

I'M RIGHT HERE

By
Madelyn Sergel

6265 Sleepy Hollow Lane
Gurnee, IL 60031
m.sergel@comcast.net
www.madelynsergel.com
Home office 847-856-0648
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CAST OF CHARACTERS

LENNY....Female. Early 60s. White. Not glamorous.

JUDES.... Female. Early 60s. White. Lenny's best friend. Successful talent agent. Somewhat glamorous.

HUGH.... Male. Early-Late 60s. Black. Judes's husband. Successful publisher. Somewhat glamorous.

CHRIS....Male. Late 20s-Early 30s. White. A successful film actor. Very attractive. Also plays ASSHOLE #1 and TECHIE.

ALICIA.....Female. Early 30s. Any race. Successful media influencer and businesswoman. Attractive. Also plays ASSHOLE #2 and WAITRESS.

JON.... Male. Late 60s. White. Alicia's husband. Successful businessman. Also plays MITCH.

SETTING

The stage of a comedy club, various apartments located in a major metropolitan area, a coffee shop, outside a comedy club, and a bar.

TIME

The present

WARNING

This play contains foul language, references to sexual assault, and explores topics of war, race, misogyny, and discrimination

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

Lights up on a large apartment which is decorated with expensive, vintage items from the mid-1960s. There's a bar trolley to the side. Judes, Hugh, Alicia, Chris, and Jon are sipping drinks and mingling. Lenny enters. Judes and Hugh nod to her and smile. Alicia, Chris, and Jon do not acknowledge her arrival. Lenny crosses downstage. She snaps her fingers. The nightclub spotlight comes up on Lenny and dims on the apartment. She will return to this spot and lighting throughout the play.

LENNY

This is where it all began. Before I set the scene and get this happening started, I need to prepare you for a few things. Just a heads-up.

I'm Lenny. Tonight will be me, an old woman, and when I say old, I mean, not young. Because, as many of us know, not young? Old. In Western culture, age? Very binary. Especially for women. For men? If you're rich, old is over seventy. Poor men, over fifty. Women, any income bracket, anything over forty is questionable at best.

Shoot. I'm getting ahead of myself.

Welcome. I'm Lenny and tonight I'll be talking about anything which occurs to me. But, from recent experience, I'm pretty sure it's going to bother some of you. I suspect some of you may actually hate it.

Good times.

I'm also white. Pretty obvious, that one. I'm also straight. So, know that my opinions about sex, and such, they come from my experience. And my desire. What I desire. Whom I desire.

Also, yes! Tonight, I will occasionally use swear words. They will not be over-used, although that is clearly a very personal judgement, but they certainly will be inserted when needed. They are such a useful communication tool. Don't you find that sometimes the cadence of a sentence just calls for that extra bit of spice? Well, I do.

The words possibly used tonight, I say possibly because I want to leave my offending options open, are, in alphabetical order, asshole, bullshit, cock, cocksucker, cunt, dick, fuck, and the various versions of fuck, you know, your "fucking" and the possessive "for fuck's

LENNY (CONT'D)

sake," and then motherfucker which is such a classic it now stands proudly on its own, separate from the fuck subset, piss, pussy, shit, slit, tits.

Oh! And vagina and vulva too. Now, vagina and vulva are not generally thought of as swear words, but I include them because of their relative scarcity in common conversation. And, YES, you comedy purists, this is a riff on George Carlin's Seven Dirty Words bit. If you don't know it, google it. It sings.

The challenging thing for many of you is not these words themselves, but that these words will be coming out of this mouth. This sixty-one-year-old female mouth.

If you anticipate any of this offending you, it's fine. You can leave now. You will also get an option mid-performance to exit, as I find offense can be a cumulative experience. You won't get a refund because I've been offended, insulted, blown off, and dismissed many, many times, and I've never gotten a refund so, neither will you.

Also, I can see you. You can see me, I mean, I'm right here. So, if you decide to check your messages, text someone, go on Twitter, answer a call, anything like that, your screen will light up. I will see it and everyone else will too. If this happens, everything is going to stop, and this-

Lenny pulls out a small flashlight.

I'll shine this on you.

She waves it around the audience just for a moment.

We all will see you. And we'll wait. Until you're done, okay?

Time to get started. I'll set the scene. Just to give you a little context. This is a very nice apartment on the top floor of a building in a major city. Very nice neighborhood. It's a cocktail and dinner party. A fancy cocktail and dinner party. Not fancy, like tuxedos and diamonds. No. Worse. Cool people. Connected people. Famous. Not uber famous, just famous enough so that the conversations get a little louder when the famous person enters the room, like, "Oh, I didn't notice so-and-so entered and I'm going to demonstrate that right now by continuing my conversation like before." But there's that tiny adrenaline boost so the volume goes up. This is accompanied by the volume change of others whispering, "So-and-so actor just came in. He so short." Or cute. Or tall. Or whatever.

Chris steps downstage with a cocktail. Lenny looks at him.

LENNY (CONT'D)

Whatever.

I'm in this room. Conversations do not get louder when I enter a room. I cause nary a ripple. Well, I'll amend that. I caused nary a ripple. We'll get to that.

Alicia crosses center, holding a cocktail and an iPhone, which she points to capture the events in the room. She will be filming throughout the evening.

Alicia, who is an influencer, is gathering content for something, maybe a Facebook event. Might use some of the content on TikTok. We'll get to that as well.

I'm me in this room. Post-menopausal me. Old me. This. This body in this cool room. I'm best friends with Judes. Judy. She's the hostess.

Judes crosses to Lenny, gives her a martini and returns to the apartment.

Also old. But lots of connections because of her being an agent for so long and her husband Hugh. Magazine publisher. Well, it's mostly online now, but, very successful.

Hugh crosses to Chris and they begin silently chatting.

Judes is a delight. Agents? Sure, they have to be tough, but people are assholes. Especially people who want to be famous. She has to be tough in business, so she balances it out with being Goddess Earth Mother in her personal life. Judes has been in the game for ages. Judes has nothing to prove. Others are positioning themselves to be captured in their coolness by Alicia. But Judes and I? We're in a distant corner, taking about sex after menopause.

Looks at audience.

Okay. Just then? Some of you might have felt a little...bump, shall I say? Old women and sex. It's not usually talked about. It's joked about but not talked about. But wrinkled people and actual, satisfying sex? Oh no. Well, buckle up, my friends. Sex is just going to be my first volley. Shall we dive into "the scene"?

When Lenny says, "the scene," she snaps her fingers. The lighting comes up to illuminate the apartment. Judes returns to Lenny's side.

JUDES

Lenny.

LENNY

Judes.

They both take a long swig of their drink.

(To audience) It's been a few minutes of Judes and I chatting. Dinner will be brought out to replace the appetizers any minute. Judes and Hugh are such pros. Things always flow here in the Judes and Hugh penthouse. It's not actually a penthouse but I tease them. So, Judes and I, we've gotten past vaginal drying, decreasing libido, the recommended lubes, and are now quietly discussing which sexual position is best after a knee replacement-

Looks at audience. Lights dim back to nightclub setting. Judes crosses away from Lenny and returns to the party. Lenny addresses the audience.

-I did it again! Old women and sex. Everyone, just take a deep breath. It's going to be okay. Probably. Anyway, back to our evening.

Lenny snaps her fingers. Lights resume to full. Judes returns to Lenny's side.

So, famous actor Chris joins us. He had already worked his way around the room at least twice and had arrived at us. So special. We felt blessed.

Chris crosses to Lenny and Judes.

CHRIS

Ladies, may I join you?

LENNY

Judes, ever the gracious hostess replied-

JUDES

-Of course, Chris. This is my friend Lenny.

CHRIS

(Making a small bow)

Delighted.

LENNY

(To audience)

I've met Chris five times.

CHRIS

(To Judes)

You always throw such wonderful parties, Judy. You never know what to expect. It's not just shop talk.

LENNY

But there is enough shop talk. For you to be here, right?

Judes and Chris look at Lenny.

(To audience) I think that was when it began. Looking back, that was it. That was when I stopped behaving.

Judes and Chris laugh.

CHRIS

Tell me your secrets. You both were having such a cozy conversation.

Lenny returns to the nightclub position.

LENNY

Poor Judes. She froze. You see, we protect men. We do. The truth. You don't hear it, well, you don't hear it well. Or easily. You just can't seem to go deep as fast and as hard as quickly as we can. We've learned to do it quickly, in and out. A conversation between two women can go so deep, so fast, because these moments have to be stolen, grabbed, these quick moments of validation, safety, understanding shared before the armor must go up again, to always be scanning for danger or threat or just the mood of a room.

Oh, and yes. I did say, hard and fast. Men think they have the market cornered on hard and fast. I mean, that's what men DO. Right? Cars and business and sex and war and strategy and politics. But deep truth? The deep dive? It's like you're standing in the middle of a minefield. You can't seem to move. But yeah. Poor Judes, she just choked. And a tiny bit of truth slipped out.

Lights resume to full.

JUDES

Actually, we were discussing, um, sexuality in the senior population.

Chris takes a very small step back but does not leave.

LENNY

(To audience)

You saw it, right? That little step back he took? Right now, he's calculating how to respond. He's not going to leave, because he's him. He doesn't leave. Women excuse themselves. Not Chris. Besides. He's a MAN. He can help us. Chris is a helper.

