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They Wouldn't Let Me Perform an Orchiectomy Live On Stage so I Figure This is the Next Best Thing

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**They Wouldn't Let Me Perform an
Orchiectomy Live On Stage so I Figure
This is the Next Best Thing**

By Angus Kanelong

AGKNOEGEMENTS

A full whole hearted fuck you to, the cops who kidnaped me when I was 8, the guy who grabbed me in a hanafords bathroom, and the guy who yelled faggot at me from his truck in Red Hook yesterday

Part 1: Like poetry

Sat on the curb outside the *Stewarts* I was dead tired. I had just finished the performances of my play and the warm concrete in the night air that almost felt like summer. My father sat beside me, they had driven two hours to see this show. I realized how much easier it was to be out in public when I wasn't alone. I stopped dressing how I wanted when I went into town a while ago. I could deal with the dirty looks or the words but the day someone grabbed me I decided it felt a lot better to be safe than happy. I put spikes on the shoulders of my jacket after that. With my father who looks like they belong in the town (and in a way they do they lived here two and a half decades ago) I realized I was a bit safer, how would those people turn if they knew that this big figure in the parking lot drinking a coffee shamelessly taking up a parking spot was (to use the words lobbed my way) just as much a 'tranny' I was. My father took this time to ask a question "Do you think 'hunted' is really the right word," they were talking about some line from the play, I paused to think but they answered their own question "well I guess if it's in the open people are gonna hunt you,".

It was easy to decide to write a play about the hyper vigilance that transgender people and trans women in particular experience. The weight of that surveillance has been taxing both in the public world and in the little toxic environment that is bard college. I remember being in classes or conversations with my cohort and the way people would talk about my transfem peers with an under the table disdain and a level of judgment that held them to a standard that was almost impossible to meet. The culture of this school has been hostile to say the least. To put my motivation in as short a way as possible I was (and am) angry and wanted to yell in the faces of the people I was angry at but if I did it would only make things worse, so this is all I can do. This action is impotent this play will not stop the violence I face but I do it regardless to try and do something anything to make a dent.

I felt like everything I did was surveilled like a thousand prying eyes. I felt like everything I did , people would want to just rip it apart and with that they would rip apart me. I saw it happen to so many of my friends it felt like they had been eaten alive, something worse than being chewed up and spit out, they were chewed up and swallowed. This happened to people in theater, it happened to trans women, and I had to very publicly be both. Fear dominated my thoughts on this project, and quite a bit of anger, I knew I couldn't do it, I couldn't be consumed in this way. That's all I knew when I began to write how much I couldn't be eaten.

The first thing I wrote was a title WARNING! NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION, I knew that's what I wanted to be un-consumable. So I began the work of writing this play in the summer of 2022, though the things that make up this play began much earlier.

Part 2: Formaldehyde, sharp objects and meat, laid out in neat rows on rubber mats.

In college (before Bard) I remember the smell more than anything. The smell of formaldehyde, and the ammonia coming off of kidneys as they sit preserved, or the sharp hint of sterile dyes as you slowly pour and rinse them trying not to stain your hands blue, or the smell of nervous tissue when you make steady slices of brain first one along the sagittal plane all the way separating into right and left, then slices thin on the coronal plane till nothing is hidden every little fold of the sheep's brain on display. They tell you before you start dissection how bad it smells, and don't get me wrong it smells bad not like rot or death but chemical and caustic, but the other thing they tell you is that you will feel hungry, starving, something in your instincts sees the dead flesh and thinks "food". It's a strange feeling to have in front of you something cut open by your own scalpel and to feel the disgust from the eye-stinging fumes and yet want nothing more than to eat it. In

my second semester in the pre nursing school education I received a fetal pig that I was responsible for the dissection and care of. They told us not to name them- I named mine Snowball, after the pig from *Animal Farm*. It turned out I was very good at dissection. I had a steady hand and confidence in my knowledge of anatomy, the teacher said I should consider a career in surgery. I had left a nick on snowball's liver, less than half an inch on the medial side, if she were still alive it would heal but it just sat there a perfect little reminder that my knife was what had made this thing so open, cut right from under the chin to the pubic bone, little pins in the important organs for the week lesson. Everyone said that it felt just the same to work with pigs as it did with people, and the closer I got to working with people the more I believed that, the first time I put a needle in a patient's arm, nothing went wrong I was was praised like I always was for my steady hand and confidence, but all I could think was how it felt just like putting those pins in Snowball. I couldn't help but think how it would feel to have a person cut open heart beating, I knew just like everyone said it would, it would feel just like the pigs did. I loved Snowball. I cared about her, even though she was dead, never even really born, I felt so bad about the scratch on her liver and yet all I could think when I saw her flayed open on that rubber mat was just how hungry I was. So how must the surgeons feel? How would I feel?

I think this was the first piece of research for my play; it was a large part of my life. I spent four years before and just after highschool in a program to get into nursing school, in fact I got in. I went to nursing school briefly I had to drop out due to my health (this is a poor way to describe the situation but that is a whole other play,) but even after that Bard was supposed to be small side track before I got back to my work in the medical field, hell with how my life has gone it might well be. All this to say what I realized is just how revealing it is to be treated the strange voyeurism of medicalization the feeling of seeing someone and having their life in your hands (I never really did but it's strange how close to that you feel drawing someone's blood,) it felt so wrong and the strange thing was I knew I wasn't alone. People in my classes and my mentors dealt with that sensation, that feeling of an unearned power, I am so glad that they did this fear is what kept us trying to protect those we cared for. I still fear that my doctor isn't scared. I hope they aren't feeling easy, the ones who don't know how much power they have. For a long time this was contained to my thoughts on the medical professionals in my life and similar, but I realized that the doctors weren't the only ones whose bodies were safe while mine was in danger.

This was the emotional base for the play however you can take the girl out of academics but you can't take the academics from the girl, so when I had decided the topic of my play the first thing I did was start reading, most of the texts I read

didn't end up having the biggest impact on the play but the first that really did was *Whipping Girl* by Julia Serano. This book was very much an academic version of the tensions and anxieties I had been reckoning with. The book really put the idea of transmisogyny into the academic world, and for me provided a theoretical space for me to build upon. The book was the frankly beautiful statement of the surveillance that I wanted to articulate Serano writes in the opening chapters,

"I am rather disturbed by the fact that so many people—who are neither medical professionals nor trans themselves—would want to hear all of the gory details regarding transsexual physical transformations, or would feel that they have any right to ask us about the state of our genitals." [1]

It was a reassurance that my feelings were grounded in the writing of much smarter people.

Much of my other time was spent finding what other (and frankly better) artists had done. I couldn't have been the first to hate this consumption and I was reminded of a wonderful musical tradition: Danger Music. Danger Music is in its most reductive definition, any music that is (or pretends to be) dangerous. What this means in practice is a genre of music that is solidly in the sonic tradition of Noise (and Harsh Noise at that) with a very industrial, sound using non-instrument

objects to generate the sound these bands present a sound that is hard to describe as anything other than confronting the sound is loud in your face and with very little concern for harmony melody or even rhythm. This music is often accompanied by performances that are directly destructive and physically dangerous. The name of the genre comes from a series of minimalist "musical scores" by the neo-dada artist Dick Higgins who wrote forty three of these pieces of danger music over the course of the first half of the 1960s[2]. These postcard size very avant garde scores were mostly treated as instructions for performance art but once they were treated as literal music scores alongside the performative aspects Danger Music as a genre was born. The musical scene for this mostly arose in Japan (giving the genre its secondary name Japanese Harsh Noise) with bands like Mezbow and the star of this movement Hanatarashi. The live performances of Hanatarashi are iconic for their direct danger, including such things as molotov cocktails and driving bulldozers through venues. This movement is very insistent in the incomprehensibility and confrontational nature, this resistance to interpretation, I believe this comes as a direct result of the Dada influences. This sort of hostility (often literal) toward the audience is something that inspired me very deeply. This music that screams "I am here I will not be easy for you," was something that I felt I wanted to emulate in the styles and forms I felt most comfortable with.

Not everything that found its way into this play was something I intended to find. I found by pure happenstance when going to a museum on a trip that I was on during the writing of the play, was the work of Portia Munson, and her installation piece *The Pink Bedroom*[3]. This work (photo included in appendix) is a room created with a number of pink objects with a combination of childrens toys and more adult and even sexual objects, the centerpiece being a full length mirror reflecting the viewer into the space. The objects in this space were almost all plastic, cheap, chincy, commodities. These objects were built to be consumed and the mirror positioned you within that same space. I was enthralled by a person who to my eye was doing the sort of project that I was at that time, this piece conjured to mind the ideas of objectification, and sexualization with this sudden striking addition of the mirror that made the me as the audience reckon with my almost voyeuristic position in the room the only thing not jarringly and unapologetically pink.

The last and to my mind most direct artistic inspiration is the work of Patricia Taxxon. Taxxon is a prolific electronic musician and art critic, whose work plays on the ideas of gender and outsider status. Her work has had an impact on my taste in art for a while as I have been a fan for several years. The inspiration was nothing so nebulous as that, last summer she put out a video essay titled 'Art, Furrries, God'[4] this was an artist statement of sorts that put forth a simple message that intrigued me to no end. The idea was of art that does not let you dismiss it that by its

construction makes you consider what it means. A way that this essay posits to accomplish this is to combine the serious and unserious to provide an outside that makes people feel comfortable enough to think about the inside. This concept of a candy coating on your work not as some “sell out” flaw but as a direct fight against the desire to have your art be detached from itself as a way to make it shout its message to make people understand, was very interesting to me. I was made to wonder what the candy coating would do with the piece I was making that was never meant to be eaten.

