA

Dr. Cooke, please! I didn't come all this way to talk about staying hydrated!

DR. COOKE

Are you sure you don't want a hit? It will help calm you down.

ANNA

I DON'T NEED TO CALM DOWN! I NEED TO GET RID OF THESE HEADACHES!
GIVE ME THE GODDAMN PRESCRIPTION!

DR. COOKE

I've already called it in to my pharmacy, dear.

ANNA

WHY THE HELL DIDN'T YOU TELL ME THAT ON THE PHONE?

DR. COOKE

Because, dear, I need to have an "official" session on my record.

ANNA

Wait a minute? Your pharmacy?

DR. COOKE

Yes, dear. It's only a few blocks away. 12455 Raven Street, right off Glen Oaks Boulevard.

ANNA

I'm going to have to drive all the way up here every time I need a refill... why can't I just get it filled at my drugstore in Culver City?

DR. COOKE

I prefer to use this place. They know me, I trust them not to screw it up, and I doubt you'll need any refills. One month and you'll be as good as new.

ANNA

Raven and Glen Oaks?

DR. COOKE

Yes, dear. Dr. Leslie Blumenthal. She's my personal pharmacist.

ANNA

(As she starts to race out.)

Thank you.

DR. COOKE

Just a moment, dear.

(Picking up her phone and dialing.)

I want to add something to your order. ... Leslie, it's Harriet. ... Yes, dear, she's on her way. I want to prescribe some Valium, too. ... 10 milligrams, four times a day. ... A month's supply, yes.

(She eyes Anna.)

And what the hell, give her a bag of my special blend. I think it will do her some good. ... Yes. ... Thank you dear.

She hangs up.

ANNA

Valium?

DR. COOKE

Yes, dear. It will help calm your nerves. I'm sure all this tension you're living with has a lot to do with your headaches.

ANNA

Anything to get back to normal.

DR. COOKE

And remember, dear. Keep hydrated!

Lights shift back to Hella's office.

ANNA

When I get to the "pharmacy," it's just a house.

HELLA

And that doesn't tip you off?

ANNA

I'm not thinking. All I want is to feel better.

HELLA

So she puts you on Estradiol, Valium, *and* Marijuana!?!

ANNA

I only tried the pot once. I don't care for the smell.

HELLA

What the hell was she thinking? What the hell were *you* thinking? Why in the world do you trust Liz and that sham shrink over your own doctor?

ANNA

My own doctor doesn't give a damn about me. She thinks I'm just being a PMS drama queen!

HELLA

Aren't you? You've never had PMS before, right?

ANNA

...
No.

HELLA

So you really don't know what it's like. For all you know what you're feeling is just the normal PMS crap most of us go through. Maybe a little worse than usual because your hormones are whacked from five years of non-stop donations, but in time / things might have

ANNA

/ IN TIME? You have no idea how I'm feeling... I'm desperate, Hella! Anything to feel better... like my old self. Get those damn headaches to stop... And for a while they do. But then... everything gets worse. Whatever those pills are, they just make everything worse.

HELLA

Of course they do, Anna. Estradiol is a strong estrogen drug meant for menopausal women. And to combine it with Valium? And pot!?!

ANNA

I told you I only used the pot once.

HELLA

That's like putting your hormones on a Slinky tied to an out of control yo-yo!

ANNA

I start getting angrier and angrier at Liz. How dare she? How dare she do this to me? How dare she abandon me like this? And I obsess about getting back at her. I begin to stalk her. I know I shouldn't but I can't help myself.

We see a montage of quick scenes:

ONE: Liz walking her dog. Anna appears in the background, watching her.

We hear the cracking sound.

TWO: Liz carrying a bag of groceries. Anna again appears in the background watching her.

We hear the cracking sound again, a little louder.

THREE: Liz sitting at "their" Starbucks table, pushing the white box towards an unseen donor, and smiling. Yet again Anna appears in the background, watching her. We can see her getting upset by this interaction with another "Super Donor."

LIZ

Oh, sweetie, I love you too! You're my SUPER Super Donor!

Lights shift to a close spot on Anna's face, distorted with rage. The cracking sounds get louder.

ANNA

I see her with her new "SUPER Super Donor," and everything just starts swirling, like I'm weightless and floating, I'm powerless to control myself. I wait until she's done and gets in her car. And that's when I completely lose it.

Huge cracking sounds, over which we hear an engine gunning, then frantic honking, and a crash.

LIZ (V.O.)

Anna! What the hell are you doing?

Another crash and crack. And another crash and crack. And another crash and crack.

ANNA

Bitch! Fucking bitch!

LIZ (V.O.)