CHRIS

I just read a terrific article in the Atlantic-

LENNY

(To audience)

-Chris reads the Atlantic. Chris is evolved-

CHRIS

-that old people, senior...the elderly population can enjoy an active sex life well into their eighties. Even their nineties!

LENNY

(To audience)

I'm sixty-one, Jude is sixty-three. But, heck, close enough as far as Chris is concerned.

CHRIS

That it just takes a commitment on the part of both people in the relationship to seek that physical connection. And, I mean, there's Viagra. And Cialis. Right?

LENNY

Oh, there's Viagra. And Cialis.

A quick glance to Lenny from Jude and Chris.

CHRIS

(Chuckling)

I mean, my parents have been together for ages, and I'm sure they still get busy, if you know what I mean. It just takes work. Attention and staying connected to your body. As an actor, I watch people.

LENNY

(To audience)

Chris is a good actor. He watches people.

CHRIS

And you can tell the people, the men, and the women, who have taken care of themselves. I mean, look at Jon and Alicia!

Lenny goes to the nightclub position. During the following, Chris continues to silently talk to Jude as she listens, smiles, and nods.

LENNY

(To audience)

A sidebar before the main event. Jon is a sixty-four-year-old multi-millionaire who has married thirty-year-old Alicia. Alicia is a media influencer. She has a media company. She also loves TikTok. She is absolutely terrific. A powerhouse.

Jon loves Alicia. Alicia loves Jon. The age difference does not matter, as Jon tells us with a grin, it does not matter because Alicia is the “mature one” in the relationship. I don’t think Jon quite realizes that this does not cast either him or Alicia in the best light, but we’ll let that go.

Powerful, rich men are attractive. Their mastery. The sense of protection their money and influence can offer. It would take five lifetimes for a woman of similar ability to achieve the kind of power and influence a well-connected, intelligent, savvy white man born into even middle-class wealth can attain. Alicia knows this. We all know this.

Alicia was drawn to Jon’s confidence. Alicia was drawn to Jon’s charm and wit and intelligence. When Jon entered a room, the energy shifted. Jon was drawn to Alicia’s vitality, her appreciation of him, and yes, her young, firm body parts. She made Jon feel like Jon felt at forty. With Alicia, tonight, Jon does not feel like he’s sixty-four. I mean, age is just a number.

But Alicia, smart, savvy Alicia has made one mistake. Alicia has not done the math. Because, in four years, very powerful and influential Jon will retire. He will have two more years of some professional influence. Awards. A delightful formal dinner honoring his lifetime achievements. A few months into the third year of retirement, Jon might express a desire to move to the country house full time so he can work on his book. It’s certainly not because, as he walks the street, the vigor of those beginning to pass him has begun to bother him. No. He wants to polish off that book.

At this point, Alicia will be in her mid-thirties. Alicia loves Jon. But Alicia finds the country a tiny bit boring. Oh, for a long weekend, it’s divine. As a break. But then Alicia wants to be back at work. Oh, yes. At work, did I mention, there are some very attractive men at Alicia’s work. But Alicia would never cheat on Jon because that is not who Alicia is. But in about five to seven years, Alicia is going to have to start propping Jon’s ego up a little bit. In her early forties, Alicia will have to start slowing down her stride as she walks with Jon so Jon can keep up with her.

LENNY (CONT'D)

Jon will start forgetting things. Small things. Tiny things. Perhaps a few big things. All this will be happening as Alicia's parents are beginning their decline. She has to begin to take time off of work to take her father to the cardiologist. Eventually, she will be taking her husband to the same cardiologist.

And eventually Alicia, who loves Jon, eventually Alicia will do the math and realize that she just might have shortchanged herself. Just a tiny bit.

And the sex? For Jon? For Jon, "Jon who has taken care of himself," for Jon, it will begin to be embarrassing. Something he worries about. And Alicia will lie. Alicia will say, "Oh baby, it's great." Jon also did not do the math. Jon did not think being an old man with a young wife might not be as hot, and as sexy, and as cool as he thought. But enough about Jon and Alicia. Let's return to Chris, who is explaining sex as an older woman to us.

Regular party lighting resumes. Lenny returns to the Chris and Judes conversation.

CHRIS

-And I read that estrogen also is like this amazing drug and there are all-natural versions. All-natural ingredients. I mean, anyway, libido is mostly in the mind, am I right?

LENNY

(To audience)

Chris is so evolved.

Judes and Lenny are motionless for a moment as Chris beams.

JUDES

I think it's almost time for dinner. Will you excuse me?

Judes exits. A moment. Chris flashes a smile and lightly touches Lenny's elbow and looks deeply into her eyes.

CHRIS

It was so nice meeting you, Lanie.

Chris crosses to Jon and Alicia.

LENNY

We've now finished dinner. The conversation has been about 65% the men talking to about 35% for the rest of us. Even now. Even in the 2020s. But it feels balanced because that percentage is pretty good compared to most conversations. I have spent 72% of the main course nodding.

Oh! Have you heard it? The thing?

You see, there's this thing, an actualization tip. Quote, "LISTEN to people, truly listen. Don't think of what you are going to say in response. First, just be present in the moment and truly hear them." End quote.

A man said that.

Because women listen. Women listen A LOT. And after you all make your point, you keep making it for about two to three more minutes. But ya see, we got the point. Back at the beginning. So, to survive your conversational indulgences, we check out. We bookmark our response, and then we float off. And you yammer. And talk. And explain. And if we jump in even the tiniest moment too early, trying to head you off at the pass of you making your point for the third time, oh, well, there will be none of that. When we have begun speaking, moving the conversation forward, you interrupt us. So just so you can finish your point.

Oh my god, it's like a medical condition, the interrupting. It's like Male Tourette's.

But then Alicia, Alicia who snagged such an eligible divorced man and will be a nurse, caregiver, and looking into buying adult diapers in bulk in fifteen years, Alicia asked-

ALICIA

-This is such a wonderful collection of interesting people. Judy, you and Hugh are such salon-creators. So, I'm going to ask, because I couldn't be in on everyone's conversations, what was everyone's favorite conversation, or idea, of the evening? Chris?

Chris begins talking silently. Alicia is filming it with her iPhone. He is fully aware that he is being filmed and casually gives the camera his best side. Lenny returns to her nightclub setting but the lights remain up enough to see the silent conversation behind her.

LENNY

(To audience)

She begins with Chris because he will soon have his action movie released. So, he must be interesting. He will set the tone.

LENNY (CONT'D)

Oh! Look! See. You'll noticed Judes is smiling. See her smile and nod? Judes is not listening to Man-Child Chris explain his opinions, excuse me, Aaron Sorkin's *West Wing*, *Newsroom*, *Trial of the Chicago Seven* opinions on the DNC and immigration policy. Judes is coming up with her favorite conversation, calculating when to bring out coffee and dessert, and noting that Hugh is fiddling with his napkin which means he's worried about tomorrow's meeting.

After Chris, Jon and Hugh probably would have spoken, there would have been much laughter, and then Judes, as the hostesses, would have gotten a turn, one of these charming men would have given the floor to her. And eventually, the conversation would have wound around to something else, no one noting, aside from Judes, that I was not asked which conversation was my favorite.

But that didn't happen.

Looks at the martini in her hand.

Was it the martini? I'll never know. Was it this educated group giving all our attention to someone who, yes, probably will be nominated for an Oscar one day, our undivided, enthralled attention, even though he was merely spouting off a few liberal talking points he picked up from an Amazon Prime original movie? Really risky choice in this room. Preaching to the choir. Let's all donate to Save The Whales.

Chris finishes. Jon takes a breath to begin speaking but Lenny jumps in.

I think the highlight of tonight for me was when Chris mansplained my sexuality to me.

The room goes quiet. Alicia points her iPhone to Lenny and keeps filming.

Chris. Oh Chris. You are so attractive. And educated and so very articulate. And of course, we listen to you. Why wouldn't we? Because you have always been listened to. It's in your bones. The very core of who you are. Chris, you are a delight to look at. Truly. But your youthful vigor is all about you. Because you have six-pack abs, you must be good in bed, right? And therefore, you deeply understand sexuality. Because, you make women come, correct? Albeit you are young and, well, we all know the first years of an actual sex life are very performative on everyone's part. Do we all know that? (*Looks around*) Can we agree on that? Replicating what we've seen in movies, magazines, porn. And I think that has been part of the problem, really looking at it. Because I really do think you believe your penises are magic. Like they have little magical feathers on them which make us climax at the very sight of them. I mean, what else can explain all those dick pics I keep hearing about?

LENNY (CONT'D)

I know not one woman who appreciates a dick pic. Is it just from the porn? Big, bulging and photographed is hot? Ah. Yes. Porn.

Lenny crosses to the nightclub setting and addresses the audience.

Men laugh at us. They do. You do. "Oh, women need plot in their porn." Ha ha ha. "Plot?! The plot is the pizza guy arrives." Ha ha ha.

But yeah. We do. Some of us do need plot. Ho, ho, ho. And I think...I think that notion scares the erection right out of a fella. Because, deep down, besides their penis with its magical unicorn feathers, they're terrified. Because, if we want a little plot, a little context, that means we exist. Outside of the tits and the slit. And what if they just aren't creative enough? So, we don't really say anything. We let them laugh at us.

But think about it. What if, for the woman you wish to fuck, what if for her, a vibrator and replaying the highlights from a favorite movie in one's mind is not only enough but is more than enough? Is even better? So, if one, and by one, I mean a woman, has a good job, makes her own money, has dynamic, satisfying relationships with friends, and doesn't need a man for satisfaction, and I'm clearly speaking as a straight woman here...I wonder if lesbians share vulva pics? I should find that out. Does anyone know?