So this is where my research left me with some of these artistic works that had ideas I wanted to try and combine to try and make some coherent work.

Part 3: People really thought there would be fake blood involved

This paper will be and has been helter skelter, my thoughts on this play like my thoughts on all things will not be what people would call organized. I have tried and tried and tried, to put all this down in a way that made any sense but it all felt wrong. I know why it felt wrong, my thoughts aren't organized. I don't say that as a sort of statement on my creativity or anything like that; it's a statement on psychosis. When I was seventeen years old I developed a schizo-spectrum. It was quite the daunting thing. It came over all at once and changed so much of my life,

but beside the point. Doctors bounced around between different diagnoses often brushing up against the strangely gendered nature of this set of disorders. My relationship with words has been shaped by this disordered way of thinking, people don't realize what the every day of living with psychosis is and one part that alluded me was what the medical space calls "disorganized thinking". This is a breakdown in the way your mind processes language and connects them to thoughts. For me this results in a strange effect, a difficulty with formal language, and looping thoughts. This has made the writing of theatrical works come very easy to me, and all other writing a nightmare. All this to say I believe that playwriting for me provides me a unique chance to try and use this relationship with language to be a productive force rather than a destructive one.

I have sat so many days at the shitty jobs I keep having to work over the breaks and just tried to write something of this play, and every time I did it wasn't like the final version. If i wrote that version it would have been angrier maybe too angry. So what I have is the tempered version, Bard college is really just about as far from the real world as you can be. All the corners are sanded off. So maybe this would have been a better play if I had written it somewhere other than the kiddie pool.

I began writing this play last summer and finished this winter just before the start of the school year. I wrote blindly at first. I didn't know how to go about this. I

didn't know what the point of it all was; I just started. The first thing I wrote was the scene presented in the fall, that when asked to describe I could only call a conversation about fursonas. Writing this scene made me realize the strengths and weaknesses of the work so far. I learned that people enjoyed the piece, I almost resented that I wanted people to understand the anger of this piece, so as I wrote more I kept this in mind. People had their critiques on the lack of setting and poorly defined relationships. This was the what I knew after the first phase from the formal settings, however what I realized in the less formal settings is that I had no fucking clue how to describe this play. Even as I wrote more and gave the play a setting and 'plot' I could not for the life of me say a single word about what it was. I still am not sure how I feel about this difficulty, I wonder if it is a failure of me to talk about things or a success of the play to be difficult. I finished the writing smoothly with a dollop of anger. The only thing that was hard was a question that took me weeks to answer: should I say what the play is about; should I name it. The play is about transmisogyny, there is no doubt about it. It has been obvious to everyone who I have talked to about it that this is the point, but I never say it no one comes out and says "I'm trans". That bothered me, I wanted it to be known. I feel like I didn't want there to be room to deny what I was writing about, but also I shouldn't have to say other people don't have to tell you the exact nature of things to be known. This struggle ended up being the ending of the play, I had other ends in

mind but I have committed to letting them die with me. This was the writing of the play, I had an act of theater I was happy with, and that is where the trouble began.

I made the decision to stage this piece, I feel that there is very little value in work unseen so I felt as long as I am in the space where it costs me nothing to use a theater I should use this opportunity. I made the decision to be in a non sanctioned environment as this meant I could use the full script. I Truly did not want to perform in this piece. My whole goal in this semester was to avoid the prying eyes of the audience. This plan went fine for a while with auditions going well. I had four wonderful people to be my performers. Sadly life got in the way of art (as it so often does) and I lost a number of these people, that number being all of them. So this left me scrambling at the eleventh hour and in an act I am more thankful for than I can describe one person was able to be my proformer. This left me with two problems. The first and easier I was gonna have to be on the stage I didn't want to but I have the background in performance; the second and more daunting was the script as it was the play called for four people and as it stood I had two. So fueled by coffee, gatorade, and cigarettes I found on the ground, I began rewriting frantically, things needed to be paired down. The process of this burning and slashing of two characters showed me a lot about what I thought of the play. I realized I needed to rewrite aspects of the full script, the play as it was before was too meandering. I needed to be more focused throughout the middle of the play. However, now was

the time for action not rumination so with a script still warm from the printer my proformer and I got into the space for the first time, we encountered a very literal obstacle. There was a set piece for the other show performing that week dead center stage, the box was quite heavy to the point where the two of us could not move it, so we are left with a bit of an impediment. So with frantic blocking and staging we came into opening night, and with the doors opening we had one person show up. To our audience of one the performance nevertheless went on, and so with the dread of what may be the only worse number of people then zero to show up to a show, I went on the following nights and the seats were full of family and friends. The stress of the performance was taxing but I was left with a new version of my script and insight on edits to make to the full version.

Part 4: I'm gonna stop talking soon don't worry

I have stared at enough documents with blinking cursors that I think I dream about them. The kerning on the google docs version of the font Arial is wrong.

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog


Look at that. It's awful. It drives me crazy. Look at the 'z' and the 'a' disgusting, and the 'n' what can I say but AAAAGGH. I feel so wrong when I start typing without changing the font. I just keep having to shuffle words and letters for hours.

Something about the task is so dreadful it's almost like meditation. I think if I didn't on some level need to get my thoughts out like I need to breathe I would never write another word again. The physicality of wiring strikes me more and more. My hands have been slowly getting worse no matter what I do. It's strange really no one is 100% sure why my nerves are falling apart.

At the end of the day if you asked me how I feel about my work on this project I would say unsatisfied. I was a coward, that's the simplest way I can put it. I feel I made myself and my work far too safe . I let the audience off pretty easy and I didn't want to do that. I resent the amount that people just liked the play. I want someone to just tell me they hated it, perhaps they do dislike it and are just too kind to say that, but that would be a failing in my eyes. I couldn't even be affronting enough to overcome social faux pas. I wish that I could have captured my fear and anger better if only in the hopes that I might be free of a little piece more of those weighty emotions. I think there was a strength and catharsis in this work. I got to express some things I quite often don't. I think that was the crux of everything that I needed to say something. How do you tell someone you are terrified to be seen by them, that you resent their presence? I'm not sure that there is a good answer to

that question but I think this play was the best I could do on the matter and that's what counts isn't it. So I give up. I think I was ineffectual and weak but I'm happy I did all I wanted. I feel better. I don't know how much it feels in the spirit of my work to keep going much longer.

WORK CITED

1. Serano, Julia. *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Second edition. Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2007.
2. Dick Higgins. (n.d.). *Danger music*. Dick Higgins. Retrieved April 29, 2023, from <https://dickhiggins.org/danger-music>
3. Museum of Sex. (2023, January 27). *Portia Munson: The Pink Bedroom - Museum of Sex*. <https://www.museumofsex.com/exhibitions/portia-munson-the-pink-bedroom/>
4. Patricia Taxxon. (2022, July 7). *Art, Furrries, God* [Video]. YouTube.  Art, Furrries, God

APPENDIX

Music:

<https://patriciataxxon.bandcamp.com/>

<https://open.spotify.com/artist/5UezsklPScipW64XIm7qql>

<https://www.last.fm/music/Hanatarash>

Image:



https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fgothamtogo.com%2Fportia-munson-the-pink-bedroom-opens-at-the-museum-of-sex%2F&psig=AOvVaw3zjR7vjrKxIOc-rL9IN74k&ust=1682837137701000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBAQjRxqFwoTCNCdzKC_zv4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD

The following is the full original text of the script.

**WARNING! NOT FOR HUMAN
CONSUMPTION, Or I Have An
Unending Desire To Eat Silica
Packets, And/Or Human Meat,
And It Keeps Getting Harder
To Resist So I'm Putting The
Desiccant Under My Tongue,
And Trying Not to Think
About Cannibalism.**

Characters

Zoe- Early 20s trans woman. Bold and borderline mean to cover deep deep fear.

Cali- Early 20s cis woman. Idealistic, very driven to be well liked, scared.

Jo- 50s woman. Protective in a tough love way that disguise's a not so tough love, also scared

Hunter- Mid 20s cis man. Cali's brother, not scared.

Setting

A theater pretending to be a hospital, today, or yesterday, never tomorrow, have some hope.

ZOE

This is a dumb thing to do. You wouldn't do it, don't try and tell me you would, you had the chance and didn't... Or well maybe you didn't have the exact chance but like close enough. Whatever you're not here to listen to me complain, you're here for a show right... And the show must go fucking on.

*(Zoe lays on the center of the stage either on the floor or on a medical cot whatever you can find seemingly asleep; a light (the only light in the room) is shining on her; it is cold and bright like surgery. The lights snap back on bright. The whole room lit like a room, not a theater, because it is just a room. Any hierarchy of light should be gone but for the moments when it is specified to happen. **JO**, a nurse dressed remarkably unlike a nurse but for a wildly out of date nurse's hat, enters as **ZOE** snaps awake with the lights.)*

ZOE

Have you heard of knocking?

JO

Yes Zoe, I have heard of it but considering you don't wake up unless someone walks in the room, I decided it was best.