Anna! Stop it! Stop it! STOP IT!!!

The last “STOP IT!!!” reverberates along with one final crash and crack.

Lights switch back to Hella’s office. Anna is sobbing.

HELLA

It’s not your fault, Anna. Yes, you caused a lot of damage. And you’ll have to take responsibility for that. But it’s not your fault.

ANNA

I was just a means to an end for her. Wasn’t I?

DING

HELLA

I’m sorry, Anna, but... yes.

...

How are you feeling?

ANNA

I don’t know. Exhausted. Angry.

HELLA

Of course you’re angry.

ANNA

But lighter, somehow. Like I just got rid of a whole lotta skit.

Still sobbing, she throws herself into Hella’s arms.

HELLA

Good. This is good. This is very good.

(Gently disengaging and holding Anna’s face
in her hands.)

Next week is our last session. You still haven’t brought your mother.

ANNA

What good would that do now?

HELLA

You'd be

ANNA

Surprised

HELLA

Surprised.

ANNA

I'll ask her again. But don't hold your breath.

HELLA

Do try.

ANNA

(Rolling her eyes.)

I knew you'd say that.

Lights shift back to Hella. She is fiddling with a pack of cigarettes.

HELLA

One more session. I hope she'll bring her mother with her but, as she so belligerently said, I'm not holding my breath. After her recent breakthroughs, after facing what she did to Liz and why, I have no doubt the charges will be dropped. But there's still that nagging question about her mother. I have to see the two of them together. Only then can I put this all to rest. For some reason I've begun to believe their relationship is the key to resolving my issues with my daughter, who was so like Anna... And with only one more session...

(She takes a cigarette from the pack and smells it.)

No. Not this late in the game.

So here we go. Session Ten.

Lights switch. We hear the soft sound of the surf, and we see Anna sitting on the beach in the soft morning light. She has a notebook next to her, and is idly playing with a piece of kelp. She watches as a sand crab scurries across her blanket. She picks it up, gently, placing it on the sand.

ANNA

And how are you today, Sebastian? Crawling into your hole, and pulling it in after you?

...

This place looks like a mermaid's graveyard.

(Picking up a piece of kelp.)

Which one were you? Ariel? Or Ursula? The great Triton himself? Whoever. Now you're just washed up on the beach, dried out and useless. Dead. Lucky bastard.

(Picking up her notebook, she looks at the kelp, and then out to the ocean.)

Okay, Hella. Let's try this.

(She writes.)

My favorite fairy tale is "The Little Mermaid." I identify with that longing to be someone other than who or what I am, to experience something other than my dull life in my dull town with my dull, unhappy parents. I mean the original story Hans Christian Anderson wrote. Don't get me started on that stupid Disney Princess shit, but I do like some of the characters in that...

(Looking up, she laughs a rueful laugh.)

Disney Princess Shit. Skit. Shit. Hahahaha.

(She picks up her pen again.)

Although when I was little I don't particularly like the ending Hans Christian Anderson wrote, as I grow older, I kind of enjoy the idea of living for three hundred years and then turning into sea foam. Maybe that's why I've become addicted to donating my eggs. It gives me a kind of immortality, I guess, an immortality that takes me far, far, far from the dreary northern Europe of *my* childhood.

As I walk along the beaches of Southern California, I become more and more aware of all the dried kelp and seaweed that washes onto the shore every morning, and I'm reminded of that Danish tale. In the depressed state I'm in after all those donations fucked up my hormones, I begin to think all that kelp looks like the remains of dead Mermaids, and I'm an interloper, drifting through a graveyard.

And I think, is this all there is? Am I destined to be like this, a dried out piece of kelp, like a dead Mermaid washed up on the beach? And I remember hating how the original story ends; maybe I could, maybe I should write my own ending? Maybe, just maybe, as a mermaid's 300th birthday approaches, they set off on one last adventure, swimming from wherever they are in the world to the Southern California coast for one final party, one spectacular "Mermaid's Ball" on the evening of their 300th birthday. They party like there's no tomorrow, because for them there is no tomorrow; at the stroke of midnight, their bodies dissolve into foam, and all that's left is their skeleton, which washes up on the beach as a mass of kelp and seaweed, carried to shore with the foam of their not quite immortal soul.

Every morning more mermaid skeletons wash up on the beach, dried out and useless, with nothing left to mark their 300 years in the sea except for the other mermaids they've spawned, who will eventually attend this same party and wash up on the beach the next morning, a cold, wet mixture of foam, kelp, and seaweed. And just maybe, that really is all there is for everyone, whether they're a mermaid or not. An endless cycle of life, birth, and death, and none of it means anything at all.