Back to party lighting. Lenny turns back to Chris.

Well, anyway, where does that leave all of you and your dick pics and your mansplaining of my post-menopausal desire? But back to our conversation about how to be a sexual woman. Chris, there are a few additional considerations you might want to think about.

Pushing out a baby or two can leave a pelvic floor in shreds. Then there's the decades-long marathon of juggling career, possible child-rearing, remaining in the ballpark of attractive, or "fuckable" as I hear it described. Not to mention one may have to factor in surviving a sexual assault, or assaults, and the trauma after that. There's been lots of that going around for the past few centuries. Then there's menopause. And after menopause, after the jokes about hot flashes, and the weight gain, and the wrinkles, and all that self-hate of our wonderful bodies which can still do an awful lot, most of us have another thirty years of living left in us. But continuing life as a vibrant, intelligent, sexual creature after the age of sixty, well, what's one to do? I wonder. What was the question again? Oh! The favorite conversation or idea of the evening, right?

Alicia and Judes both quickly raise their hands.

ALICIA

I know mine!

JUDES

Me too!

LENNY

(To audience)

You know. I've a hunch that after tonight, Chris is probably going to be able to remember meeting me.

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

The party is over. Lenny and Jude are seated.

Hey, Lennster.

JUDES

Hey Jude.

LENNY

Well, that was an interesting evening.

JUDES

It WAS.

LENNY

First off....

JUDES

Okay?

LENNY

Are you okay?

JUDES

I'm great.

LENNY

I'm just checking that you haven't had a stroke or a minor psychic break.

JUDES

You actually mean a psychotic break, and no, I haven't. *(Grinning)* Am I in trouble?

LENNY

No, but, um, what happened?

JUDES

Come on.

LENNY

Come on what?

JUDES

LENNY

Haven't you ever wondered what would happen if you began telling the truth?

JUDES

Um. Okay. I do. Well, most of the time. Sometimes. I do.

LENNY

Okay. Well, I think I thought what if I just said what I thought when I thought it. And not the usual "me" truth. Not the "I hate my neck" truth. Or the "I hate myself for being fat," or the usual, acceptable, self-deprecating truths women are given social permission to tell. I'm not going to do that anymore. When guys start regularly, publicly making jokes about their limp dicks or inadequacies at work, then I'll make chin hair jokes again. But no. I think I just wanted for once to call out the bullshit. The pompous. The clueless but oh-so-fucking-confident. So, I just did.

JUDES

That you did.

They both grin.

I loved it.

LENNY

Is Chris going to fire you as his agent?

JUDES

Oh, I'm the last thing on his mind right now.

LENNY

Me? Little old me?

JUDES

Oh stop.

Hugh enters and sits.

LENNY

Hey, Hugh. You okay?

HUGH

First, I would like it known that I have never sent a dick pic in my life.

JUDES

Good to know, honey.

LENNY

Setting the bar real high there, Hugh, but well done.

HUGH

Second, Lenny. How long have we known each other?

LENNY

Thirty-five years? Maybe?

JUDES

Closer to forty.

HUGH

I just want you to know that I think in the past forty years, you may have thought this stuff, maybe about me, in your mind, and I didn't know and maybe you wanted to say it, but you didn't and just....

LENNY

Yes, Hugh?

HUGH

You can tell me.

LENNY

Really?

HUGH

Yeah? Yeah. Yes. Just say it. But in private, maybe?

LENNY

Sure.

HUGH

Also, Judes honey, I've been in the study-

JUDES

-I was wondering where you were-

HUGH

-We're going to go on a vacation. To anyplace you want. I moved some money so wherever you want. An exotic romantic, or whatever is something you desire, in your....you know.....mind-

JUDES

-Fantasies?

HUGH

Yes. Whatever. Whatever you want. And, also, all guys watch porn and it's different than love. And I don't watch a lot. I just wanted to say that. Just so you know. It's not cheating.

JUDES

I don't think that. I just don't want you to feel that-

HUGH

-Stop. Judes. Stop. You don't have to make me feel better. I think I want to make you feel better. I think. Shit, I don't know what to think right now.

They all sit quietly for a moment. They all take a sip of their drink.

HUGH

(Slowly)

Oh my god!

JUDES

What?

HUGH

Do you think Kristie has ever gotten a dick pic? Oh shit! Do you think Eddie has ever SENT one?

He pulls out his cell phone and starts making a call.

JUDES

Honey, what are you doing?

HUGH

Calling the kids!

Hugh exits. During the following, Judes gets up, pours a few glugs of vodka (Yes, vodka, not gin.

It's my play) into a martini shaker, drops in a few ice cubes, shakes it, and pours both herself and Lenny a refill.

HUGH

(Offstage)

WHAT THE FUCK? Your BOSS sent you----Which boss?----Andrew? ANDREW?! When was?----Why didn't you tell us, Kristie?

Judes and Lenny take a sip. Hugh returns, still on the phone.

But why didn't you tell us then----What?-----

Hugh listens to her response and then shoots a withering glance to Judy. Judy looks away and takes a big gulp.

Yes, it's a huge thing. Oh god. I didn't mean that---My god!---I am calm-----Why didn't you quit?----But, but----Okay-----But-----You shouldn't have had to deal with it ever-----I'm----No, I'm fine-----No, I won't call him. I'll never be able to look him in the eye again at church, but I won't call him----I love you too.

Hugh ends the call and collapses into a chair. Lenny brings him his drink.

HUGH

(To Judes)

You knew?

JUDES

Honey. For women, sometimes, this is just business.

HUGH

Should I call Eddie?

JUDES

Why would you call Eddie? They're on vacation with the kids.

I'M RIGHT HERE/Reading Version/Sergel

HUGH

I think I need to tell him not to send dick pics to his employees. Because, obviously, this is somehow not obvious.

They all sip take another sip.

END SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Lenny in the nightclub spot.

LENNY

After my unexpected penthouse soliloquy over after dinner drinks, one might think I would have gotten it out of my system. But the opposite seemed to happen. I said what I thought, out loud, and I did not die. I didn't even feel bad afterwards. I thought I would. You know that feeling when you wish you could rewind the whole evening and take it all back? That feeling? It didn't happen.

Maybe I did have a stroke.

A moment. A smile. Takes a sip of her martini and then holds it up.

This? This martini? You know, it might be a martini. It might be water. I just like what it represents. This martini is everything the world thinks I'm not. Elegant. Sleek. Sexy. A little bit naughty. Hell, a little bit dangerous. A martini is always in on the joke.

Takes another sip.

Moving on to assholes.

After the penthouse happening, (*she snaps her fingers on "happening"*) it was back to work for me. Monday morning, I'm standing in line, waiting to place my order for coffee and a bagel. And two assholes stride in and step right in front of me in line.

Chris and Alicia enter, now Asshole #1 and Asshole #2, and step in front of Lenny, all the time looking at their phones.

You may be thinking, "Young people these days." Oh no. They were not young. They still think they're young but in the United States, over twenty-four? Not young. Not old. Not like me, over-forty woman old, or an over-seventy guy old. But not young. Right now? They are the "Not Old." Yes, it's complicated. Anyway. So, right in front of me they slide. Perhaps I was still coasting on the thrill of the penthouse. Telling the truth and surviving. But I decided to try it again. (*To Asshole #1 and Asshole #2*) I'm right here.

Asshole #1 and Asshole #2 look up.

LENNY (CONT'D)

(To audience)

Suddenly, this old, heavy, wrinkled body, suddenly was not invisible. My big hips, my glorious bones and flesh took up space.

I wanted to say, "I'm right here, assholes." It was rising up in me like a verbal tsunami. But sixty-one years of navigating the complex societal rules, unspoken, like working one's way through a tabletop ant farm, I knew, if I added "assholes," it would become about them. Again. Always. About them. But back to the assholes.

ASSHOLE #1

"Who you calling 'asshole', bitch?"

LENNY

(To Asshole #1) That would be you, *(to audience)* but I needed to win. Isn't winning glorious? So, I had to edit myself. Filter. Make a choice to hold back just a little.

Oh! Another sidebar. I saw a wonderful documentary on Muhammed Ali. The Thrilla in Manila? That famous photo of him, standing over Sonny Liston after he knocked him out? This documentary said Ali could have gotten another punch in, but he didn't. He knew Liston was going down and instead, he gave the camera the angle. The shot. That photo? Iconic. Plastered across every paper. Sometimes, you have to hold back to score the bigger win.

Lenny demonstrates the pose.

Muhammad Ali. A sacred cow of American Sports.

Sip of martini. Looks at the audience.

Second sidebar. Sidebar to the sidebar.

Sacred cows. Yes, we have them. Tonight, I'll be talking mostly about East Coast liberal white male sacred cows. These track pretty close with West Coast liberal sacred cows. The South has certain conservative varietals. Are you ready? Really? Because this is gonna hurt a little. Really.

The movie *The Godfather*? A sacred cow. Want to stop a party in its tracks? Sidle up to a group of white men and say, "*The Godfather*? The first two *Godfather* movies. They sucked."

Oh, my god, the pearl clutching will start.

LENNY (CONT'D)

If you are feeling especially bold, try this. "Bruce Springsteen. Yup. BRUUUCE. He wrote the same song for twenty years, you know that, right? Girls and cars. Cars and girls. Dug really deep there, didn't ya Bruce baby. And the dude was a little slutty. Come on. He was."