ZOE

I'm a grown ass woman, I can sleep if I want.

JO

If I weren't so nice I would put some doubt on many parts of that statement.

ZOE

Right Jo 'cause you're so nice.

JO

You should do something, you're gonna waste away.

ZOE

Wasting away sounds tempting.

JO

I wouldn't have to deal with you any more.

ZOE

No more nurse's poking their heads in my business.

JO

You came here of your own free will.

ZOE

Nothing about this has been "free".

JO

Welcome to America.

ZOE

Oh her and I have been introduced.

JO

Well if you aren't happy you can just go.

ZOE

Oh you like that wouldn't you. (*ZOE gets to her feet and stretches.*)

JO

Do you think the real reason you're in here is that your body can't take being that extra all the time.

ZOE

I have never once overreacted, the world is just like that.

JO

I have no idea why anyone not being paid to be around you would even look at you, unless you're only like this because I can't run off.

ZOE

What do you take me for? I would never treat a worker worse just because they are a worker. If anything I'm more cordial with you.

JO

Scary. (*They laugh it is a moment where the mask slips if just for a moment.*) You should go find Cali today.

ZOE

Cali comes to me.

JO

I know that's why you should go to her for once.

ZOE

Our arrangement is for a good reason. She isn't bothered by the halls here, I don't like them.

JO

What is it that you hate this place for anyways?

ZOE

Too many eyes.

JO

Do you mean the cameras, I know they dot the place but most of them are fake, if they weren't I'd have been fired years ago. They're kinda like eye spots on a butterfly just there to scare you.

ZOE

I know about the cameras. I'm not that stupid. It's not a metaphor, real eyes. People watch you out there, it sucks.

JO

I promise that's not the case.

ZOE

Well you're on the wrong side of it, you're a watcher.

JO

So I make you scared to come out? I thought you were tougher than that.

ZOE

I'm not scared, I just... don't like it.

JO

So what, you're just gonna stay in here until you die?

ZOE

No, just until you do.

JO

Such a nice young lady.

ZOE

That's all I ever wanted to hear you say.

JO

If you waste away here don't blame me.

ZOE

Don't worry you won't have to feel bad one bit if the young person in your care suffers.

JO

Just try and leave the room Zoe, okay? (**JO** exits.)

(ZOE comes down to the edge of the stage she is so close to the people sitting up front she could touch them if she wanted she really doesn't want to)

ZOE

If I do "waste away" I'm gonna blame her, not just her you will hopefully know who else I'll blame later. She does keep me stuck in here in her own way. I know she tries but she just isn't that helpful. She's... like... like the kindly rancher who makes sure the steers are comfy. I wonder if she knows about you? Cali does so be on your best behavior for me alright.

(A too long pause, uncomfortable but under a minute)

We are gonna have to wait for her to get here. The world isn't here for your comfort, get used to it.

(Another pause, also too long but shorter than the other one.)

CALI

(Off stage.) Knock Knock.

ZOE

(ZOE stands and comes back to center stage.) Cali! Come on in, it's open.

CALI

(Entering) Of course it's open, these doors don't lock.

ZOE

Oh well then why even ask to come in?

CALI

Who knows what you could have been doing in here.

ZOE

Like I said the door is unlocked, what would I do out in the open like that.

CALI

I don't know, but even just you could be changing I mean, and you know there for sure people jerking off in their room.

ZOE

Can you even imagine.

CALI

It's perfectly natural. What's the thing people say? Ninety percent of people masturbate regularly and the other ten percent lie about it.

ZOE

(Crossing down stage) Yeah but here it's so public, like I would feel like a perv if I did that.

CALI

So haven't done anything since you've been here?!

ZOE

(Sputtering hard, can't get a word out for five whole seconds the first moment she is really slipping her cool effect.) I.. wha.. I what... um, um ha ha... no no. What?

CALI

Come on, just tell me.

ZOE

N-no, no of course not. *(Regaining herself.)* I mean have you?

CALI

A lady never tells.

ZOE

Oh but I'M supposed to.

*(This is a genuinely awkward silence, long and tense **CALI** wants to say something but can't think of the words she fumbles behind **ZOE** who is looking away.)*

ZOE

Anyway I just said that it would feel pervy, why would I do that. Do you think I'm some kind of deviant?

CALI

Oh so you really believe that then. Why care about being a pervert?

ZOE

It's not a good thing to be.

CALI

Right but like either you are one or not so if you want to do it and you are not hurting anyone then be a, what did you say, "a deviant".

ZOE

No I don't mean it's bad to be a deviant in like essence but I don't want to be seen as one.

CALI

Oh so you'd be fine no one would think you're a deviant for jerking off in your own room.

ZOE

Oh? And how would you know how I'd be seen?

CALI

Because I've done it, and mentioned it, and no one cared.

ZOE

(Very sharply) I Thought a lady never tells.

CALI

Well you told me, so it's only fair right?

ZOE

Well good to see you value fairness finally.

CALI

So you see you wouldn't be looked down on.

ZOE

I don't think you have the perspective to say that.

CALI

I just said I've told people I've done it and no one cared. That sounds like a pretty good perspective to me.

ZOE

Well we're different people.

CALI

But it's the action that would get the judgment, not the person.

ZOE

I mean plenty of people already think. (*ZOE cuts herself off*) You know what you could be right. (*She doesn't believe this. Then she speaks quietly*) I at least want you to be right. (*Back to herself.*) So what's the plan for the day?

CALI

Are we just changing the subject?

ZOE

Yes. (*She comes back toward the bed or center.*) So what's the plan for the day?

CALI

Shouldn't you choose, it's your big day.

ZOE

Don't remind me, my stomach is in knots.

CALI

Yeah but it's a good thing right?

ZOE

A surgery is a surgery is a surgery.

CALI

Hey take it easy you'll be okay, you're not even being put under, super safe.

ZOE

Such a good friend... more comforting than my mom, you will never guess what her good luck text was accompanied by.

CALI

Was it something weird?

ZOE

Weird, but not like bad weird, just weird weird. (*Shows her phone to CALI*) A fucking Bob Barker gif?!

CALI

I get the issues with this but this is the funniest thing I have ever seen.

ZOE

No you're right, but like wow! Save that for after.

CALI

(*Giggling, and sing-song taunting.*) Zoe's getting fixed.

ZOE

(*Laughing along clearly enjoying herself*) Are you a middle schooler?

CALI

You know I was caged up all of middle school. I need to catch up on all my middle school insults.

ZOE

You're a natural.

CALI

You flatter me.

ZOE

Any other childhood experiences you are missing?

CALI

I mean a lot of things but, you're not gonna fulfill the fact that I never, I don't know, had some weird game that I played with the other little girls.

ZOE

Oh, god you never played mermaids... That's tragic.

CALI

Yeah swimming was never really in the cards for me.

ZOE

Have you ever swam?

CALI

Does physical therapy count?

ZOE

That is the saddest thing I have ever heard.

CALI

It just never came up as a thing to do.

ZOE

Once we're out of here I am taking you swimming. When are you getting set free anyway?

CALI

I don't have a solid date but probably before you. I'm in recovery. You still haven't gotten your procedure. Speaking of like I said, you're in charge today.

ZOE

God I don't want to be in charge. What are you up to?

CALI

Well now that you say it I am having lunch with my brother and I could use you in case it gets boring.

ZOE

I'm like your fidget toy.

CALI

Exactly! I'll just poke you if I need something fun to happen.

ZOE

So, to the cafeteria then?

CALI

Yeah, I'm sure it'll be great.

ZOE

I hope you're right.

CALI

If it sucks I'll get you a jello.

ZOE

Score!

(CALI comes to the front of the stage as behind her ZOE and HUNTER change the set. They remove the bed and replace it with a table and chairs, they are sharp and metal very simple with no ornamentation. CALI waits as this is done watching them, silent until they are done they then leave. CALI turns forward and speaks.)

CALI

How are all of you... No need to answer. I mean it would be hard to really have a conversation. So did I do well? Again rhetorical, but it's hard not to think about what you want, you think art on the wall asks the same thing? Well or would it if it could, who can say. My brother though, we're going to talk with him, I don't think he would ever ask a question like that or many questions at all. He makes people ask questions, you might get along. Let me rephrase that; you should get along. I don't think you will.

(CALI turns back to the scene ZOE has been watching her HUNTER has been watching ZOE. They all sit at the table, the women on one side HUNTER on the other.)

HUNTER

So... whose this?

CALI

Zoe, she's a friend. We were hanging out so I thought I could bring her along.

ZOE

Nice to meet you.

HUNTER

Yeah, the names Hunter.

ZOE

Nice name.

HUNTER

It's whatever man not like I had anything to do with it. *(A pause)* So Cali how you holding up the leg alright.

CALI

Not too bad... all things considered. Physical therapy has been really helping. How is dad doing?

HUNTER

He is a bit of a mess as usual, just neurotic and strung up. The house will be spotless when you get home. I don't think he has done anything but clean eat and yell. I don't think he's sleeping.

CALI

You'd think he'd get used to me being here.

HUNTER

He refuses any change, a stagnant man.

CALI

Stagnant man sounds gross.

ZOE

Like think about the smell.

*(Laughs between the two **HUNTER** is silent)*

HUNTER

Have things been okay here on the front of being a place to live.

CALI

Weird, but fine.

HUNTER

Weird how?