What we leave behind might matter for a little while, but realistically, who really knows what the people living and dying 300 years ago left behind? And 300 years before them? Or 300 years from now? And who really cares? It's all just a bunch of shit, isn't it? Or shit.

She picks up the kelp, and tosses it back into the sea.

Lights switch. Anna, Anna's Mother, and Hella in her office.

HELLA

And how does hearing that make you feel, Mrs. Lindgren?

ANNA'S MOTHER

Ashamed.

ANNA

Of course it does.

HELLA

Why?

ANNA

Because everything I do, everything I have ever done, everything I will ever do makes her ashamed.

HELLA

Anna, let your mother answer.

Another long, tense silence.

ANNA

She's not going to say anything, you know that don't you?

(To her mother.)

Why the hell did you agree to come, / anyway?

HELLA

/ Anna...

A pause.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Listening to that story...

...

She runs away to Malmo, once. When she's little. Before her father leaves...

The authorities call. She tells them if I come to get her she'll become a mermaid... go into the sea... swim to Denmark. Or die trying.

...

Hearing my daughter wants to be dead...

...

I don't want to be here. I don't want to be in this room // this woman I don't know hearing all these... things... these personal things... Knowing things about me // about you // us...

...

This is very difficult for me. I do not like to...

...

But...

(To Anna.)

There's no one else this time // I came to support // I came to help you.

ANNA

And how the hell do you think you're doing that?

ANNA'S MOTHER

I don't know. But I came. Not your father. Me. For you.

A moment of silence.

ANNA

Ashamed! How the hell do you think that makes me feel? You should've just stayed at the Starbucks // Stayed in Göteborg. You don't give a shit about me // You've never given a shit about me.

ANNA'S MOTHER

(To Hella.)

You see? She's been like this since she was a child // could talk. Rude. Always answering back. Always pushing me away.

ANNA

I'm pushing *you* away? Are you fucking kidding me?

ANNA'S MOTHER

Yes, Anna, you push me away. Every chance you get. You never let me even try to make up for...

Anna's mother can't continue.

HELLA

(Gently.)

Yes, Mrs. Lindgren? Make up for what?

After a tense moment, the following lines all pile up on top of each other.

ANNA'S MOTHER

I need to leave.

ANNA

Make up for hating me?

ANNA'S MOTHER

I don't hate you, Anna.

ANNA

You think I don't know you've hated me my whole life?

ANNA'S MOTHER

(To Anna.)

I DON'T HATE YOU, ANNA!

...

But you never make it easy to love you.

ANNA

That's right, make it my fault again // It's always my fault // It's always been my // I messed up your life.

Another silence as Anna's mother struggles with her feelings.

ANNA'S MOTHER

(To Hella, quietly.)

I don't want her. When I get pregnant. I don't want her. I resent her. I try so hard not to // I try so hard.

She pauses, having a hard time continuing.

HELLA

Go on, Mrs. Lindgren.

ANNA'S MOTHER

And I'm jealous.

(To Anna.)

I'm jealous you always get along better with your father than with me. I'm jealous you trust everyone else but me. I'm jealous of this Liz person. I tell you I don't trust this whole egg thing you get yourself mixed up in, and I'm jealous you trust her more than you trust me.

...

I don't hate you, Anna. I have never hated you. I don't like you very // who you've become // Despite what you think I don't want you to come back to Sweden. But I don't hate you.

Long silence.

HELLA

Thank you, Mrs. Lindgren. I know how difficult this must be for you.

ANNA'S MOTHER

Do you?

Hella hands Anna's mother a box of tissues. She waves it away.

HELLA

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

ANNA'S MOTHER

No.

...

Yes.

(To Anna.)

I don't understand. I don't understand this whole egg donation thing. You always say you don't want children. And you have an abortion, almost as if you want to shove that in my face // "See, Mom, I'm smarter than / you..."

ANNA

/ I took responsibility for what I did!

ANNA'S MOTHER

NO, YOU DIDN'T! You do what you always do // Take // Find the easiest way out.

ANNA

You want a medal for how *you* took responsibility? How you always make me feel like I wrecked your life?

ANNA'S MOTHER

So you have to wreck your own?

...

I get angry with you // Mistake after mistake after mistake // I am angry because for such a smart girl // You make such stupid decisions. I just want to smack some sense into you // stop you from...

...

I want to leave.

ANNA

Of course you do.

ANNA'S MOTHER

I mean I want to go home. To Göteborg. I... came here to help. I don't think I can.

(To Anna.)

I will wait in the car. Give me the keys.

Anna does.

HELLA

Mrs. Lindgren...

Anna's Mother leaves. A moment of silence.