Bob Dylan. Big sacred cow for the boomers.

Johnny Cash. Jesus. Not necessarily in that order. Although not necessarily NOT in that order.

Tupac. To be hip, Tupac must be untouchable.

Steven Spielberg. Interesting fact. You can attack Spielberg movies, but you can't attack him. For Francis Ford Coppola, it's the opposite. You can attack him, but you can't attack *The Godfather*, one and two. You're allowed to dump on number three. Sticking with filmmaking sacred cows, Martin Scorsese's movies are too long. *The Gangs of New York*? I want my twelve dollars back. And I'm surprised there were any buildings left in New York after the scenery chewing Daniel Day Lewis did. And did *The Irishman* need to exist?

Let's see. The Beatles. Of course.

"Westerns are a tired, overused genre." That one really riles the fellas up.

Where was I? Oh. With the assholes. Let's call them Asshole #1 and Asshole #2.

I wanted to say, "I'm right here, assholes." But had I added "assholes" I would have been a crazy old bat. Some bitch, who was probably homeless, or had dementia, screaming at kids to get off her damn lawn, you troublemakers.

So, I had to make the social calculation. We make a thousand a day. Tiptoe around this ego. Agree with the spouse's boss. Disagree or walk away? Stay on the line or hang up? Cross the street or will that show weakness? Charm the operator. Be a weak old lady right now, and now, be a bad ass bitch. But this time? Holding back. It was worth it. (*To Asshole #1 and Asshole #2*) I'm right here.

ASSHOLE #1

Oh. Sorry. I didn't see you.

LENNY

Well, that's embarrassing for you, isn't it? A person, standing in front of you, five foot five inches of humanity, right smack in the middle of your trajectory, and you didn't see me. Perhaps you have an undiagnosed medical condition? I'm concerned. I think everyone here is concerned. Do you need to sit down?

Asshole #1 and Asshole #2 gape at Lenny.

LENNY (CONT'D)

(To audience) Now, I could have grouped Asshole #2 with my response to Asshole #1. And damn, it was tempting. The smug, slightly blank look of the young woman who does not realize she is at the top of the mountain right now. This is it. Society values her most highly right now. And it's all downhill from this moment.

But I was her. I was Asshole #2. Most of us were.

Lenny takes Asshole #2 by the hand and leads her to a seat in the front row of the audience.

(To Asshole #2) You're a feminist, maybe?

Asshole #2 nods.

Think that you should be paid the same as a man for the same work? And, of course, you will be because, well, you're fabulous! Young and smart, heck of an education. Discrimination would never happen to you.

And you will never be like her anyway, I mean, like me. You will never let yourself go so much that you're not a size....um....small. Just not gonna happen. Eye of the tiger, you've got.

And, well, too, you are *(lowers voice)* white. *(Normal volume)* And very liberal. But yes! White. Although now, being ethnic is becoming cool. You're hoping to dig up some heritage to work into the conversation. But your dad is Jewish, and they've been oppressed, so you lucked out there.

And, okay, yes. There's discrimination and that's bad, but if you needed an abortion, you could get one, right? And you're on the pill anyway! Not a problem!

And your bosses love you. You even have a woman boss.

Lenny takes a sip of her martini.

Just for fun, let's consider some facts.

Asshole #1 over there? You both work at the same firm. You both do the same job but, already, he makes more than you do. Yeah. He does. Sorry. And that guy you're going out with tonight? Third date, if I'm right? You do know he raped a girl in high school? But she was drunk, he was drunk, and it was ages ago. I'm sure he got it out of his system.

LENNY (CONT'D)

You'll be fine.

You're fine.

Or maybe you're not fine.

Maybe you keep your head down, plowing ahead at all costs, blowing past the old woman in line, right behind Asshole #1, since he did it, it must be okay.

But really? Because you were that girl in high school? And you just gotta keep moving.

And you keep yourself tiny by relentless exercise, kickboxing class, and yoga, and spin, but only indoor Soul Cycle. And you see women getting blasted on social media. "You know, Soul Cycle could actually just be riding your bike outside." But riding outside? Incalculable risks to that.

You just have to stay thin so no one sees the flaws, the anxiety that bubbles in your gut, saying "you're not enough" or "you're too much" or "it was your fault and you'll just never go in a basement alone again with a guy after you've been drinking and so it will never happen again."

And you do know that Asshole #1 makes more money than you do, but the gal in the cubicle next to you pushed for a raise and was let go a few months later for "poor performance."

It feels like a war, doesn't it? A little bit. In your gut. And you're right. Trust your gut.

(To audience) 'Cuz men do seem to be at war with us. Granted, it's a covert war. And I'm not sure why exactly. I've never been able to unpack it. We're smaller, we make less money, we give them fucking life, but still, we still seem to be their favorite prey. Raping and hunting and hurting. It must be rewarding on their end. I wonder. Does it, like, make them feel like they're taking a hill on Normandy Beach or something? Afterwards, is it like, "Yippie me! I raped someone!?" I just can't figure it out.

Maybe that's why so many societies don't want to educate girls. If girls can't read, then they can't read the memo, that men? At war with us.

(To Asshole #2) But yes, you are only you. And you cannot fight all these battles, all at once, on every front. Every day is a skirmish, just to stay safe. And boy, if you survive, the skirmishes and the battles and the attacks, you're supposed to forgive, am I right? To move on, be emotionally healthy, if you don't forgive it's like *(sincere voice)* "Drinking poison and expecting the other guy to die."

Lenny grabs two to-go cups of coffee and hands one to Asshole #1 and Asshole #2.

She takes a sip of martini as they each sip their coffee.

LENNY (CONT'D)

Forgiveness? It's bullshit. Forgiveness? It's to make everyone else feel comfortable. It's to make everyone else's life easier. It's not for you. It's for them. It's for the family, the church, the school, your spouse, your country.

"Lenny? She's so stuck. She just needs to open her heart and forgive."

Um....no, I don't.

I hate forgiveness. Say, I dunno, say a drunk driver hits me. My leg is busted. They drive off. I'm hospitalized for, say, a week. No, ten days. Then physical therapy for, maybe three, four months. Stacks of medical bills. I'm driven into debt. Perhaps I'll always walk with a limp after that. Now, current standard is that I forgive the motherfucking drunk driver, right? So, I can heal emotionally as I heal physically.

Yeah....no. Forgiveness is demanded so we'll just stop talking about getting fucked over.

Now, acceptance? If I accept what happened? "Wow, this incredible shitty thing happened to me. This sucks. Fuck that drunk driver. Fuck this shit."

I'm all over acceptance. I fucking love acceptance! Acceptance means I'm not going to try to hide my limp. I'll take that handicapped parking placard. I'll tell the story at dinner parties. I'll take your sympathy, I'll talk your ear off, I'll be a goddamn mess until I decide not to be a goddamn mess anymore. I'm owning this damn thing. This happened, and guess what, motherfuckers, I'm still here to talk about it.

Yes, I'm right here.

But look around. It doesn't end there. Yes. Look at each other. (*Lenny might use the flashlight to help*) We don't just have survivors here.

We also got perpetrators. Someone here has driven drunk, smacked a kid, stolen money, assaulted their girlfriend, or wife, or a date, cheated on their spouse, lied, bribed, sent a picture of someone naked, forwarded a picture of someone naked, turned away, did the wrong thing, did the cowardly thing, hell, maybe even killed someone, the list is as endless the grains of sand on the beach.

LENNY (CONT'D)

And you...we want to forgive ourselves, don't we? We do. Or to just shove it down. Because, I mean, come on, there were circumstances. There are always circumstances.

Don't do it. Don't forgive yourself. 'Cuz if you do, you know in a week you'll be back at the bar, doing shots of Jägermeister and heading home in the Volvo.

But if you accept that you're a drunk? Well, that's different. "I need to accept that I'm an asshole who did a really shitty thing." If you're a perpetrator, and face it, we all are perpetrators, you may not be able to make it right.

No. Wait.

We will not be able to make it right. None of us can go back. Cannot fucking happen. But we can make something right. Move forward, with all the blame, guilt, and contempt, and make something right.

So, survivors? Perpetrators. We're all both. And we made it this far. We did. And we can keep going. Because surviving? That's fucking winning. *(To Asshole #2)* You? Being here? Right now? You fucking won. So, know that I see that. And I see you. But you also need to see me. 'Cuz I'm right here.

Lenny brings Asshole #2 back onstage.

Don't forget your sugar.

Lenny puts a teaspoon of sugar from a table in the apartment into Asshole #2's coffee.

ASSHOLE #2
(To Lenny)

Thank you.

ASSHOLE #1
(To Asshole #2)

Come on. We'll be late. *(Muttering but loud enough for Lenny to hear)* Crazy old bitch.

Asshole #1 exits. Asshole #2 looks at Asshole #1, and then looks at Lenny, and then follows him off.

I'M RIGHT HERE/Reading Version/Sergel

LENNY

Quick sidebar. That particular morning? My coffee and bagel? On the house.

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

LENNY

It could have ended there. Me, being the crazy old bitch at the Starbucks. How did I go from there....to here?

Alicia enters.

(To audience) I told you she was fabulous.

Alicia draws Lenny into the apartment.

ALICIA

First, thank you.

LENNY

For?

ALICIA

For giving me permission to post your monologue from Judy and Hugh's party on our site.

LENNY

You mean my rant?