CALI

So many people here all the time it's exhausting sometimes you know.

HUNTER

I don't, how is just being in the same building as people exhausting?

CALI

It's not being in the same building its, I mean it's the ten thousand little how do you dos in the halls every fucking day, or the sorta invasive check ups, or check ins or check outs. I just mean... There are a lot of fucking people.

HUNTER

(Pause) Sure, I get that I guess.

ZOE

Well I get you, I get you get you.

HUNTER

What are you in here for?

ZOE

Hmmmm bleeeeh, I'm uh... here.... Um.

CALI

Don't you get that maybe that's not a question she would want to answer?

HUNTER

They can speak for themself.

CALI

Christ Hunter you are a total dickhead.

ZOE

It's fine... If you must know, I am getting a... growth removed... from a private area.

HUNTER

Oh... gross.

CALI

Hunter!

HUNTER

God can't you lighten up I'm just teasing them.

CALI

Fine... can we just not talk about surgery, or medical shit right now.

HUNTER

Come on, what else is there to talk about?

CALI

Literally anything fucking else. Sports, the weather, religion, politics, your favorite cartoon as a kid. I have to spend, my time in this piece garbage body and you have to come in and take my lunch my one moment of quiet where theres not a fucking EKG blaring in my ear, where I don't have to be reminded that I am falling apart.

(CALI pokes ZOE quickly but sharply, before resting her head on her hands.)

ZOE

(Deep breath) So, Hunter, what do you like do.

HUNTER

I work at a smoke shop.

ZOE

Oh for real, tight. *(Pause)* Do you like do anything other than work?

HUNTER

I'm a bit of a gamer.

ZOE

Oh sweet, same here.

HUNTER

What do you play?

ZOE

I mean a whole bunch, but um I just replayed Celeste, that's a favorite.

HUNTER

Yeah that tracks.

ZOE

(A bit offended but trying to keep the conversation going.) Well what do you play?

HUNTER

Honestly just whatever my buddies are playing. It's kinda a social thing for me.

ZOE

Well like, what else do you enjoy? What about movies? Do you have a favorite movie?

HUNTER

Oh yeah totally! I fucking love Silence of the Lambs.

CALI

(Back in action.) Oh hell yeah!

ZOE

(Confused) This is a lot of hype. What is your deal?

HUNTER

That movie was a staple of our childhood. Our father loved it so he let us watch it when we really were way too young, it kinda ruled.

ZOE

Weird kids entertainment.

CALI

Yeah, but it was fun. Our dad used to chase us from room to room saying he was gonna eat our livers, and doing that slurping noise from the movie.

(HUNTER and ZOE both imitate Hannibal Lecter and bust out laughing. ZOE shrinks into her seat more and more as the conversation continues.)

CALI

God I almost forgot about that it was so weird. I love that movie, it scared me so badly, I used to have nightmares but I'm glad I can look back and laugh. Did you ever watch it?

ZOE

No I haven't. I didn't see it as a kid, my mom would have not allowed that god forbid, and in my adult life, it didn't really endear itself to me. I watched like half a season of Hanibal the tv show though. I like what I saw of that though.

CALI

Why'd you stop?

ZOE

Well it made me nervous.

CALI

Aw, did the NBC show make you scared?

ZOE

No, not scared. Nervous. I knew enough about Silence of the Lambs to worry about the show having like the same sort of issues. So I would be watching the show waiting for the other shoe to drop. I mean I liked Hannibal, like the character, he was cool.

HUNTER

He ate people though.

ZOE

He also isn't real.

HUNTER

Yeah I know but why would you like the cannibal?

ZOE

Because it's, like, sexy.

CALI

Sexy?

ZOE

Cannibalism is sexy... like in stories. It's what horror is all about, making some real fear and making it alluring.

HUNTER

Come on cannibalism isn't like a real fear though it never fucking happens, it's just a gross out thing in horror.

ZOE

Sure it's not one to one, it's a symbol.

CALI

For what?

ZOE

Lots of things, but I think it's about like inequality. Like Hannibal is this rich doctor all prim and clean in sharp suits, and he throws these lavish parties, and he can only do that because someone has to die, be consumed.

HUNTER

You didn't say it was a metaphor, you said it was sexy.

ZOE

Well, it's about some dynamic of power, and like what is sex about if not power, and like on top of that there is some implication you can flip the script. We all have teeth.

HUNTER

Man... You're weird.

CALI

Why can't you just be nice.

HUNTER

It's a joke. I'm sure they can take a joke.

CALI

God I cannot believe we were raised in the same house.

ZOE

I can. Same house, different kinds of people, and bang! One kid's nice, the other is a bit of dick.

CALI

Zoe!

ZOE

It's a joke. I'm sure he can take a joke... Right Hunter.

HUNTER

Yeah, I get you. See Cali we can joke around.

ZOE

I'm sure we'll be fast friends right?

HUNTER

Yeah I'm sure we will.

ZOE

See Cali I told you you could trust me to get along with him.

CALI

Good, it's nice when people you like like each other.

*(There is a quiet moment during which **HUNTER** looks at his phone.)*

HUNTER

Fuck I just got a text from dad, he needs me home like half an hour ago I gotta jet. Be safe Cali... like seriously. *(He exits)*

CALI

Sorry.

ZOE

Don't apologize. He wasn't that bad just, kinda...

CALI

Kinda a dick?

ZOE

Well, yeah. But like he's no worse than most folks.

CALI

Then the bar is buried a foot underground.

ZOE

Well at least I get to finish lunch in peace.

*(There is a very long silent moment the pair sits and eats, then **HUNTER** enters, coming down to the audience to talk. As he speaks the other two take the table and chairs off and replace them with a row of chairs upstage.)*

HUNTER

Cali wanted me to talk to you all, she was very insistent. She really cares about what you all think, Zoe does too. They both think about it a fucking lot, I don't get it. Like you don't really give a shit. No one cares, like when you're walking around in public and no

one even looks at you. I don't know man I tried to get what those two were saying about you, but it just doesn't click for me. I just don't think anyone cares... God they're both weird huh... Anyways I think I killed enough time and they're ready back there. I'm going, I have more important things to do than be your entertainment. *(He exits)*

(The stage is empty for about a minuet, then ZOE enters she slowly crosses down to the audience)

ZOE

Waiting, it kinda fucking sucks doesn't it, but if I have to so do you. I don't take pleasure in this you know being mean, but I have to stay safe *(does an antler gesture)* mess with the deer you get the antlers... You'll understand that later.

(She sits and waits a moment until CALI enters and stands beside her.)

CALI

There you are, you never aren't in your room. I thought I lost track of you.

ZOE

Well I'm just waiting, and this is the waiting room so it felt right.

CALI

How much longer do you have to wait?

ZOE

About an hour till I have to get prepped for surgery.

CALI

I thought you hated being out here, feeling too "exposed".

ZOE

I'm gonna be as exposed as possible soon anyway. I might as well get used to it.

CALI

Well you seem in quite the good mood.

ZOE

Well I am. You know I'm worried but this is good I want this.

CALI

Well are you gonna just sit here reading magazines waiting for the doctor.

ZOE

I mean I could.

CALI

That sounds like a bore.

ZOE

The inner workings of my mind are quite entertaining.

CALI

Well how about you let me into that world.

ZOE

This sounds a lot more like me entertaining you than the other way around.

CALI

So what if it is.

ZOE

Isn't this my big day? I should be the one being pampered.

CALI

You said earlier that you didn't want to make decisions. So I'm taking the lead, and I say tell me what's in your head.

ZOE

Fine, I'll tell you but know that you have to really consider this is deeply related to today's goings on.

CALI

God spit it out.

ZOE

Do you know what a fursona is?

CALI

Yes.

ZOE

Well what would yours be?

CALI

You can't be serious?

ZOE

I am entirely serious.

CALI

Why are you asking this, now of all times?

ZOE

It is extremely important to the current situation.

CALI

Fine...

ZOE

Okay... what's your answer then?

CALI

No, you have to ask again. I think that you saying it is also important to the situation.

ZOE

Alright (*clears throat*) what would your fursona be.

CALI

(*Sighs*) A dog.

ZOE

Boooooorrrrrring

CALI

It was your suuuuper important question and you're judging my answer?

ZOE

Okay wait like just a normal dog? Or something cooler.

CALI

A normal dog? What would be the cooler dog?

ZOE

Like a sparkle dog.

CALI

A what?

ZOE

Do you seriously not remember sparkle dogs?

CALI

Obviously not.

ZOE

You were totally not weird enough in high school. Okay so sparkle dogs were these like cartoon dogs people would design but they were like disasters of visual strain like so so many clashing colors and like patterns, so extravagant... but like kids made and they were bad but they were creative to say the least. So would your fursona be something like that?

CALI

No, it would just be a normal dog.

ZOE

Oh my god, that's like the most basic fursona.

CALI

You seem to know a lot for someone "just asking questions".

ZOE

You're just dodging the fact that you can't come up with a cool animal. Why a dog.

CALI

You know what fuck you I have a good reason I picked a dog.

ZOE

Then lay it on me.

CALI

Dogs are like... entrenched in love.

ZOE

Entrenched in love? That gibberish.