ANNA

See? I told you she's a pain in the ass.

HELLA

Anna. Do you realize how difficult all of this is for her?

...

I want to tell you something. I probably shouldn't, but since I've already told you about my experiences in Berlin during the war I think it's... I am going to tell you how I know Harriet Cooke.

ANNA

I KNEW YOU KNOW HER!

HELLA

Anna, please.

...

Harriet Cooke was my daughter's psychiatrist.

ANNA

Oh. I didn't know you had a daughter.

HELLA

Do you remember my telling you why I answer my phone during sessions now?

ANNA

Something about if you'd answered the phone, things would have been different?

HELLA

Dani. My daughter. She called to tell me she was going to kill herself.

ANNA

Oh my God.

HELLA

She was strung out on the pills Harriet Cooke kept prescribing for her. And the pot. And God knows what else she'd started taking. I didn't know the extent of the problem.

ANNA

You didn't smell the pot on her?

HELLA

I should have, but I didn't. I was a heavy smoker myself.

...

Unlike your mother, I wanted my daughter. I loved her // But I never understood what she needed // And I wasn't paying attention...

...

My daughter was so like you, Anna. And seeing you with your mother...

ANNA

So now you're going to tell me to patch things up with her so you can feel better about yourself, right?

HELLA

Not at all. Your mother... the best I can say is she is totally honest with you. Much more than I ever was with Dani. Would it have made a difference? I don't know. But your mother's honesty with you, no matter how hard it is to hear... I hope the two of you will continue to work on your relationship with another shrink, but I know, realistically, that's not going to happen. I'm afraid until you really listen, Anna, you will never really understand what she has to say. And vice versa.

Another long silence.

DING

ANNA

This is it, it isn't it?

HELLA

Yes, Anna. This is it. Your ordeal is over.

Hella takes a pen and signs the last paper.

ANNA

Now what?

HELLA

I send these papers to the judge with my notes, most likely the charges will be dropped, and you can go back to your life.

ANNA

It seems weird, somehow. Not having to come here every week... Not seeing you anymore.

HELLA

Your mother's waiting for you.

...

You're going to need to be a little patient with her today.

ANNA

No shit, Sherlock.

(Hugging Hella.)

Thank you, Hella.

HELLA

You're welcome. Sweetie.

Anna bursts out laughing.

ANNA

Somehow, I don't mind you calling me sweetie anymore.

HELLA

One more thing, Anna...

ANNA

Yes?

HELLA

Your mermaid story. You have talent. You could be a writer.

ANNA

Maybe.

HELLA

Do try.

ANNA

Do try.

They laugh, then freeze. Lights change to the sharp light on Hella.

HELLA

I never speak to Anna again. The charges against her are dropped, although she is put on probation for three years and forbidden to ever donate her eggs again. After I send my report to the court, Harriet Cooke is charged for practicing and dispensing drugs without a license and sent to jail for 10 years. Leslie Blumenthal's private pharmacy is raided and closed down. Every clinic where Liz Clarke does business is investigated, and she is stripped of her license and barred from ever working as an egg broker again. I've spent the last few years working on getting stricter regulations on egg donations in Southern California, and putting measures in place ensuring they'll be enforced.

...

And I stop having the shit dream. My daughter Dani is dead, there's no bringing her back. And even though I know there's little chance of Anna ever completely resolving her deeply rooted conflicts, I cling to a shred of hope she will...

...

I do *see* Anna one more time. I'm in New York, and just happen to notice she's performing at a comedy club. Despite my best efforts, I can't resist.

Lights up on Anna, mic in hand. There is an easel with a poster for a book on sale in the lobby: "All The King's Horses, by Anna Lindgren." Hella watches her, quietly.

ANNA

I was an egg donor, once. Twice. Okay, eleven times. Twelve if you count the one they aborted... I mean when you're kind of an actress in LA and look like me, what else can you do between auditions to make money? Legally, I mean?

Laughter.

HELLA

I do my best to make sure she doesn't see me, but...

ANNA

Of course, I don't do that anymore.

(Pausing slightly for effect.)

I'm not allowed. But...

(Indicating the poster.)

I've got bigger, better options these days. And... do you know you can get \$250,000 for a kidney? I mean, I only need one, right?

(Looking directly at Hella.)

Just kidding.

A burst of laughter. Anna freezes as her light tightens to a spot on her smiling face.

HELLA

Oh, how I wish I believed her. Oh, how I wish I could.

She takes out a pack of cigarettes and a book of matches. Taking a cigarette out of the pack, she strikes the match but doesn't light the cigarette. She stares at Anna as the match burns out and the lights fade on them both.

END OF PLAY