ALICIA

I mean your brilliant social commentary. It's exploded. It's everywhere. You can't predict what will catch on, although, that's sort of my job, but anyway. You're trending. So many views. So, I want to do a weekly live streaming event. A party. With you. Doing what you do. What you did. With Chris. With us.

LENNY

Telling the truth?

ALICIA

Yes. Bringing the audience into the party. With you, us, people, telling the truth. Now, I feel I have to warn you. This could be dangerous.

LENNY

Dangerous how?

ALICIA

Well, have you heard of Cancel Culture?

Lenny begins laughing.

LENNY

I'm an old woman in America. I've already been cancelled. But no one will listen to me. No one will come. I mean, watch.

ALICIA

Oh, yes, they will.

LENNY

(To audience)

I told you, she's fantastic.

Light change. Alicia, clearly the hostess of the evening, crosses into her apartment. Jon, now MITCH, enters and sits. Chris, now a TECHIE, is the iPhone camera handler. Alicia will direct him to record conversations during the following scene.

So, I did sign on to Alicia's idea. Suddenly, this old gal? I was providing fresh content. On Twitter, which, yes, I am on. Instagram. Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat. Me. Fresh. Imagine. I do suspect Alicia hosting this streaming event from their place took some convincing of Jon. Because, well, I had so misbehaved at Judes and Hugh's. Eventually he did sign off on it. Still trying to keep up with Alicia. Poor guy. But right before, he suddenly had something come up. Couldn't make. I know. I was shocked too.

ALICIA

(Calling for Lenny to join them)

Lenny, Lenny! Here. I want you to meet Mitch. An old friend of Jon's.

LENNY

(To audience)

Have you noticed that old rich guys? They all look exactly alike.

Lenny enters apartment. She and Mitch shake hands.

I'm Lenny. How did Alicia talk you into this broadcast?

Lenny gestures to Techie, who Alicia is gesturing to film the introduction.

MITCH

I like to use all modern, social media means to reach my constituents.

LENNY

You are so hip.

MITCH

(Laughing, flattered)

Ah, serving the American People keeps me young.

LENNY

(To audience)

Dear god, it's gonna be like shooting fish in a barrel. Okay, the next patch here? It might feel a little....obvious. But it's going to feel really good. It will. And, well, I'm in the room. I gotta to say it. It won't help. Won't change a goddamn thing. But it'll be so sweet. And I did wait until after appetizers. Alicia was pushing for early engagement, but I'm not an animal.

Alicia brings both Lenny and Mitch small appetizer plates with one appetizer on each. She waits as Lenny and Mitch eat the appetizer. She then takes their plates from them.

LENNY

(To Mitch)

Oh, goodness. In person, you are so nice. All of you are, I suspect.

MITCH

Thank you, my dear. All of us?

LENNY

Old white men with a lot of money and influence.

MITCH

(Chuckling)

Oh, not as much as the media would have you believe. And I'm not that old, young lady!

LENNY

That crazy, biased media. You do know our hostess-

MITCH

-Alicia is a delight. But she's smart enough not to wade too far into politics. She stays in her lane. But you would be surprised, my dear. The hypocrisy of the media is astonishing. But we all must navigate the waters in which we find ourselves.

LENNY

"We're gonna need a bigger boat."

MITCH

Yes! The media is like a big shark, indiscriminate, consuming anything in its path without regard for truth or objectivity. The twenty-four-seven news cycle is the ocean, and they think American business is the chum. I am waiting for the American People to wake up.

LENNY

Oh, my goodness. Me too! I'm waiting too.

MITCH

Yes, yes.

LENNY

Oh, not for the American People to wake up.

MITCH

Excuse me?

LENNY

(Sweetly, lightly)

Oh no. They're snoozing away. I'm not gonna poke that bear. No. I'm waiting for you to die.

MITCH

Excuse me?

LENNY

Yes, you, Mitch. I'm waiting for you to die. Yes. You. You. You Ivy League, New York, Connecticut, Stanford, family money, MFA, polo, pro-military-but-never-enlisting you. Every advantage you, yet still expecting, demanding more you. More deals. More mergers. More money. More influence. More power. More, more, more.

Alicia, wanting to hear, comes over with a martini shaker.

ALICIA

Lenny-

LENNY

(Holds out her glass to Alicia)

-Yes, I'd love a touch more. *(Back to Mitch)* And the you, that you, you also don't want anyone else to have it. Brown people. Black people. Female type people. More for anyone else is less for you. You don't do less. *(To Alicia)* Thank you, Alicia.

Lenny stands and crosses downstage to her nightclub position. She leaves her martini behind. Alicia waves for Techie to follow Lenny. Techie takes the audience seat which Asshole #2 previously occupied and keeps streaming.

So, I'm saying to him, you do know that you have too much fucking money? Yes, it is possible to have too much. Hoarding? Not a good look.

But I digress. I said to him, since you won't share, since you will do anything, crush people, devastate whatever is in your path, blow past the checks and balances keeping this perfectly balanced fragile little planet spinning, all in the name of job creation, of course, and keep people as stupid and misguided as possible, just so you can just keep getting more money and power, I want you to die.

Alicia brings Lenny her martini and returns to the party.

Sitting at your desk, or in the Senate, or at your clubhouse, in your Lexus, surrounded by your aides, your assistants, your interns, your second or third wife, I want you to feel a seizing, burning sensation in your head or in your chest and I want you to keel over. All power and influence wiped away in a moment of sheer brutal physicality. And I want it to hurt. I do. I want you to crap your pants. You see, honey. Sweetie. Young man. You're the shark. The trolling, slimy, relentlessly, mindless consumption machine. And I want Roy Scheider, aiming for the oxygen tank in your jaws, to blow your fucking head off.

Now, fair warning. If one attempts this type of "sharing," shall I say, then one will get The Glare. I think men practice it in the mirror. Sort of 80% Clint Eastwood and 20% early DeNiro. The glare of the powerful male in the pack is to first, wither you. And then to shame you. And there is an anthropological, visceral reaction to it. Because it has been so dangerous, for so long. The Glare is putting you in the crosshairs of the sniper scope.

Here. Let me show you. *(Calls to Mitch)* Hey, Mitch. Could you come over here and do the old man glare for everybody?

Mitch glares at her and turns away.

LENNY (CONT'D)

(Still to Mitch) Oh, come on. Give me what for. How dare I?! You built this economy. If people would just pull themselves up by their bootstraps and go to church and get rid of those damn unions, America would be great again. Come on. I'm right here. Please.

Mitch doesn't budge. But he does glare at Lenny.

Alright. It's hard to see, but he's doing it from there. See?

Another sip of martini.

Oh! I think this is a good time. I promised a chance to bail out. Here it is.

Lenny turns on her flashlight to illuminate the aisles.

Just proceed this way to the exit. Don't forget your coat. But just so you know, I'm picking on the liberals real soon! You might not want to miss that. But not yet. Guns or religion are probably next. It's a tough call. Alright, I'll do guns. Just shooting from the hip. You see what I did there, right? Alright, just, real quick.

Sip of martini.

(To Techie) Oh. Hey, do you need anything? Some water. *(Over her shoulder)* Hey Alicia, can you get him some-

Alicia crosses with a bottle of water and hands it to the techie.

ALICIA
(To Techie)

-Here you go. *(To Lenny)* You okay?

LENNY
I'm great. How's Mitch?

ALICIA
He's furious. He feels blindsided.

LENNY
You did?-

ALICIA

-I warned him! *(To audience)* I did. *(To Lenny and audience)* I told him it would be frank conversations in a virtual, streaming setting. I think there's going to be a job opening for a media consultant real soon. *(To Lenny)* But keep going.

She crosses back to the party.

LENNY

(To Techie, holding out her martini glass)

Hey, can I have a splash? *(He pours some water from his bottle into her martini glass)* Thank you. Um, let me see. Oh! Guns.

You know, guns are not like fruit. They don't go bad.

She looks back at Mitch. He glares at her and turns away again. She turns back to audience.

"Honey, this gun I bought last year. It's getting some brown spots. I'm gonna need to grab a new one at the gun show this weekend." Doesn't happen. Nope. They last pretty much forever. But that's a big issue for sales. What the fuck does a company do when their product lasts forever? I mean, cars break down. Furniture wears out. Electronics? Don't even. But firearms!? Those babies? Built to last! It's a saturation issue. A marketing conundrum.

A sip of martini.

And all the stuff that goes with them. The accessories. They're all so fun! I mean, the ponytail holders and glitter lipstick! Sorry. I meant the Recover Tactical Slide Rack Assist, 7 Versions Available, Compatible w/Glock 17 19 20 21 42 43, Compatible with Smith & Wesson Shield 40. Did you know you can get a Recover Tactical Slide Rack Assist, 7 Versions Available Compatible w/Glock 17 19 20 21 42 43, Compatible with Smith & Wesson Shield 40 on Amazon for 19.95? I'm not sure if you can get next day Prime delivery though.

But I get it. A gun. A firearm. It's a tool. You need firearms for sport and hunting. Because so many of us live on venison and wild turkey. "Honey, no. Don't get one of those roaster chickens from Walmart. Go snag us some venison. And I'll need some turkey for sandwiches for work tomorrow. So, bag one of those too." Maybe I'm in the wrong neighborhood but I'm just not seeing a lot of that.