CALI

No... right so you know how people talk about the differences between dogs and cats like how they say that cats don't love you, which as a cat person/ is BS

ZOE

Yeah you are so totally a cat person that part of why I was surprised/ you chose dog

CALI

I'm not done, where was I?... Right, I think people say cats don't love people is because cats express it differently and are therefore often you know by the general public treated with less love and that's a huge issue, a really huge issue but that's not what I'm talking about right now. Okay so dogs right. Dogs are exactly what people think about when they think "love" or uh... not dogs but how dogs express themselves I guess. I mean they are jumping up on you and are licking and wagging, it's high energy and it looks what people think love looks like. You get what I mean? So people love dogs and think dogs love and that's not conditional and it's all around them, dogs are entrenched in love... And I think I want that... To have my expression be understood and reciprocated without a fight. So my fursona would be a dog.

ZOE

So you totally would be a sparkle dog.

CALI

How could that possibly be your take away?

ZOE

Cause they're like all love.

CALI

Now it's your turn to explain.

ZOE

So the archetype of the sparkle dog is something a naive kid made because of a special passion for art or dogs or scene or like colors or whatever. So some kid makes it because they love the art of making it and they share it with the group they love. It's like a deep deep passion, that's what you want right... Love!

CALI

Yeah, uh... sure I guess.

ZOE

You don't like the idea...

CALI

Well... This sounds weird...

ZOE

Just spit it out.

CALI

The sparkle dog kinda just sounds like how I am now, I mean there's no fantasy to it.

ZOE

How is the sparkle dog less of a fantasy.

CALI

Not the dog itself but the way it relates to love. So you said the dogs were weird right? Part of this subculture, and you know they are really made with this deep passion, and they are truly loved... But I guess I'm not just looking for love but the ability to be loved for what I am, not just by a person but by people, I mean right now that's what I have a small group who loves me I want a change.

ZOE

Oh, so then you're a sell out.

CALI

Come on, that's not fair.

ZOE

I think it's fair, like you want broad love like fame to have everyone's attention over the realness... You trade your passion for glory.

CALI

First off don't quote eye of the tiger/ at me

ZOE

Eye of the tiger has some/ very powerful lines

CALI

Second off it's not about fame.

ZOE

What is it about then?

CALI

(Escalating to speed and volume) I want... respect no maybe... I want people to see me and look at me and think yeah there is someone who I want to try and understand who I love even, or who if I don't love them I can love them, or I see how they could be loved, I mean... if I have to have a fursona it should be a fantasy and my fantasy is to be treated nicely I want to be a nice pet I want to be loved for who I am *(Visceral screaming out of breath)* I want to be a fucking dog!

(A very long pause the pace of dialogue is slow for several lines)

ZOE

(Quiet) What kind of dog?

CALI

(Slowly and quietly) A Jack Russell Terrier.

ZOE

Oh my god that is so... you.

CALI

Is that an insult?

ZOE

Is you, being like you a bad thing?

CALI

No.

ZOE

Then it's not an insult.

CALI

Yeah but you said it like an insult.

ZOE

It was a neutral statement. How can I say it "like an insult".

CALI

like this. *(almost valley girl dripping with sarcasm)* That is so... you.

ZOE

I still think it's only an insult if you think being you is bad.

CALI

Okay I'll accept that yours wasn't an insult but it totally can be, I mean people are using the phrase to express their judgment of you.

ZOE

Everyone's judging you always... not like you specifically but like me, you, us, the... general you... The royal you?

CALI

Don't be dramatic.

ZOE

I'm really not...

CALI

I'm not judging you.

ZOE

Aren't you though.

CALI

No we're just here together and that's it... okay well that's not it it but I'm not sitting here silently criticizing you.

ZOE

Well I just passed your judgment, like you saw me and at some point thought "she's fine" and now are just passive about it. If I fucked up you'd judge me more actively again.

CALI

What could you do that I'd judge you.

ZOE

You'd judge me if I killed your brother.

CALI

You wouldn't kill my brother.

ZOE

Yeah but I could.

CALI

Okay... then what would you do that would make me judge you.

ZOE

That's the issue, I don't know. I'm not in your head I can't be sure what it is that you would care enough about to judge me for it has so many many many factors.

CALI

So... does that mean you're judging me?

ZOE

Not actively but I could I suppose... Do you want me to?

CALI

No I don't want you to judge me, I was just curious... So do you think like the default stance of judgment is passive or active?

ZOE

It Depends.

CALI

ZOE

CALI

ZOE

CALI

And!

ZOE

And what?

CALI

What does it depend on?

ZOE

You'll figure it out.

CALI

Come on, we were having a conversation that's a cop out.

ZOE

It is not fun if I give you all the answers, and again you will figure it out you're smart.

CALI

Lazy.

ZOE

Ha! Gotcha, you judged me.

CALI

Fuck off.

ZOE

You did admit it.

CALI

Well you deserved it. That move was ridiculous.

ZOE

I'm still counting this as a win.

CALI

As long as I'm judging you, what "would" your fursona be.

ZOE

Who says I have any idea?

CALI

No one asks a hypothetical question without an answer for themselves.

ZOE

Got me there... A deer.

CALI

Now that one also feels pretty basic.

ZOE

It might be but how would you know?

CALI

But it's gotta be right?

ZOE

Who knows.

CALI

You know, don't you.

ZOE

How would I know?

CALI

I feel like you aren't just being hypothetical, you know more than you're letting on.

ZOE

Maybe you are right but you can't prove a thing you're over there you can't see in my head.

CALI

But I can guess.

ZOE

That's all you can do.

CALI

Fine you win... But why a deer.

ZOE

Why don't you guess.

CALI

You've always wanted horns?

ZOE

Deer have antlers not horns, and no that's not it.

Did you really like bambi as a kid?

CALI

Hated that movie.

ZOE

Then why?

CALI

Deer are hunted.

ZOE

I'm sorry what?

CALI

Deer are hunted.

ZOE

Do you want to be hunted?

CALI

God no.

ZOE

Then how is that a fantasy?

CALI

It's not, it's representational.

ZOE

You aren't hunted.

CALI

Not literally but metaphorically.

ZOE

I'm lost.

CALI

ZOE

So deer are hunted, people track them down and watch them from afar waiting for a mistake and then BANG. I am hunted, people hold these expectations for how I can be what I can wear. If I talk wrong or hold my body wrong BANG, and sometimes it's the same bang. Like people want me to be consumable, palatable, to be how they expect and they want to eat me up, to integrate me into their hegemony, I guess the only difference is, they shoot the deer if they think it tastes good, and they try to eat me alive. I feel for the deer frozen in the headlights, like I get it. I don't want to be in the spotlight either but if I don't dance the car will hit me. I'm mixing metaphors I think but like uh... I would be a deer because deer are hunted, and so am I.

(Long pause.)

CALI

Then why be the deer if it sucks.

ZOE

I don't want people to be able to ignore that they want to hurt me... I want to look them dead in the eyes and say "I am your prey. What does that make you?"

CALI

That sounds less fun than being a dog.

ZOE

It is..

CALI

That pretty fucking heavy for a fursona.

ZOE

Well who says that shouldn't be a heavy thing.

CALI

I don't know, it just feels like it should be a fun animal thing.

ZOE

It's how you present yourself, that's always a serious thing.

CALI

Come on presentations can be fun. I enjoy it.

ZOE

Right it is fun, but it's not just a thing to brush off.

CALI

Yeah but shouldn't it be?

ZOE

It should be, it should be safe and easy, but it's not.

CALI

Nothing will change if people don't change.

ZOE

I'm not the person who needs to change. I know what I want but I can't be it because people don't like it when I do that.

CALI

You gotta be the change you wanna see.

ZOE

You think I'm not doing that? I just have to make some consideration to how I'm seen.

CALI

That's so not like you. Since when do you care what people think?

ZOE

You don't get it.

CALI

I'm sure I do get it. I know what it's like to be put under the lens, to have to keep up appearances. We're both women, we get each other, but you gotta resist that internalized need to be "appealing" and just be you, have fun with it.

ZOE

Yeah we're both women but come on that's naive.

CALI

No. It's brave.

ZOE

For you sure, but things are different for me. I have to be a coward sometimes, a little skittish.

CALI

Why? I mean far as I can tell we have spent so fucking long getting along but now its we're so different. I call BS.

ZOE

You know what I'm talking about, don't play dumb.

CALI

Isn't it important to say things out loud?

ZOE

I'm not gonna say it.

CALI

Why not, what are you, scared?

ZOE

I just don't think I should have to.

CALI

Well what if I'm not just playing dumb and I really don't know?

ZOE

Sucks for you I guess.

CALI

Not very nice.

ZOE

Tough. This is my time to be mean.

CALI

When aren't you mean?

ZOE

How cold, I am nothing if not kind... Alright fine I can be mean sometimes.

CALI

Sometimes?

ZOE

Okay don't push your luck.

CALI

Okay okay, I won't.

(Heavy pause)

ZOE

How do you think I'd look with antlers?

CALI

Don't only bucks have antlers?

ZOE

That's not what I asked.

CALI

I suppose you're right. I think you'd look sweet.

(ZOE comes forward to the center addressing the audience. CALI exists.)