You all do know if you took the money you use to buy your guns and invested it in even a conservative growth money market, your outcomes for you and your family might be a little more fruitful? Yeah. Cheap guns? About \$75 to \$1,000 each. Still, bit of jingle. But, if this is a hobby, you deserve the best, well the good ones typically go for \$4,000 to \$20,000. That's a lot of mortgage payments.

LENNY (CONT'D)

But look. I'm not judging.

Yes. I am. I am completely judging.

My right to be reasonably safe in public spaces supersedes your right to own as many guns as you want. My right trumps your right. If you need more than, say, two guns, you're an insecure train wreck. And you're being played. You're using your discretionary income to prop up an industry which needs to sell fear to pay for their CEO's kids' tuition. Take your money and pay for your own kids' tuition.

It was a lovely evening. Although I didn't get to religion. Next time.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

Judes and Hugh's apartment. Lenny enters.

LENNY
(Calling)

Hey, guys. I'm here.

Judes and Hugh enter from either side of the apartment. Everyone stops. Judes and Hugh break into applause. Then they all begin laughing.

HUGH

Way to break the internet.

JUDES

You bad, woman. You shut that shit DOWN. Respect.

LENNY

Oh, please. Don't do "street." You grew up in Hinsdale.

Hugh begins making martinis during the following.

JUDES

So? What's it been like?

LENNY

It's sort of been like ageing in reverse. I'm evolving from invisible to seen, not the other way around. Lots of love. And lots of insults. Oh, and insults from the young? Hysterical. "You're fat and old." I KNOW. This is not news. They think it's like a fate worse than death. Or "This bitter old bitch has never been fucked." Well, not by you, thank god. I'm sure you're the tenderest and most accomplished of lovers, you dashing poet you. The death threat thing is a little odd.

HUGH

Really? Have you notified the police?

LENNY

It's sort of been along the lines of "I hope a thousand crows peck out your liver," so nothing really actionable, I'd say. But I'm keeping an eye on it. And Alicia is helping.

Hugh passes out martinis.

HUGH

To our rebel friend.

JUDES

The hottest YouTube sensation since Randy Rainbow.

They toast and drink.

HUGH

I'm curious.

LENNY

Uh oh! Hugh is curious. We all know what that means.

HUGH

What does that mean?

LENNY

It means when you say "I'm curious" all innocent like that, you've really examined every nuance and angle of what you are about to say but will now casually toss out like you just thought it.

HUGH

I don't do that!

JUDES

You so do. Oh please.

HUGH

Give me one example.

JUDES

(Looking Hugh straight in the eye)

Pasta Primavera.

A staredown. Hugh breaks.

HUGH

I withdraw my objection.

LENNY

It's okay. What?

HUGH

I was just wondering your thoughts on race.

LENNY

What? Oh god. I am not doing race. Are you shitting me? That's just a bridge too far. I'll just say some stupid white person thing and you'll hate me.

HUGH

Lenny, I've known you for forty years. You've said lots of stupid white people things. And I still love you. Come on.

LENNY

What? Oh shit. What did I say? Oh shit, I'm so sorry.

HUGH

Oh, don't even. Judes has too. It's impossible not to. Come on. Things keep changing and we're all just trying to keep up. Just so you keep trying and aren't a jerk. We're all screwed up.

JUDES

It's true. It took me forever to get him to say "Asian" instead of "Oriental."

HUGH

See? So we won't be mad.

LENNY

Nope.

JUDES

Then do interracial couples.

LENNY

Are you nuts? I'm not doing interracial couples either.

HUGH

Try it. We know you have opinions.

JUDES

Please.

HUGH

Don't be a scaredy cat. Come on. It's my birthday next month.

They both look at Lenny eagerly. Perhaps one mimes a puppy begging. Lenny takes a sip of her martini.

LENNY

Alright, but just about couples. And just a little bit.

JUDES

(To Hugh)

Now, don't interrupt her.

HUGH

Me? You're the worst interrupter!

JUDES

I am not!

HUGH

You interrupted the priest when we were getting married.

JUDES

He was forgetting the poem part!

LENNY

Kids.

JUDES

Sorry.

HUGH

We'll be good.

JUDES

Wait!

She leaps up, runs offstage, and returns with a bag of Skinny Pop popcorn. She offers some to Hugh as they make themselves comfortable.

Okay. Now go.

LENNY

Dear god, you two. Okay. You're sure?

Judes and Hugh nod in unison.

LENNY

(Another sip for courage)

Okay. Interracial couples. Um....well....I've noticed that there is this thing. For a long time there have been more couples of Black men and white women. More than Black women and white men. Oh, it's changing. Especially on commercials. Every combination, all thin and gorgeous, but much more diverse, I gotta say. Bi-racial kid actors? Must be making a killing.

JUDES

I wouldn't go that far. It's getting better.

LENNY

But the Black guy and white woman pairing has been a thing for a while. But I suspect, it's been hard on couples. I'm just extrapolating from the sidelines again but, I'm thinking, the Black guy gets flak from the Black women in his life. For not dating a Black woman, you know.

Hugh nods.

And the white woman, she's got a whole lotta learning and growing and "What the fuck, this country is bullshit. You've put up with this your whole life, honey?"

Judes nods.

Not to mention getting the usual, "Being a couple is hard enough, you do know the divorce rate? I just don't want things to be even harder for you. Or your children. Are you going to have children?"

JUDES

Aunt Emily. I almost slapped her one year. At Easter. *(To Hugh)* Remember what she said?

HUGH

See? You're interrupting.

JUDES

Sorry. Go on.

LENNY

Now, I might be wrong, but I think there's a bit of balance at play. Black men? Oh, man, they, you, take a lot of shit BUT, they are still men. White women, as women, take a lot of shit, but are still white. You see where I'm going with this, don't ya? I suspect the mountains of bullshit heaped upon each, one for gender, one for race, while not even-steven, there is a unique kind of synergy. A balance of bullshit. It's not fair but it makes a strange sort of sense.

Sip of martini.

LENNY (CONT'D)

But what Black women have to put up with? Being Black. And female? They get a double load of bullshit right off the bat. I can't even....no words. And they all just keep going. Incredible. Humbling.

After a moment, Lenny raises her glass in a silent toast. Hugh and Judes join her. They sip.

LENNY

Jackie told me....you know Jackie?

JUDES

Yeah. The federal judge? Does the marathons?

LENNY

Yeah. Her husband Tony is white. She told me that when she and Tony got together, he spent the first year of dating apologizing. For everything. Every news story. Every instance of racism or misogyny, he apologized. Just trying to distance himself, very, "Look, I'm not like that. You know that, right?" She said it was so exhausting it almost broke them up.

HUGH

(To Judes)

You did that too a little bit, honey.

JUDES

I did not.

HUGH

Sure. Okay.

JUDES

Okay. I probably did.

HUGH

Hey, Lennster.

LENNY

Yeah?

Hugh tops off Lenny's martini.

HUGH

You can't stop there.

LENNY

What?

HUGH

We all need white people to talk about race too, okay? Can't just be us.

Lenny crosses to nightclub spot. Judes and Hugh come sit in the audience, one bringing the popcorn, the other their drinks. They may offer a handful of popcorn to the audience.

LENNY

Okay. From where I stand, basically safe on the sidelines, an old, white woman, I gotta say, white people?

We suck.

We do. I mean, I'm embarrassed for us. When one of us shows up on camera, at a march or rally, especially if it's a guy in a baseball cap, I'm cringing. I'm like, "Please. Don't do it, dude. Please. Whatever you're gonna say which you thought was important and right and newsworthy, just don't. Don't say it. For the love of God. Don't."

But he does.

I heard that successful rock bands in the nineties, they felt ripped off. Before AIDS, if you were a rock star, you had it made. All the pussy you wanted, whenever you wanted, however you wanted it. Then the rules changed. Promiscuity could kill you. "What, I gotta wear a condom? And, what, sleeping around is now BAD? Really? This shit sucks, dude."

I think that's how a lot of white people are feeling right now. "Suddenly, it's all diversity this, inclusion that. Fuck that. I wanna go back to the old rules. Sure, I don't want, like, slavery, but now, I dunno. It just feels really unfair."

It's like, as a race, we've been reading our own press releases. Just like that actor, Chris. He thinks he's the greatest leading man of his generation. Deep down, he knows he isn't. Just like deep down, white people? We know we're just as fucked up as everybody else. But if everyone keeps telling you that you're God's gift to acting, well, who are you to disagree? And it does help with getting more work. And magazine covers.

LENNY (CONT'D)

The thing is, for me, as an old woman, I've got one basic ongoing battle. *(Waving)* "I'm right here," people. Right?

But Black and brown people? From what I can tell, again, from the sidelines, they're dealing with people going *(she points)*, "They're right here! Oh my god, they're everywhere. These black people, brown people, there are even Asians sometimes. But the worse part, is they don't look like me, I mean, like real Americans. My ancestors are from here from, like, forever, I'm Native American....wait. *(Thinks)*. Well....finders keepers!"

And while we all have skin in the game, my skin? It makes me ubiquitous. Common. The dreaded, ridiculous "norm." And, yes, sometimes invisible.

But Black skin? Brown skin. Any skin but white skin. That skin? Makes you a target. Always. Every single moment. *(Looks at Hugh and Judes)* Thoughts?

Hugh and Judes rise, break into applause, and cross up to Lenny.

HUGH

(Kissing her on the cheek)

Marvelous.

JUDES

I have some notes.

END SCENE FIVE

SCENE SIX

Lenny in the nightclub.

LENNY

I was trending. The whole weekly event was trending. Alicia was thrilled. She was managing it all. Jon is so lucky to have her, even if I suspect they are having some "conversations" behind closed doors about all this.

But she's amazing. I see the freight train of elder care bearing down on her and I know I can't really warn her or prepare her, but I do feel bad for her. When that tsunami of eldercare hits, it's all hands-on deck.

No.

It's a few hands and lots of other hands making excuses.

Traditional family values are great until someone has to wipe Grandma's ass four times a day. Could you....oh....you're at the office. Shoot. Oh. I guess sister will have to do it. Sister ALWAYS does it, doesn't she? No wonder "sister" doesn't make it as far in business, eh? And if she doesn't, or can't, or won't, those pesky immigrants who keep sneaking into our great country, from Jamacia or Romania or Mexico or wherever, those gals are the ones at the assisted living place taking care of Mom. Just so those immigrants don't fucking unionize, that's all I can say. I want people making minimum wage caring for my fragile and elderly mother.

Oh, good god, I sound so mad. That sure is not okay. You see, certain people can be mad. It's called righteousness. Or advocating. Defending the American People. Politicians. All those preachers. But me? Golly no. I can't be shrill. Or strident. Or lecturing. 'Cuz a mad woman is not an attractive woman. But wait a second. I'm OLD. I'm already unattractive. This is AWESOME. Nothing to lose!

But, back to my new-found fame. It crept in under the radar. Radar is old-timey talk for trending. Our evenings began trending.

Alicia and Lenny are seated in Alicia's apartment.

ALICIA

Saturday night was amazing! You are amazing. A truth teller. A true advocate.

LENNY

A what?

ALICIA

A true advocate. And I think next time, we could expand the discussion. Next event, could you steer it to Me Too? Tell those stories. We have to believe every woman.

LENNY

Alicia, my phone is dying. I want to put something on Facebook. Would you type it out in a text message, send it to me, and then I can post it?

ALICIA

Sure.

Alicia pulls out her phone and sits, ready.

LENNY

(Softly)

This is really hard for me. *(Alicia begins typing)* I was at a party the other night. A party with some very good friends. And the husband of the hostess, I'll call her Ally, well, her husband, a much older man, he's a very powerful man. I'll just refer to him by his first initial, J. Well, I was coming out of the bathroom, and Jon, I mean J, came up and grabbed me. I was shocked. I didn't know what to do. I froze.

ALICIA

What are you talking about?

LENNY

Alicia. Your husband assaulted me. Saturday night.

ALICIA

What? You mean Jon. But...but, he was at the country house. What?

LENNY

No, he wasn't. What? You don't believe me? To be a "true advocate," you must believe me. Full stop. No questions. Come on, Alicia! You're a feminist. And a true advocate. Or maybe you're not. You can't be if you have questions. And because, god knows, women have never lied. Bullied. Cheated. Stolen. Committed crimes. We can't be bigots or stupid. Yes, we are pure as the driven snow, all motivations admirable.

ALICIA

Point taken. But what you propose is really hard, you know that? Because so many women haven't been believed, for so long.

LENNY

Yes. Listening? Analyzing? Hearing everyone? True fairness? Really fucking hard. That's why so few of us actually manage to do it on a consistent basis.

Lenny crosses to the nightclub setting.

It sure is a slippery slope, isn't it? The lefty, liberal, true advocate thing? Or the fundamentalists who get to decide what God really meant. It sure is a clear, crisp line for some. You're either for us or against us. But what I've noticed about absolutes is that if you question shit, you in trouble.

But the few, fragile systems which have been created. Due process. Scientific analysis. The crucible of truth. For them to work, we really need to be all in. Yes, it's never been done, not even close. But justice cannot be a fad. It feels like one! But it can't be. And if some people get "more" justice than others? That ain't justice.

I know some of you gals and feminist fellas are mad at me right now. Don't fret. I'll circle back....and might even make you madder.

Oh! Yes! Organized religion. I didn't forget you!

First of all, they don't seem too organized. But whatever. My overall assessment is, organized religion, we've got two basic groups.

First, we've got your popular, very drinkable, good for most palates Reform Judaism, the Christianity blends of the casual Catholic, your almost-Catholic Episcopalian, Christianity Lite of Methodist-Lutheran, the stray Quaker running around, the mostly Muslim but who does like a good Chardonnay, the haphazard Hindi but who puts on a good show for mom. Religious but realistic. The main thrust of these vintages seems to be: "Okay, whatever, but just don't be an asshole." They won't sweat the details if, overall, you're just not an asshole. They have a nice God. Or gods. The "God loves you" God.

Then there's the full-bore varietals, the un-diluted evangelical, orthodox, fundamentalist. Many flavors, always new ones cropping up. The Christians, generally falling under that "Evangelical" umbrella with chronic selective forgiveness condition, Orthodox Judaism, oh boy, do they have a lot going on, and the burqa-loving Muslims. And there are some pretty violent Buddhists running around too. There are. Google it.

All those fundamentalists. They seem to start with, "If you're not one of us, you're an asshole." Not a Nice God but a Mean God. But if other people are worse than them, then God hates them a little bit less. And they get to decide. What makes people bad. For God. It's complicated.

LENNY (CONT'D)

And, for all their individual quirks and peccadillos, they do all share one thing. One consistent rule. Across the board. No exceptions. Males are better than females. Oh, they dress it up in "We want to protect them." Blah, blah, blah. But nah.

Men need us, faithful, covered up, and uneducated. To perpetuate their greatness. And, well, sex. That joyful release, which is their due, always, for whatever reason. Not our due. Theirs. 'Cuz what if we figure out that we, women I mean, only need them, him, the male person, one time to make a kid. Wham, Bam, Thank You, Stan. Well, that is certainly inconvenient for their regular sexual needs.

But back to the true advocate, true believer, "good" Christian, Jew, Muslim, liberal, whatever, insert religion or belief system here. For the next guy, over there, you're never going to be pure enough. And every religion has this. Judging the other guy to make yourself feel better? Universal.

And if God wants to strike me dead, I'm right here. And if there are any pissed off Christians out there, please forgive me. And if you can't, you're not a Christian.

END SCENE SIX

SCENE SEVEN

Outside a comedy club. Judes enters. Then Lenny enters from the opposite side.

LENNY

Hey! I'm right here.

They hug.

JUDES

You were great. Really great!

LENNY

Well, you laughed at everything.

JUDES

Too much? I wanted to be supportive.

LENNY

Well, I clearly had a friend in the audience, but I forgive you. So, okay?

JUDES

You were the best. The guy with the beard was pretty good too.

LENNY

He's okay. A little derivative but solid delivery. And not a total shit, which is a nice perk.

JUDES

Lennster, I'm just so proud of you. And I'm bringing my Book Club next week. They love you.

LENNY

Thank you.

JUDES

If you need an agent, I know a really good one.

LENNY

Sure. Oh, wait.

Pulls out a quarter and gives it to Judes.

LENNY (CONT'D)

Here's your ten percent from last week. I gotta say, once people heard an actual agent was in the house, everyone brought their A game. Although do you even sign comics?

JUDES

I signed a comic once, oh god, it was over ten years ago.

LENNY

Which one?

JUDES

Oh, he's off the grid. Lots of homophobic texts surfaced. You know. Oh, you could talk about that in your act.

LENNY

Homophobic texts? Maybe. I need to form an opinion about them. Wait. There it is. Fuck bigots. So, let's go get a drink.

Judes doesn't move.

JUDES

You know, some of the stuff you've said. I don't agree with.

LENNY

Okay. So. *(Beat)* What?

JUDES

I'm a Catholic, you know.

LENNY

Oh! So, not the true advocate material. Interesting.

JUDES

Well....

LENNY

It's okay. Go ahead.

Judes hesitates.

I can't believe you're an agent. You're such a wimp.

JUDES

It's different at work. You know that! Advocating for my clients, is, well, different.

LENNY

Just fucking speak, Judes!

JUDES

Okay! It's hard, being a Catholic! And people like you make it harder. Oh, god, never mind.

LENNY

Shit, Judes, just say it.

Judes enters the nightclub spot. At some point during the following, Lenny sits in the audience chair.

JUDES

I love it. I love it. I love Mass. I love the tradition. The tradition you, YOU, dumped on? I love it. Well, not the tradition of, well, the whole corruption and pedophilia thing, but the tradition of a group of people committed to a higher ideal. Sometimes, when I'm sitting in church, I feel so small and so big at the same time. I am connected to all those before me and all those with me and all those coming after me. And you know, there are amazing priests. Confession has saved me. And sure, it's hard sometimes. Trying to live your principals. But at least, we have some principals! I mean, do you have any idea how hard it is to use the rhythm method and keep things down to two kids?

LENNY

You're kidding? You didn't take the pill!? Man, now I even have more respect for Hugh. That dude must love you.

JUDES

No, I didn't take the pill and yes, he does.

And, AND people look down on us, us Catholics, for being all hoodwinked. In denial or backwards sheep or something. *(To audience)* Oh, excuse me, what about your brother who, who, assaulted your niece and you never knew? Or, or "Oh, the government is so corrupt. Spend, spend, spend," but you still take your tax refund or cash your Social Security check. Or "I hate this country. It's so backwards." Well, I don't see you moving to fucking Sweden or someplace. *(To Lenny)* OH MY GOD, this DOES feel good!

LENNY

See?! See!

Lenny comes back onstage. Judes and Lenny cross to a table and sit. They are now in a bar. Alicia, now WAITRESS, brings them both a martini during the following.