ZOE

I lied earlier when I said I didn't like being mean to you. I love it, it's nice you know to like let loose. I don't get to do that enough. People expect a lot out of a lady like me. To be prim and proper and if that slips well... Open season. For all my bluster that can't really happen here, not nearly as much, you've all got blanks in the chamber so I get to do whatever I want. No more sweet little girl, I get to be a fully grown bitch... At least for what, a bit under an hour, then back to walking on eggshells because its so affronting to see someone with some bits a bit to big or small, like fuck if I have two little strands of hair out of place thats the line between violence and peace... How do you sleep at night? I know I don't. I just look at ceiling tiles wondering if there is some way to save my life or my sisters lives or brothers or other siblings, or whatever. Do you even like think about how easy your day to fucking day is?... I hope no one's confused... Not for your sake, like I said you can go fuck yourselves for all I care, I hope you know for my sake.

(JO Enters)

JO

Would you look at the time.

ZOE

Oh come on let me live a little, didn't you say I should be more active?

JO

That was before it was an inconvenience to me.

ZOE

So what's good for me ends, where what's good for you begins.

JO

You're as smart as you are annoying.

ZOE

I try.

JO

Well come on then the doctors need to talk you through things one last time.

ZOE

Yeah just... Give me a second.

JO

Are you okay?

ZOE

I'm a bit fucking nervous okay!

JO

Oh some one's on edge... Is it that time of the month?

ZOE

Very funny... I'm serious though, just let me take a deep breath.

JO

You're nervous, I don't buy it. This is as safe as surgery can be, I would be hard pressed to call it surgery.

ZOE

Not that. What if I'm doing the wrong thing?

JO

Then you'll figure it out. Things always change, you're a kid I'm not sure you're old enough to get this but that's what you're always doing; changing, liking the new you then hating it and changing again. Besides you're stubborn enough you'll live a good life out of spite, you remind me of my mother in that way, you'd like her she's mean... Now how's that for bedside manor?

ZOE

Five stars.

JO

Glad my world class education paid off, now let's get you ready.

*(The pair exit and then **JO** changes the set to the bed from the beginning with a simple white sheet. **JO** exits and reenters with **ZOE**. **ZOE** lays on the bed and **JO** puts the sheet over her whole body and she exits. Lights focus on the bed, hold for a moment, then **ZOE** shoots up.)*

ZOE

No fuck that we're not doing that. I'm not gonna give you a comfortable bittersweet ending. Too many stories end like that for people like me, so let's go off script. There is a whole hell of a lot I wanted to say, and I said it. Right I said what I wanted to, that's not why I'm still talking. I wonder if you got it? Shout it out what makes me different. I bet one day no one will have any fucking idea what the hell I'm talking about. Some of you might not get it and like I ask, am I okay with that? So many of our stories are like that unsaid subtext, but this isn't it fucking isn't its here look for it read this listen to me every fucking thing but the one word, so maybe I should just say rip the bandage off. No, I shouldn't have to! Not For any reason not for you or for me. It's like saying I should just get naked here because you all already know what's under these clothes. I bet some of you don't know, and when people get that surprised... Well lets just say that there would be a new set of antlers on some bastard's wall... Fuck this I'm going home. I hope you don't know shit about me.

(She exits through the audience and out of the building. Lights up the show already ended there is no fanfare it's just over. Go home stop reading

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The following is the text of the script as it was rewritten to be performed.

**WARNING! NOT FOR HUMAN
CONSUMPTION, Or I Have An
Unending Desire To Eat Silica
Packets, And/Or Human Meat,
And It Keeps Getting Harder
To Resist So I'm Putting The
Desiccant Under My Tongue,
And Trying Not to Think
About Cannibalism.**

Characters

Zoe- Early 20s trans woman. Bold and borderline mean to cover deep deep fear.

Cali- Early 20s cis woman. Idealistic, very driven to be well liked, scared.

Jo- 50s woman. Protective in a tough love way that disguise's a not so tough love, also scared

Hunter- Mid 20s cis man. Cali's brother, not scared.

Setting

A theater pretending to be a hospital, today, or yesterday, never tomorrow, have some hope

ZOE

This is a dumb thing to do. You wouldn't do it, don't try and tell me you would, you had the chance and didn't... Or well maybe you didn't have the exact chance but like close enough. Whatever you're not here to listen to me complain, you're here for a show right... And the show must go fucking on.

(Zoe lays on the center of the stage either on the floor or on a medical cot whatever you can find seemingly asleep; a light (the only light in the room) is shining on her; it is cold and bright like surgery. The lights snap back on bright. The whole room lit like a room, not a theater, because it is just a room. Any hierarchy of light should be gone but for the moments when it is specified to happen. ZOE snaps awake with the lights.)

ZOE

Another day here, one last day to be specific. I have not gotten used to waking up in a hospital bed. The monitors beep in my ear. They have to keep an eye on me... every last inch. I cannot deal with this building, it's all so fucking much, I am watched all day out in those halls. The cameras are bad beady little eyes flicking back and forth, they aren't the worst, the nurses are so judgy from that desk at the center of everything. So I try as much as possible... Jo, one of the nurses says I am gonna waste away if I don't go out. But I'm not alone I have Cali and Cali comes to me so I will be fine. If I do "waste away" I'm gonna blame Jo, not just her though you will hopefully know who else I'll blame later. She does keep me stuck in here in her own way. I know she tries but she just isn't that helpful. She's... like... like the kindly rancher who makes sure the steers are comfy. I wonder if she knows about you? Cali does so be on your best behavior for me alright.

(A too long pause, uncomfortable but under a minute)

We are gonna have to wait for her to get here. The world isn't here for your comfort, get used to it.

(Another pause, also too long but shorter than the other one.)

CALI

(Off stage.) Knock Knock.

ZOE

(ZOE stands and comes back to center stage.) Cali! Come on in, it's open.

CALI

(Entering) Of course it's open, these doors don't lock.

ZOE

Oh well then why even ask to come in?

CALI

Who knows what you could have been doing in here.

ZOE

Like I said the door is unlocked, what would I do out in the open like that.

CALI

I don't know, but even just you could be changing I mean, and you know there for sure people jerking off in their room.

ZOE

Can you even imagine.

CALI

It's perfectly natural. What's the thing people say? Ninety percent of people masturbate regularly and the other ten percent lie about it.

ZOE

(Crossing down stage) Yeah but here it's so public, like I would feel like a perv if I did that.

CALI

So haven't done anything since you've been here?!

ZOE

(Sputtering hard, can't get a word out for five whole seconds the first moment she is really slipping her cool effect.) I.. wha.. I what... um, um ha ha... no no. What?

CALI

Come on, just tell me.

ZOE

N-no, no of course not. *(Regaining herself.)* I mean have you?

CALI

A lady never tells.

ZOE

Oh but I'M supposed to.

*(This is a genuinely awkward silence, long and tense **CALI** wants to say something but can't think of the words she fumbles behind **ZOE** who is looking away.)*

ZOE

Anyway I just said that it would feel pervy, why would I do that. Do you think I'm some kind of deviant?

CALI

Oh so you really believe that then. Why care about being a pervert?

ZOE

It's not a good thing to be.

CALI

Right but like either you are one or not so if you want to do it and you are not hurting anyone then be a, what did you say, "a deviant".

ZOE

No I don't mean it's bad to be a deviant in like essence but I don't want to be seen as one.

CALI

Oh so you'd be fine no one would think you're a deviant for jerking off in your own room.

ZOE

Oh? And how would you know how I'd be seen?

CALI

Because I've done it, and mentioned it, and no one cared.

ZOE

(Very sharply) I Thought a lady never tells.

CALI

Well you told me, so it's only fair right?

ZOE

Well good to see you value fairness finally.

CALI

So you see you wouldn't be looked down on.

ZOE

I don't think you have the perspective to say that.

CALI

I just said I've told people I've done it and no one cared. That sounds like a pretty good perspective to me.

ZOE

Well we're different people.

CALI

But it's the action that would get the judgment, not the person.

ZOE

I mean plenty of people already think. (*ZOE cuts herself off*) You know what you could be right. (*She doesn't believe this. Then she speaks quietly*) I at least want you to be right. (*Back to herself.*) So what's the plan for the day?

CALI

Are we just changing the subject?

ZOE

Yes. (*She comes back toward the bed or center.*) So what's the plan for the day?

CALI

Shouldn't you choose, it's your big day.

ZOE

Don't remind me, my stomach is in knots.

CALI

Yeah but it's a good thing right?

ZOE

A surgery is a surgery is a surgery.

CALI

Hey take it easy you'll be okay, you're not even being put under, super safe.

ZOE

Such a good friend... more comforting than my mom, you will never guess what her good luck text was accompanied by.

CALI

Was it something weird?

ZOE

Weird, but not like bad weird, just weird weird. (*Shows her phone to CALI*) A fucking Bob Barker gif?!

CALI

I get the issues with this but this is the funniest thing I have ever seen.

ZOE

No you're right, but like wow! Save that for after.

CALI

(*Giggling, and sing-song taunting.*) Zoe's getting fixed.

ZOE

(*Laughing along clearly enjoying herself*) Are you a middle schooler?

CALI

You know I was caged up all of middle school. I need to catch up on all my middle school insults.

ZOE

You're a natural.

CALI

You flatter me.

ZOE

Any other childhood experiences you are missing?

CALI

I mean a lot of things but, you're not gonna fulfill the fact that I never, I don't know, had some weird game that I played with the other little girls.

ZOE

Oh, god you never played mermaids... That's tragic.

CALI

Yeah swimming was never really in the cards for me.

ZOE

Have you ever swam?

CALI

Does physical therapy count?

ZOE

That is the saddest thing I have ever heard.

CALI

It just never came up as a thing to do.

ZOE

Once we're out of here I am taking you swimming. When are you getting set free anyway?

CALI

I don't have a solid date but probably before you. I'm in recovery. You still haven't gotten your procedure. Speaking of like I said, you're in charge today.

ZOE

God I don't want to be in charge. What are you up to?

CALI

Well now that you say it I am having lunch with my brother and I could use you in case it gets boring.

ZOE

I'm like your fidget toy.

CALI

Exactly! I'll just poke you if I need something fun to happen.

ZOE

So, to the cafeteria then?

CALI

Yeah, I'm sure it'll be great.

ZOE

I hope you're right.

CALI

If it sucks I'll get you a jello.

ZOE

Score!

(CALI comes to the front of the stage as behind her ZOE changes the set. She removes the bed and replaces it with a table and chairs, they are sharp and metal very simple with no ornamentation. CALI waits as this is done watching her, silent until she is done then CALI turns forward and speaks.)

CALI

How are all of you... No need to answer. I mean it would be hard to really have a conversation. So did I do well? Again rhetorical, but it's hard not to think about what you want, you think art on the wall asks the same thing? Well or would it if it could, who can say. My brother though, we're not going to talk with him, trust me it's better without him. He is like the painting he won't ask a question no matter how much you look at him You would get along. Let me rephrase that; you should get along. I don't think you actually would.

(CALI turns back to the scene ZOE has been watching. An empty chair CALI walks being the empty chair..)

CALI

Right like I said Hunter's not coming today. The conversation was horrible, like the most awkward introductions and small talk. Eventually he told me about my father, my father is so so so worried about me, too worried to even come see me. That's kinda how it goes with me. People love to hear about me but never look me in the eyes. I got talking about the hospital. I really hate it here. I got all worked up and sucked the air from the

room. Hunter jumped to change the subject, he turned to me pointed at Zoe and said, and I quote “what are they in for,” Zoe looked like she wanted to die, I couldn’t speak.

ZOE

Hmmmm bleeeeh, I’m uh... here.... Um.

CALI

I spat out that she might not want to answer the question. But no, according to Hunter, “They can speak for themselves.” He is a total dickhead, but Zoe, looking like she wanted to die, figured out something to say.

ZOE

It’s fine... If you must know, I am getting a... growth removed... from a private area.

CALI

It’s not a lie, just a description that feels more subtle. I can’t handle this whole thing I just want one lunch where where everything isn’t so medical I want to talk about literally anything fucking else. Sports, the weather, religion, politics, your favorite cartoon as a kid. I have to spend, my time in this piece garbage body and you have to come in and take my lunch my one moment of quiet where theres not a fucking EKG blaring in my ear, where I don’t have to be reminded that I am falling apart. *(Pause)* I thought all that at the time I said some of it too. It doesn’t matter how much, enuch that the silence after was awkward.

(The aforementioned silence)

I take it upon myself to change the subject we end up talking about TV. Hunter just started watching Hanibal, I really like that show and silence of the lambs Zoe says she hasn’t seen more than a little of either but she has some thoughts on the themes...

ZOE

Cannibalism is sexy... like in stories. It’s what horror is all about, making some real fear and making it alluring.

(Confused silence.)

And like it’s better because it’s not one to one, it’s like a symbol, a metaphor or whatever.

(More silence.)

Its about lots of things, but I think it's about like inequality. Like Hannibal is this rich doctor all prim and clean in sharp suits, and he throws these lavish parties, and he can only do that because someone has to die, be consumed.

(Yet more silence.)

On top of that and why its sexy is, it's about some dynamic of power, and like what is sex about if not power, and like on top of that there is some implication you can flip the script. We all have teeth.

CALI

Hunter called her weird after that.... He had to go soon after. *(To ZOE.)* Im sorry.

ZOE

Don't apologize. He wasn't that bad just, kinda...

CALI

Kinda a dick?

ZOE

Well, yeah. But like he's no worse than most people.

CALI

Then the bar is buried a foot underground.

ZOE

Well at least I get to finish lunch in peace.

(There is a very long silent moment the pair sits then exits. The stage is empty for about a minuet, then ZOE enters she slowly crosses down to the audience)

ZOE

Waiting, it kinda fucking sucks dosen't it, but if I have to so do you. I don't take pleasure in this you know being mean, but I have to stay safe *(does an antler gesture)* mess with the deer you get the antlers... You'll understand that later.

(She slowly arranges three chairs in a row then she sits and waits a moment until CALI enters and stands beside her.)

CALI

There you are, you never aren't in your room. I thought I lost track of you.

ZOE

Well I'm just waiting, and this is the waiting room so it felt right.

CALI

How much longer do you have to wait?

ZOE

About an hour till I have to get prepped for surgery.

CALI

I thought you hated being out here, feeling too "exposed".

ZOE

I'm gonna be as exposed as possible soon anyway. I might as well get used to it.

CALI

Well you seem in quite the good mood.

ZOE

Well I am. You know I'm worried but this is good I want this.

CALI

Well are you gonna just sit here reading magazines waiting for the doctor.

ZOE

I mean I could.

CALI

That sounds like a bore.

ZOE

The inner workings of my mind are quite entertaining.

CALI

Well how about you let me into that world.

ZOE

This sounds a lot more like me entertaining you than the other way around.

CALI

So what if it is.

ZOE

Isn't this my big day? I should be the one being pampered.

CALI

You said earlier that you didn't want to make decisions. So I'm taking the lead, and I say tell me what's in your head.

ZOE

Fine, I'll tell you but know that you have to really consider this is deeply related to today's goings on.

CALI

God spit it out.

ZOE

Do you know what a fursona is?

CALI

Yes.

ZOE

Well what would yours be?

CALI

You can't be serious?

ZOE

I am entirely serious.

CALI

Why are you asking this, now of all times?

ZOE

It is extremely important to the current situation.

CALI

Fine...

ZOE

Okay... what's your answer then?

CALI

No, you have to ask again. I think that you saying it is also important to the situation.

ZOE

Alright (*clears throat*) what would your fursona be.

CALI

(*Sighs*) A dog.

ZOE

Boooooorrrrrring

CALI

It was your suuuuper important question and you're judging my answer?

ZOE

Okay wait like just a normal dog? Or something cooler.

CALI

A normal dog? What would be the cooler dog?

ZOE

Like a sparkle dog.

CALI

A what?

ZOE

Do you seriously not remember sparkle dogs?

CALI

Obviously not.

ZOE

You were totally not weird enough in high school. Okay so sparkle dogs were these like cartoon dogs people would design but they were like disasters of visual strain like so so many clashing colors and like patterns, so extravagant... but like kids made and they were bad but they were creative to say the least. So would your fursona be something like that?

CALI

No, it would just be a normal dog.

ZOE

Oh my god, that's like the most basic fursona.

CALI

You seem to know a lot for someone "just asking questions".

ZOE

You're just dodging the fact that you can't come up with a cool animal. Why a dog.

CALI

You know what fuck you I have a good reason I picked a dog.

ZOE

Then lay it on me.

CALI

Dogs are like... entrenched in love.

ZOE

Entrenched in love? That gibberish.

CALI

No... right so you know how people talk about the differences between dogs and cats like how they say that cats don't love you, which as a cat person/ is BS

ZOE

Yeah you are so totally a cat person that part of why I was surprised/ you chose dog

CALI

I'm not done, where was I?... Right, I think people say cats don't love people is because cats express it differently and are therefore often you know by the general public treated with less love and that's a huge issue, a really huge issue but that's not what I'm talking about right now. Okay so dogs right. Dogs are exactly what people think about when they think "love" or uh... not dogs but how dogs express themselves I guess. I mean they are jumping up on you and are licking and wagging, it's high energy and it looks what people think love looks like. You get what I mean? So people love dogs and think dogs love and that's not conditional and it's all around them, dogs are entrenched

in love... And I think I want that... To have my expression be understood and reciprocated without a fight. So my fursona would be a dog.

ZOE

So you totally would be a sparkle dog.

CALI

How could that possibly be your take away?

ZOE

Cause they're like all love.

CALI

Now it's your turn to explain.

ZOE

So the archetype of the sparkle dog is something a naive kid made because of a special passion for art or dogs or scene or like colors or whatever. So some kid makes it because they love the art of making it and they share it with the group they love. It's like a deep deep passion, that's what you want right... Love!

CALI

Yeah, uh... sure I guess.

ZOE

You don't like the idea...

CALI

Well... This sounds weird...

ZOE

Just spit it out.

CALI

The sparkle dog kinda just sounds like how I am now, I mean there's no fantasy to it.

ZOE

How is the sparkle dog less of a fantasy.

CALI

Not the dog itself but the way it relates to love. So you said the dogs were weird right? Part of this subculture, and you know they are really made with this deep passion, and they are truly loved... But I guess I'm not just looking for love but the ability to be loved for what I am, not just by a person but by people, I mean right now that's what I have a small group who loves me I want a change.

ZOE

Oh, so then you're a sell out.

CALI

Come on, that's not fair.

ZOE

I think it's fair, like you want broad love like fame to have everyone's attention over the realness... You trade your passion for glory.

CALI

First off don't quote eye of the tiger/ at me

ZOE

Eye of the tiger has some/ very powerful lines

CALI

Second off it's not about fame.

ZOE

What is it about then?

CALI

(Escalating to speed and volume) I want... respect no maybe... I want people to see me and look at me and think yeah there is someone who I want to try and understand who I love even, or who if I don't love them I can love them, or I see how they could be loved, I mean... if I have to have a fursona it should be a fantasy and my fantasy is to be treated nicely I want to be a nice pet I want to be loved for who I am *(Visceral screaming out of breath)* I want to be a fucking dog!

(A very long pause the pace of dialogue is slow for several lines)

ZOE

(Quiet) What kind of dog?

CALI

(Slowly and quietly) A Jack Russell Terrier.

ZOE

Oh my god that is so... you.

CALI

Is that an insult?

ZOE

Is you, being like you a bad thing?

CALI

No.

ZOE

Then it's not an insult.

CALI

Yeah but you said it like an insult.

ZOE

It was a neutral statement. How can I say it "like an insult".

CALI

like this. *(almost valley girl dripping with sarcasm)* That is so... you.

ZOE

I still think it's only an insult if you think being you is bad.

CALI

Okay I'll accept that yours wasn't an insult but it totally can be, I mean people are using the phrase to express their judgment of you.

ZOE

Everyone's judging you always... not like you specifically but like me, you, us, the... general you... The royal you?

CALI

Don't be dramatic.

ZOE

I'm really not...

CALI

I'm not judging you.

ZOE

Aren't you though.

CALI

No we're just here together and that's it... okay well that's not it it but I'm not sitting here silently criticizing you.

ZOE

Well I just passed your judgment, like you saw me and at some point thought "she's fine" and now are just passive about it. If I fucked up you'd judge me more actively again.

CALI

What could you do that I'd judge you.

ZOE

You'd judge me if I killed your brother.

CALI

You wouldn't kill my brother.

ZOE

Yeah but I could.

CALI

Okay... then what would you do that would make me judge you.

ZOE

That's the issue, I don't know. I'm not in your head I can't be sure what it is that you would care enough about to judge me for it has so many many many factors.

CALI

So... does that mean you're judging me?

ZOE

Not actively but I could I suppose... Do you want me to?

CALI

No I don't want you to judge me, I was just curious... So do you think like the default stance of judgment is passive or active?

ZOE

It Depends.

CALI

ZOE

CALI

ZOE

CALI

And!

ZOE

And what?

CALI

What does it depend on?

ZOE

You'll figure it out.

CALI

Come on, we were having a conversation that's a cop out.

ZOE

It is not fun if I give you all the answers, and again you will figure it out you're smart.

CALI

Lazy.

ZOE

Ha! Gotcha, you judged me.

CALI

Fuck off.

ZOE

You did admit it.

CALI

Well you deserved it. That move was ridiculous.

ZOE

I'm still counting this as a win.

CALI

As long as I'm judging you, what "would" your fursona be.

ZOE

Who says I have any idea?

CALI

No one asks a hypothetical question without an answer for themselves.

ZOE

Got me there... A deer.

CALI

Now that one also feels pretty basic.

ZOE

It might be but how would you know?

CALI

But it's gotta be right?

ZOE

Who knows.

CALI

You know, don't you.

ZOE

How would I know?

CALI

I feel like you aren't just being hypothetical, you know more than you're letting on.

ZOE

Maybe you are right but you can't prove a thing you're over there you can't see in my head.

CALI

But I can guess.

ZOE

That's all you can do.

CALI

Fine you win... But why a deer.

ZOE

Why don't you guess.

CALI

You've always wanted horns?

ZOE

Deer have antlers not horns, and no that's not it.

CALI

Did you really like bambi as a kid?

ZOE

Hated that movie.

CALI

Then why?

ZOE

Deer are hunted.

CALI

I'm sorry what?

ZOE

Deer are hunted.

CALI

Do you want to be hunted?

ZOE

God no.

CALI

Then how is that a fantasy?

ZOE

It's not, it's representational.

CALI

You aren't hunted.

ZOE

Not literally but metaphorically.

CALI

I'm lost.

ZOE

So deer are hunted, people track them down and watch them from afar waiting for a mistake and then BANG. I am hunted, people hold these expectations for how I can be what I can wear. If I talk wrong or hold my body wrong BANG, and sometimes it's the same bang. Like people want me to be consumable, palatable, to be how they expect and they want to eat me up, to integrate me into their hegemony, I guess the only difference is, they shoot the deer if they think it tastes good, and they try to eat me alive. I feel for the deer frozen in the headlights, like I get it. I don't want to be in the spotlight either but if I don't dance the car will hit me. I'm mixing metaphors I think but like uh... I would be a deer because deer are hunted, and so am I.

(Long pause.)

CALI

Then why be the deer if it sucks.

ZOE

I don't want people to be able to ignore that they want to hurt me... I want to look them dead in the eyes and say "I am your prey. What does that make you?"

CALI

That sounds less fun than being a dog.

ZOE

It is..

CALI

That pretty fucking heavy for a fursona.

ZOE

Well who says that shouldn't be a heavy thing.

CALI

I don't know, it just feels like it should be a fun animal thing.

ZOE

It's how you present yourself, that's always a serious thing.

CALI

Come on presentations can be fun. I enjoy it.

ZOE

Right it is fun, but it's not just a thing to brush off.

CALI

Yeah but shouldn't it be?

ZOE

It should be, it should be safe and easy, but it's not.

CALI

Nothing will change if people don't change.

ZOE

I'm not the person who needs to change. I know what I want but I can't be it because people don't like it when I do that.

CALI

You gotta be the change you wanna see.

ZOE

You think I'm not doing that? I just have to make some consideration to how I'm seen.

CALI

That's so not like you. Since when do you care what people think?

ZOE

You don't get it.

CALI

I'm sure I do get it. I know what it's like to be put under the lens, to have to keep up appearances. We're both women, we get each other, but you gotta resist that internalized need to be "appealing" and just be you, have fun with it.

ZOE

Yeah we're both women but come on that's naive.

CALI

No. It's brave.

ZOE

For you sure, but things are different for me. I have to be a coward sometimes, a little skittish.

CALI

Why? I mean far as I can tell we have spent so fucking long getting along but now its we're so different. I call BS.

ZOE

You know what I'm talking about, don't play dumb.

CALI

Isn't it important to say things out loud?

ZOE

I'm not gonna say it.

CALI

Why not, what are you, scared?

ZOE

I just don't think I should have to.

CALI

Well what if I'm not just playing dumb and I really don't know?

ZOE

Sucks for you I guess.

CALI

Not very nice.

ZOE

Tough. This is my time to be mean.

CALI

When aren't you mean?

ZOE

How cold, I am nothing if not kind... Alright fine I can be mean sometimes.

CALI

Sometimes?

ZOE

Okay don't push your luck.

CALI

Okay okay, I won't.

(Heavy pause)

ZOE

How do you think I'd look with antlers?

CALI

Don't only bucks have antlers?

ZOE

That's not what I asked.

CALI

I suppose you're right. I think you'd look sweet.

(ZOE comes forward to the center addressing the audience. CALI exists.)

ZOE

I lied earlier when I said I didn't like being mean to you. I love it, it's nice you know to like let loose. I don't get to do that enough. People expect a lot out of a lady like me. To be prim and proper and if that slips well... Open season. For all my bluster that can't really happen here, not nearly as much, you've all got blanks in the chamber so I get to do whatever I want. No more sweet little girl, I get to be a fully grown bitch... At least for what, a bit under an hour, then back to walking on eggshells because its so affronting to see someone with some bits a bit to big or small, like fuck if I have two little strands of hair out of place thats the line between violence and peace... How do you sleep at night? I know I don't. I just look at ceiling tiles wondering if there is some way to save my life or my sisters lives or brothers or other siblings, or whatever. Do you even like think about how easy your day to fucking day is?... I hope no one's confused... Not for your sake, like I said you can go fuck yourselves for all I care, I hope you know for my sake.

(The lights are low spot on ZOE. Silence then CALI enters.)

CALI

It's time, they are looking for you

ZOE

I'm worried

CALI

You'll be fine trust me

ZOE

I wish I could

(ZOE exits.)

CALI

I don't know if she'll be okay, not really that's what it's like you never really know what could happen, tragic endings are all too common.

(ZOE enters slowly and lays on the floor. Lights focus on her hold for a moment, then ZOE shoots up.)

ZOE

No fuck that we're not doing that. I'm not gonna give you a comfortable bittersweet ending. Too many stories end like that for people like me, so let's go off script. There is a whole hell of a lot I wanted to say, and I said it. Right I said what I wanted to, that's not why I'm still talking. I wonder if you got it? Shout it out what makes me different. I bet one day no one will have any fucking idea what the hell I'm talking about. Some of you might not get it and like I ask, am I okay with that? So many of our stories are like that unsaid subtext, but this isn't it fucking isn't its here look for it read this listen to me every fucking thing but the one word, so maybe I should just say rip the bandage off. No, I shouldn't have to! Not For any reason not for you or for me. It's like saying I should just get naked here because you all already know what's under these clothes. I bet some of you don't know, and when people get that surprised... Well lets just say that there would be a new set of antlers on some bastard's wall... Fuck this I'm going home. I hope you don't know shit about me.

(She exits through the audience and out of the building. Lights up the show already ended there is no fanfare it's just over. Go home stop reading)