LENNY (CONT'D)

So, you're conceptually mad at me but not mad at me as a person.

JUDES

That's the thing. That's why I'm proud of you. Because you're getting better at that. Well, better than I am. I've always felt that if someone disagreed with me, deep down, it was a judgement of ME. That I'm a disagreeable person. *(To Waitress)* Thank you.

LENNY

(To Waitress)

Thank you.

Waitress exits.

JUDES

And even if I deeply believe I am right, I can't articulate it when we're disagreeing. I have one super-conservative friend on Facebook; I went to middle school with him-

LENNY

-That Marty guy?

JUDES

Yeah. And he's really nice but he's just so screwed up. Well, I think he's so screwed up from where I am, and he thinks I'm screwed up from where he is. But I am right. But anyway. But then he posts this stuff which is, yes, these talking points, but what do I do and think and post? Talking points.

LENNY

You know, talking points are really just points? Making your point. As you talk.

JUDES

I know. And don't interrupt me.

LENNY

Sorry.

JUDES

And in my core, I know what I believe. But the words don't always work for me. Like they do for you. And I hear these arguments and positions and stuff and I know they're wrong but I get lost in the...the-

LENNY

-Rabbit hole of the logic. Twisted and not. It just sucks you in.

JUDES

It does! And the amount of content? There's so much!

LENNY

Not as much as one would think. The cut and paste function has destroyed independent analytical thought.

JUDES

I guess. And, sometimes, I just feel stupid.

LENNY

You are not stupid.

JUDES

Thanks. And sometimes (*lowers her voice a little*), I get tired of being mad. (*Normal volume*) And scared. And pissed off. And pissed off at myself for not being more pissed off. That purity test thing! That thing you said. People I know seem to be righteously pissed off so much, all the time, and making a difference, and sometimes, I just check out and watch trashy reality tv.

LENNY

We all do. (*A moment*) There's a new one on Netflix. With those guys from Scotland. They cut down trees in kilts and stuff. Just dropped. Six episodes, I think.

JUDES

Finished it last night. Hugh's out of town.

LENNY

You know you do have an out. On everything. Politics. Cultural stuff. Policy. World events.

JUDES

There is no out anymore. Not these days.

LENNY

You can just not have an opinion. It is such a great option but so few of us take advantage. You can just say, "I don't know enough about that to have an informed opinion." It's as though we

LENNY (CONT'D)

have to have stances on everything. Shit, is sampling copyright infringement? I dunno. EU trade practices? You got me. India and Pakistan border disputes? Well, I know they exist.

JUDES

It's easy to say that, Lennster, but, one should be educated. We must be informed.

LENNY

But can you keep up with everything? 'Cuz I sure as hell can't. What if we just say that? You know it'll break one of three ways. Either the other person will roll their eyes and dismiss us as idiots. Or they'll try to educate us, trying to get us to agree with them. Or, most likely scenario, they be so fucking relieved someone else doesn't get it either.

JUDES

You're pretty smart. Even though I think you are completely misguided regarding religion.

LENNY

(Grinning)

I'm devastated.

They both take a sip of their martini.

END SCENE SEVEN

SCENE EIGHT

Lenny in nightclub spot.

LENNY

Things started getting a bit dicier. Sure, as women, we can talk about our bodies and sex and how slut-shaming is bad. Oh, and quick sidebar. Can we please rename that particular action? Maybe pleasure-shaming? Or healthy-sexuality-shaming perhaps?

Anyway, once you start going after bigger game? Oh, the rules start to change. Like Mitch. Remember Mitch? Old dude. Political power guy. He and his crew, oh, they were not happy with me. The more views, the more the conversation moved from political theatre to virtual sniper practice. Death threats got a little more specific. And yes, there was a regional slant. I don't think I'll be hitting the Appalachian Trail any time soon.

But all the blowback got me thinking.

Mitch and his supporters, they're sort of like some of those guys you knew from high school. Back then, sure, they could be jerks but they were fun jerks. Maybe even cute. Their passion, although misguided, was entertaining. They would sneak beer from their folks' house. You'd hang out at the same parties. They would puff up their chests and stick up for "their woman." You know. Kinda macho but still insecure like the rest of us.

But unfortunately, it's like, as a country, we married one of these guys. And he's changed. Oh, the seeds were there back in high school. Harmless. Half baked. But there.

Actually, wait. We've both changed. He thinks his wife. (*She curtsies*) He thinks I've been led astray by lefty media and I've become a Commie who wants to take his hard-earned money and give it to slackers. That I hate freedom and I want to kill babies and put microchips into everyone to make them gay. That I want to come into his house and take his guns. Well, that one is sort of true. Oh, and I hate God. And good Christian values. And I hate America.

I think he's intellectually lazy, calcified, a racist veiled as patriot, he hates anyone who doesn't look like him or talk like him, is convinced that there are large governmental conspiracies but can't imagine how systemic racism or discrimination can still be going on because if he has a setback or two, well, then, stuff is hard for him too, so he's discriminated against too. He strides around the kitchen, puffing out his chest and whining about how he's been so wronged, and honestly, I can't even look at him anymore without my skin crawling.

So. Is this marriage really working anymore?

Maybe, just maybe, after almost two hundred and fifty years, maybe it's time for a divorce? Amicable, yes! An informed parting of ways. Because isn't hanging on to this United States thing beginning to feel just a little bit desperate? Like, we're doing it for the kids? Is it really

LENNY (CONT'D)

working for either of us? Each partner thinks the other is beyond redemption. We have nothing in common. We could do therapy, but we all know what it would be. "You did this," countered by "But you did THAT!"

People break up all the time. So do countries. Couples remarry. Borders change. Look at a map from two, three hundred years ago. Hell, fifty years ago.

And aren't we all exhausted? Trying to make it work. Trying to understand the other guy. And who doesn't want to just say, "So go! You go and try that. But I'm tapping out. 'Cuz your plan? It's bullshit and I don't want any part of it." Yeah, it'll take a little doing. Separating finances. Who gets which house. Stuff like that. But maybe....it's time?

One more sidebar.

Martin Luther King. Now, I'm a fan. But his quote? "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." People love that one. It's always popping up on Facebook and Twitter. But do you see things getting more just? I don't. I see injustice exposed. But justice increasing? It's tricky, isn't it? All due respect to Dr. King. Truly. But isn't the arc of the universe really more like Whack-A-Mole? Injustice over here, BAM. Slap that down. But then, over here? Another injustice pops up. So, we go BAM over there. Then more over there. It doesn't seem to stop.

It's like the idea of reincarnation. Concept is, we die, we get reincarnated to get another chance to work out our baggage. Improve. Or pay any karmic debts we've racked up. But this presupposes that, eventually, humanity? Gets better. But does anyone see us getting any better? Is humanity, all of us, as a whole, are we all better than say, two thousand years ago? From what I'm seeing, I gotta say it's not looking real good. We really are a terrible species.

So maybe all we can do is to just keep slapping our down our terrible impulses. Maybe Whack-A-Mole is the best we're ever gonna do?

END SCENE EIGHT

SCENE NINE

LENNY

An unexpected development. As my fame increased, I began to miss my invisibility. Just a tad, mind you. But in the mornings especially, I just wanted to go about my business without having to help people navigate their opinions around their reactions to my opinions. So, bagel and coffee order placed, with no line jumpers this time, I wait.

Lenny pulls on a hoodie and pulls the hood up. She is now waiting for her coffee and bagel at her Starbucks. Asshole #2 enters. She sees Lenny, hesitates, and then approaches her.

ASSHOLE #2

Excuse me.

LENNY

Yes?

ASSHOLE #2

I think we sort of met, well, a few months ago. We, I, we cut in front of you in line.

LENNY

Oh. Yeah.

ASSHOLE #2

And you, well, you called us out on it. And you were right. It's been bothering me. More than it probably should have but....I'm glad to see you again because I've been wanting to....I just want to apologize.

LENNY

Why thank you. Apology accepted.

ASSHOLE #2

It was really rude.

LENNY

It was more sort of rude. Not really rude. About a 3 on the rudeness scale of 10.

ASSHOLE #2

Okay. Thanks. Yeah. You're right. These days, well, there's a lot of rudeness going around.

LENNY

Where's your friend?

ASSHOLE #2

Him? He's not my....we just work together. He's, well, you know.

LENNY

He sure is, "you know."

ASSHOLE #2

Yeah. Well....Sorry.

LENNY

Okay. Thank you.

Asshole #2 doesn't move.

ASSHOLE #2

Um, you know how sometimes, someone is an asshole? And it seems like it's what you're supposed to do, to be tough, or to get ahead. I think that that's what happened. But you were really right to call us on it.

LENNY

Thank you.

ASSHOLE #2

(To herself and Lenny)

I wish I was more like that. *(To Lenny)* You know. Calling shit out when it happens.

LENNY

It's not as hard as it looks. Although, it took me sixty years to really get the hang of it, so what do I know?

Asshole #2 goes to wait in line. After a moment, she crosses back to Lenny.

ASSHOLE #2

Hey. I'm early for work. After I get my coffee, do you want to join me at a table? I'm Susan, by the way.

LENNY

Lenny. Sure. I'd like that.

SUSAN

Great.

Susan stands still for a moment. Lenny waits.

SUSAN

Lenny, can I ask you a question?

LENNY

(Smiling, to Susan)

I'm right here.

Lenny looks at the audience. Then she snaps her fingers.

BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY