

THE PROFESSION

CHARACTERS

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| VALERIE HARDY - | Assistant professor of English, specialist in Renaissance literature, strong feminist. Late 30s-early 40s. Ethnicity open. |
| MARK TOWNSEND - | Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, PhD in Mathematics, no people skills -- the kind of man who somehow manages to twist people's words to suit his purposes. Secretly attracted to Valerie, but wouldn't act on it. 50s-60s, caucasian man. |
| PAUL STOCKTON - | Professor of Theology, seems to be a good guy, but is incredibly flawed; married with children. 40-45 years old, ethnicity open. |
| MARINA DEKKER - | Student, English major, lover of Renaissance literature, comes from a poor background, works for Dr. Hardy and is a stripper. 21 years old, ethnicity open. |
| FLINT - | Manager of The Cat Nip strip club; your basic asshole. Any adult age, ethnicity open. |
| LUCY - | Stripper and, confidante to Marina. 35-40 years old, ethnicity open. |
| JILL CARTER - | Chair of English. She is an opportunist. 60+ years old, ethnicity open. |

Doubling: Flint and Mark may be doubled.

SETTING

The play should be performed on a mostly blank stage with minimal props. There is no expectation that each space will be fully developed in performance. A traditional wooden desk (on casters) is indicated for all locations, with small differences in positioning and props. But a designer can feel free to do whatever they want.

A town in Midwestern America

TIME

2019

Props

Envelope with letter
Cell phones - 3
Paradise Lost by John Milton
Complete Works of Shakespeare anthology
Paper schedule for the Cat Nip
Makeup brushes and makeup
Mirror
Hair brushes
Photocopier
Marina's Backpack
Library books
Cash (bills)
Fliers (pink) for the protest
Cardboard boxes

SCENES

1.1 - In Valerie's Shakespeare Classroom (Valerie, Mark)
1.2 - In the hall (Valerie, Paul, Marina)
1.3 - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Marina)
1.4 - In the Cat Nip Gentlemen's Club (Marina, Flint)
1.5 - In the Cat Nip - dressing area (Marina, Lucy)
1.6A - In the Cat Nip (Marina, Paul)
1.6B - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Jill)
1.7 - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Paul, Marina)
1.8 - In the Cat Nip - dressing area (Marina, Lucy)
1.9 - In the Cat Nip (Marina, Paul)
1.10 - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Marina, Mark)
1.11 - In the Cat Nip (Mark, Lucy)

Act 2

2.1A - In Valerie's Classroom (Valerie)

2.1B - In the Hallway (Paul, Marina)

2.2 - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Mark, Jill)

2.3 - In the Cat Nip - dressing area (Marina, Lucy)

2.4 - In Valerie's Office (Marina, Valerie, Paul)

2.5 - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Marina)

2.6A - In the Hallway (Valerie, Paul)

2.6B - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Mark, Paul)

2.7 - In the Cat Nip (Flint, Marina, Valerie)

2.8 - Outside the Cat Nip (Marina, Paul)

2.9 - In Valerie's Office (Valerie, Marina)

ACT 1

SCENE 1

(Dark stage. A copy machine / printer is center stage, and in the silence, a copy is made. We see the light from the copier flash in the darkness.)

(Lights up on Valerie's Shakespeare class. Valerie stands upstage behind a wooden desk with casters for easy movement. A lectern is on the desk. Valerie is teaching the play *Troilus and Cressida*.)

VALERIE: The men are not particularly heroic figures in this play. Instead, Shakespeare portrays them with candid disillusionment. Now, it's interesting to compare the roles of the men and the women. While the Greek and Trojan men are free to philosophize and argue, as they do in Act 2, the women, particularly Helen of Troy and Cressida, can never escape their roles as handmaidens to masculine pleasure.

(Enter Mark)

VALERIE (Continued): Can I help you, Dr. Townsend?

MARK: Just here to observe. Please, continue.

VALERIE (Continued): Okay. . . (to herself) Where was I? (To audience as if they're students) Women may be the center of the universe in the Trojan War, but what that also means is that they're surrounded. Shakespeare infects *Troilus and Cressida* with the feverish realization that, for women, the Trojan War has never really ended. Who controls women's bodies? And who controls women's destinies? Even today, these questions are all too relevant.

(VALERIE looks at her watch.)

VALERIE (Continued): So we'll be thinking about all that for next time. We'll make some connections to Lucretia as well, so

review your notes on the ekphrastic portion of *The Rape of Lucrece*. (Sounds of students starting to pack up. Valerie calls after them) Make sure you read the rest of *Troilus and Cressida* on break. We'll have an in-class writing assignment when we come back on Monday. All right? Have a good break. . .

(Class is over. MARK approaches VALERIE with a slow clap.)

MARK: Fascinating class.

VALERIE: Thanks, Mark. Hey, I've been meaning to drop by --

MARK: I thought you'd ignored my email.

VALERIE: No, no. I was hoping we could get together during spring break.

MARK: When your boss tells you to come to his office, you come.

VALERIE: You said, "Pop by when you have a moment," so I didn't think it was an emergency.

MARK: Well -- spring break is contract time for me.

VALERIE: Yes. And I have a lot of papers to grade.

MARK: We're always so busy anymore. I was lucky -- I got into academia before it went to hell.

VALERIE: Hell is where all the fun people live. But anyway, I have a student meeting that I need to get to, so do you want/ to talk later?

MARK: /I'll be brief. I've been running numbers for Humanities departments, and there has been quite a downturn in major enrollment over the last five years.

VALERIE: Really? We just got that report from the provost that undergraduate enrollment has gone up 26%.

MARK: Most of those are science and math students on scholarship. Tuition is fairly stagnant.

VALERIE: Are we in trouble?

MARK: No--not yet, anyway. But. . . the number of young people is falling nation-wide. That will certainly impact our budgets, so we need to think of ways to save money.

VALERIE: Okay. . .

MARK: The number of English majors is down 7%.

VALERIE: That can't be right. The number of English majors has increased in the years that I've been here.

MARK: I'm talking nation wide -- down 7% nation wide. The trend lines are down, the expectations are down, the number of majors is down, the generated student credit hours are down. And we can't count on enrollment improving, so we're having to consider numbers when evaluating tenure applications.

VALERIE: National numbers weren't a part of the application criteria. I just had to report on my scholarship, teaching, and service.

MARK: And you were unanimously supported by the Promotion and Tenure committee based on your strengths as a faculty person. But based on the second criteria in the handbook, which is the "needs and conditions of the department," the Board, with the recommendation of the President and the Provost, decided that there wasn't a need – not sufficient need – for another tenured faculty member in English.

VALERIE: Are you telling me that I'm being denied tenure?

MARK: Yes. I have a letter here for you from the president.
(MARK hands VALERIE an envelope.)

VALERIE: I don't understand how this is possible. I exceeded expectations in all areas. You wrote a letter of recommendation for me!

MARK: Look, the board wants to know why we're supporting a product line that has a declining market and we can't make much money on.

VALERIE: (Astounded) Why should you support the *English*

department? To support the mission of the institution!
We're a liberal arts college.

MARK: I hear that. But undergraduate enrollment only accounts for thirty percent of our income at this point, and there's no graduate degree in English.

VALERIE: We've been talking about creating one.

MARK: But there isn't one now. We have to make decisions based on information we have today.

VALERIE: What about retirements? All our tenured faculty are due to retire in the next five to ten years.

MARK: But they never *have* to retire, and we're not allowed to ask them when they will.

VALERIE: I know Jill is retiring soon. She's talked about it for years -- ever since I was hired, in fact.

MARK: If we had the information, maybe it would have made some difference, but I can't guarantee it.

VALERIE: Listen, tenure denial is a huge red flag. When I was teaching part-time, I saw this happen to people, and they never got academic jobs again. You *know* this is going to ruin my career.

MARK: That's not necessarily true. We'll write recommendations for you.

VALERIE: Nobody is going to believe them. Academia is a small world, Mark. I've never heard of anyone being denied tenure because of national statistics in a major. People are going to know something else is behind this.

MARK: It's just numbers. We can get two adjuncts to teach your classes for a quarter of what you make in salary and benefits.

VALERIE: With that rationale, the university doesn't need any full-time professors at all.

MARK: I'm just the messenger, okay? You'll be given a terminal

contract, so you can still teach next year. That will give you time to apply for other jobs.

VALERIE: It took me *five years* of applications to get *this* job.

MARK : There's nothing I can do. Sorry.

VALERIE: This is about what happened last fall, isn't it?

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

VALERIE: Oh come on.

MARK: Don't you have a student meeting you need to get to?

VALERIE: How am I supposed to meet with a student when I've just been told I'm getting fired?

MARK: I'm sorry. Next time you get an email from your boss, maybe come by sooner so you don't have to worry about that.

(Exit Mark.)

ACT 1

SCENE 2

(Valerie starts to walk to her office. Paul enters and starts fiddling with the copy machine. He notices her.)

PAUL: Hey, Val. Everything okay?

VALERIE: Not really. Is the copier jammed again?

PAUL: Yeah. I got through a few copies before it crapped out, as usual.

VALERIE: Let me look at it. (Starts to take the copier apart.) If anything worked around here, I don't know what I'd do.

PAUL: So what's wrong?

VALERIE: Well, I just had a meeting with Mark. He came to my Shakespeare class to corner me.

PAUL: Oh no. Why?

VALERIE: I'm being denied tenure.

PAUL: What?

VALERIE: Yeah. I'm furious. I don't know what's gotten into this place.

PAUL: Data and money.

VALERIE: It's always money.

PAUL: But now they have data to back up their arguments.

VALERIE: Higher ed has become some kind of capitalist hellscape. All the corporate goons care about is the college-to-job pipeline. They don't give a damn about literature, art, music -- or anything important that that doesn't fit on a number line.

PAUL: (Sarcastically) There's no value in reading or writing, is there?

VALERIE: What can we expect when *football* is our best recruitment tool?

PAUL: You're not a fan of the St. Sebastian Arrows?

VALERIE: Didn't arrows kill St. Sebastian?

PAUL: He survived the arrows. He was beaten to death.

VALERIE: Sounds like football. Sports might bring in a lot of money, but they don't bring in a lot of English majors.

PAUL: Or Theology majors. I know.

VALERIE: At least Catholic schools can't get rid of Theology professors.

PAUL: You'd think that. But I had a meeting with Mark a few days ago, too. They made me a buyout offer.

VALERIE: Seriously? Didn't you just get promoted last spring?

PAUL: Yeah.

VALERIE: How does that feel? "Here's a promotion, and by the way, we want you to leave!"

PAUL: It doesn't feel great.

VALERIE: What are you going to do?

PAUL: I'm not sure. They said it's "optional," whatever that means.

VALERIE: It means they're prolonging the inevitable.

PAUL: It's tempting. They offered me three years' salary.

VALERIE: Three years? Jesus, you'd think they could keep me if they're throwing around that kind of money.

PAUL: It's enough to send my kids to college, which is the main reason I've stayed in the profession--the free tuition thing.

VALERIE: Yeah, I'll be losing that, too. My poor kids. I've been too busy paying off my own college to save for theirs.

PAUL: I'm shocked you haven't moved to another university.

VALERIE: I got tired of moving around so much when I was an adjunct. Besides, the job market is completely dried up.

PAUL: It isn't great in Theology either.

VALERIE: (Closes up the copier) Here. Try it now.

PAUL: (It works, and starts spitting out pink fliers) Oh great. Thanks.

VALERIE: What's with the pink? Is it "breast cancer awareness" month or something?

PAUL: No, this is for campus ministry's pro-life event coming up after break. The students would have to pay for copies, so I said I'd make them.

VALERIE: Ugh. In the future, give the students a temporary code and let them do their own dirty work.

PAUL: (Laughs) Thanks for your help.

VALERIE: You're *kind of* welcome.

(Enter MARINA)

MARINA: Hi, Dr. Hardy. Oh. Sorry to interrupt.

VALERIE: Oh Marina. I'm so sorry -- I'm totally running late to meet with you.

MARINA: It's okay. Should we reschedule?

VALERIE: No, no. It's fine.

PAUL: Hey, Marina. You're in class with me *and* Dr. Hardy this semester? You poor kid.

MARINA: I decided to take the Milton class. Taking Shakespeare with Dr. Hardy got me hooked on the Renaissance.

PAUL: What are you reading now?

MARINA: *Paradise Lost*. I love it. It's about Adam and Eve and Satan and all these devils. And man, the language. Oh my God,

it's . . . mouthwatering.

PAUL: You must be doing a good job, Val, to inspire such passion for the fall of man.

VALERIE: I try.

PAUL: Well, I'd better get these copies sorted out. Some of these aren't mine.

VALERIE: See you later, Paul.

(VALERIE and MARINA start moving toward the desk, which will be VALERIE'S office.)

MARINA: (To Valerie) So last night, I was thinking, "What if *Paradise Lost* is a satire about God being an asshole?"

PAUL: (Overhears Marina and laughs) Yeah, she's your student.

MARINA: (Aside) Oh shit . . .

VALERIE: Have a good spring break if I don't see you before, Paul.

PAUL: You, too, Val.

(PAUL gathers his copies and exits)

ACT 1

SCENE 3

VALERIE and MARINA sit at the wooden desk.)

- MARINA: I always love coming to your office. You have so many books.
- VALERIE: There are twice this many at home. Part of being a scholar is building your own library.
- MARINA: I don't know if I'll ever be a *scholar*.
- VALERIE: Writers have to be just as analytical as they are creative. And you asked a good analytical question in the hallway.
- MARINA: I can't believe I said that in front of my *Theology* professor!
- VALERIE: "Is God an asshole?" is an excellent scholarly question. You had to have read *Paradise Lost*--and understood it--to have asked.
- MARINA: I'm sorry if that offended you.
- VALERIE: Heavens no, I'm not a religious person. Paul is probably less skeptical, being a Theology professor and all.
- MARINA: I just I feel like, a lot of times, God is screwing with people. (*In character as an "asshole God"*) "Here's this amazing tree, but don't eat from it!" . . . "Oh, Abraham, if you're *really* loyal to me, you'll cut off your foreskin." . . . "Nah, not good enough. Now you have to kill your son!" . . . "Just kidding!"
- VALERIE: You're making a compelling case for "God's an asshole."
- MARINA: I'm surprised I like this book so much. I'm not religious at all.
- VALERIE: (Indicating her large Shakespeare anthology) Shakespeare is my bible. Every now and then, I just open it up and see what he's got to say to me.

(Valerie opens her Shakespeare book and reads aloud.)

VALERIE (Continued): (Smirks) “The time of miracles is past. . .”
See? Even Shakespeare doesn’t recommend religion.

MARINA: (Laughs, then digs copies out of her bag) By the way, I
have those copies for you. (Hands over papers) I also have
some library books you asked me to pick up.

(MARINA hands over books.)

VALERIE: Oh great. I’ve been waiting for this one! My new book is
about Shakespeare’s subversion of the Bible.

MARINA: I would love to read that.

VALERIE: (Amused) You and two other people in the world.

MARINA: No, seriously. That would be incredible.

VALERIE: You could take a look at my book proposal if you want.

MARINA: Really? I would love that.

VALERIE: I’ll be here every day during spring break if you want to
talk about it.

MARINA: Well, I’m hoping to work at my other job a lot. I’m short on
my final tuition bill of the year, so I really need the cash.

VALERIE: Oh boy.

MARINA: Yeah, but I work nights, so I could come by in the morning
sometime.

VALERIE: Okay. Shoot me some times that you think will work.

MARINA: I will. Thanks, Dr. Hardy.

(MARINA moves away from the desk but
stays on stage. Exit VALERIE)

ACT 1

SCENE 4

(Enter FLINT, who goes to the copier. MARINA approaches him. We are now at the Cat Nip Gentlemen's club.)

MARINA: Hey, Flint. You wanted to see me?

FLINT: Hey, kid, yeah.

MARINA: Everything okay?

FLINT: Yeah. It's just--goddamn this copier. It's always stuck.

MARINA: Want me to look at it?

FLINT: If you think you can fix it.

MARINA: (Pulls paper out) Is this the copy of the schedule?

FLINT: Yeah, for next week. It's a mess.

MARINA: Why?

FLINT: Spring break is next week.

MARINA: Yeah. I was hoping to be here every day, if that's okay.

FLINT: Problem is, this town empties out during spring break. There's no money in it.

MARINA: Oh.

FLINT: You ain't been here long enough to know how it goes--the college empties out, and there goes half the money.

MARINA: There's always the regulars.

FLINT: There ain't enough to spread around.

MARINA: Look, Flint, I really need to make money next week. I'm short about two thousand dollars for tuition.

FLINT: You thought you were going to make two grand during the driest week of the year? You'd have to do *a lot more* than shake your ass for that. Of course, there's always that

possibility . . . (Marina is shocked, but doesn't want to show it.) I'd pay a lot for a taste of that ass.

MARINA: (Nervous) You would, hunh?

FLINT: If it was for sale. Just think about it.

MARINA: (Presses button, and the copier works.) Well, the copier works anyway.

FLINT: (Hands her a photocopy of the schedule) Monday and Thursday, got it?

MARINA: Nothing on the weekend?

FLINT: (Shakes his head.) You always work weekends. Give the other girls a chance.

MARINA: None of them work harder than me.

FLINT: Work hard? Shit.

MARINA: Come on, Flint. You can't afford to lose me, right?

FLINT: Sure I can. There'll always be desperate girls banging down my door.

MARINA: Flint, really, I'll do anything.

FLINT: No, you won't. And that's the problem.

(Exit FLINT.)

ACT 1

SCENE 5

(MARINA moves the desk to center stage as LUCY enters, grabs a wheeled chair and puts it at the desk. LUCY sits, opens a drawer, and pulls out makeup and a mirror on a stand. She starts freshening her make-up, as MARINA watches. We are now in the dressing room of the Cat Nip.)

LUCY: Aren't you supposed to be on stage soon?

MARINA: Hey, Lucy. I got held up talking to Flint.

LUCY: Schedule?

MARINA: Yeah. I don't know what I'm going to do. He's only giving me two days next week -- no time on the weekend.

LUCY: Spring break. The worst week of the year.

MARINA: I thought it would be just the opposite!

LUCY: This motherfucker is a ghost town on spring break -- with the exception of a few professors who *only* come in on breaks. But I've been doing this for fifteen years, and yeah, spring break is shit.

MARINA: Fifteen years?

LUCY: Mm hm.

MARINA: I don't know that my knees would last that long.

LUCY: That's why they play the music loud. So they can't hear our creaky knees.

MARINA: Lucy?

LUCY: Yeah?

MARINA: What do you do when it's slow?

LUCY: Prioritize.

MARINA: I can't really cut any more corners.

LUCY: There are other ways to make money.

MARINA: I need a lot all at once. I have rent, tuition/

LUCY: Honey, you're not the only girl who needs to pay bills around here. Some of us have more pressing things to pay for than tuition.

MARINA: What, drugs?

LUCY: Baby formula. Diapers. Clothes for growing kids. Adult expenses. And yeah, sometimes drugs. I'm surprised a good girl like you can do a job like this without being fucked up.

MARINA: I feel like I need to be pretty aware of what I'm doing when I'm here. I wouldn't feel safe if I didn't.

LUCY: That's what bouncers are for.

MARINA: Do you think anyone would trade me shifts so I could get a weekend night?

LUCY: I doubt it. Just give up some of that schoolgirl booty, and you'll make your money.

MARINA: I don't know.

LUCY: Look, a lot of girls can't see themselves stripping. But everybody has sex. It's way easier fucking somebody than dancing in front of them. Just think of it as a one-night stand that you get paid for.

MARINA: But -- I kinda think it would do something to me.

LUCY: Shit. If you were really worried about that, you never would have started working here.

(Exit Lucy)

MARINA: I'd better get ready.

(MARINA starts to change clothes, then stops and crosses to look off stage to watch LUCY do her routine. The audience cannot see LUCY, but MARINA can.)

MARINA (CONTINUED): God. Fifteen years.

(Enter FLINT.)

FLINT: (Indicating MARINA watching LUCY) You taking notes or something?

MARINA: Lucy's really good.

FLINT: She should be running the joint -- (indicating schedule) then I wouldn't have to deal with this bullshit. Are you taking Monday and Thursday or not?

MARINA: Yeah, if that's all you have.

FLINT: Don't sweat it. Business'll pick back up.

MARINA: I hope so.

FLINT: Better get on stage, babe. Make some money while you can.

(FLINT moves desk stage left and EXITS.
MARINA finishes getting dressed, and
heads to center stage.)

ACT 1

SCENE 6.A

(PAUL enters and sits at the desk, watching MARINA. She starts her exotic dance routine, center stage, taking off layers of clothing, one piece at a time. Paul watches Marina. They recognize each other. Marina hesitates, until he holds out money. She moves toward him, and he tips her. Emboldened, Marina continues her routine without shame. Once finished, Marina exits. Paul follows her off. Enter Jill and Valerie.)

ACT 1

SCENE 6.B

- JILL: No. Enrollment was never considered in tenure before, let alone national figures.
- VALERIE: I feel like I've been blindsided. How am I supposed to do anything about data outside St. Sebastian?
- JILL: You can't really.
- VALERIE: Jill, you're my chair. Isn't there anything you can do to help me?
- JILL: Well, let me think on it, but if the administration has decided against you, I'm not sure there's anything I can say to change their mind.
- VALERIE: You know, when I was hired six years ago, you said you were going to retire in 2016. That was three years ago.
- JILL: Who can afford to retire?
- VALERIE: It's just. . . if the administration knew that you were leaving, it might help me. You and Karen have been talking about retirement for a long time.
- JILL: I'm too old to fall on my sword, Val. I don't have anyone to take care of me. You at least have a husband.

VALERIE: Frank is a freelancer. We never know what his income is going to be month to month. My job provides our health insurance.

JILL: You could always teach high school.

VALERIE: Is that what you would do?

JILL: (Appalled) No, of course not. Look, get on Obamacare. Teach a couple of writing classes at the community college. Rebuild your reputation. In a couple of years, you'll be ready for the tenure track again, and maybe some jobs will open up.

VALERIE: Nothing opens up if tenured professors refuse to retire.

JILL: Well, I guess you should have thought about that before you publicly criticized the administration last fall.

VALERIE: They changed the entire structure of the colleges without consulting the faculty. I was standing up for Humanities.

JILL: That's not your place. If I so much as rolled my eyes in the late '80s, I would have been denied tenure. I know you think you're special, that your ideals are more important than being a team player. But I can tell you this: You don't play the game? You don't stay in the game.

VALERIE: Games don't belong in a university. We're supposed to have the ability to debate and criticize without fear of retaliation.

JILL: And how do you think I got to where I am? Healthy debate? Jesus.

VALERIE: I just want to do my job and do what's best for our students. And what? That makes me naive? I didn't see any tenured faculty speaking up.

JILL: The rest of us know which way the winds blow. Your attempts to save the Humanities, albeit noble, were misguided. The provost wouldn't even know you existed if you hadn't called out Mark. You could have skated through here with half of your accomplishments. But what did

you do? You went outside the hierarchy, went outside the norms. You called your dean incompetent in front of the whole faculty.

VALERIE: You agreed with me!

JILL: Privately. Sure. But if you wanted tenure, you should have kept your mouth shut.

VALERIE: And then what? Just keep my mouth shut like you and all the other tenured faculty?

JILL: You think tenure protects people from retaliation?

VALERIE: I think someone who has the courage to tell the truth can stand up against retaliation.

JILL: Well, one of us has a permanent job, and one of us doesn't. Which do you think is better?

(Exit JILL. Valerie remains.)

ACT 1

SCENE 7

(Enter Paul, distracted)

VALERIE: How's your break going?

PAUL: Good. Good enough anyway.

VALERIE: I'm finally caught up on grading.

PAUL: I wish I were. But, hey, I got some news yesterday.

VALERIE: Oh? What's that?

PAUL: I've been offered a visiting professorship at Ohio State.

VALERIE: You're going from associate professor to visiting professor?

PAUL: It's being offered as a trial. If they like me, they'll keep me on at associate rank the following year.

VALERIE: And if they don't like you?

PAUL: Then, I guess I'll find something else.

VALERIE: Don't be like one of those Catholic priests who hopscotch from parish to parish, Paul. People will start to talk.

PAUL: I've done all the good I can do here. We're a Catholic school, but nobody gives a damn about the Theology department. It strikes me as blasphemous.

VALERIE: Are Laura and the kids excited?

PAUL: They. . . well, they aren't coming.

VALERIE: Oh, Paul.

PAUL: Maybe a break will do us some good.

VALERIE: (About his family) I'm so sorry, Paul.

(Enter MARINA.)

MARINA: (Surprised.) Hi, Dr. Hardy!

VALERIE: Hi, Marina. Did you need to see Dr. Stockton?

MARINA: Oh, I just thought I'd say hi. How's it going?

PAUL: (Affected) Good! You?

MARINA: (Affected) Great!

PAUL: Great! Well. . .

MARINA: Actually, Dr. Hardy, did you want to talk about that book proposal?

VALERIE: Yes! I have time if you do. (To Paul) Let me know if you need anything.

PAUL: If the copier busts, I know who to come to.
(VALERIE and MARINA move the desk center stage and sit facing each other as PAUL exits.)

MARINA: (Clears throat) So how is your break going?

VALERIE: Good. Let me pull up this proposal for you.

MARINA: Yeah, I'd love to see it.
(VALERIE pulls a laptop out of a drawer, opens it and starts looking through documents.)

VALERIE: So usually you start out with the statement of aims, which essentially is where you share your goals and clearly outline your argument. Here's a little bit from the intro.
(Valerie hands over the laptop to Marina.)

MARINA: (Reading aloud) "When Shakespeare uses the prodigal son parable as a metaphor, he makes clear that those who sin can be forgiven, but their faults will most certainly not be forgotten." Do you really think that?

VALERIE: In Shakespeare's history plays, absolutely.

MARINA: What about in real life?

VALERIE: Recently, I've felt like people remember your sins more than your merits.

MARINA: Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it all works out in the end.

Milton makes the fall of man beautiful -- a fortunate fall.

VALERIE: (Sighs) Yeah, I know.

MARINA: Is *Milton* wrong?

VALERIE: It would be nice if we didn't have to be damned in order to be saved.

MARINA: I don't know. *Paradise Lost* gives me a lot of hope.

VALERIE: That's part of the point of studying literature. There isn't a lot of fairness and justice in life, but in literature, we can see a world of possibilities.

MARINA: I'm not sure what my possibilities are going to be after St. Sebastian.

VALERIE: You mean, in terms of a job?

MARINA: Well, yeah.

VALERIE: It used to be that college wasn't about *job training*. Not unless you were going to be a nurse or accountant -- or something else that led to a very specific profession. I wish students saw the value of learning for learning's sake.

MARINA: The value is \$60,000 a year. So I'd better get a job after this.

VALERIE: Of course you'll get a job. You just might have to have a few terrible jobs before you find the right one.

MARINA: Don't college graduates make more money and have more success than people who don't go to college?

VALERIE: There are studies that make that argument, sure.

MARINA: So isn't college a good *strategy* for my eventual career?

VALERIE: Strategy is not the same as an education. If you want to be a writer, you need to be far more interested in asking questions --

MARINA: Like, whether you're better off being a *sinner* or a *saint*? I *am* interested in that question.

VALERIE: In what way?

MARINA: Eve eats the forbidden fruit, but in the end, she's better off. Without that choice, there would have been no salvation. Even if you don't believe in God, it's got to give you chills.

VALERIE: I guess that depends on how you feel about being subjugated by men.

MARINA: Maybe I subjugate them. Hypothetically speaking.
(Valerie laughs)

MARINA (Continued): But I get Eve. She risks death for knowledge. I'd much rather know the depths of good and evil than be an innocent nobody.

VALERIE: You've thought about this a lot.

MARINA: *Paradise Lost* was a lightbulb moment for me. Eve's disobedience was inevitable. Humans are too curious to stay ignorant forever. They would have eaten from the tree eventually. If her sin was a catalyst for salvation, that really clarifies the benefits of sinning.
(Valerie laughs, but Marina is dead serious.)

VALERIE: Marina, in theory, that's all fine and good. But you should never let *Milton* justify doing something that you *know* is stupid.

MARINA: (Smirks) Noted.

VALERIE: I'm sorry. I shouldn't make any assumptions.

MARINA: It's whatever. (Beat) Anyway, I gotta go. Send me the rest of the proposal, okay?
(MARINA pulls the desk away from VALERIE, and sets it to where the dressing room of the Cat Nip is. VALERIE looks abashed and exits.)

ACT 1

SCENE 8

MARINA sits at the mirror, pulls out make-up and a mirror, and starts to get ready for her routine. LUCY enters, wearing a silk robe, having just come off the dance floor.)

- LUCY: Decent tips tonight.
- MARINA: Good. I have to pay rent. And tuition. God. . .
- LUCY: The guy on the right side of the stage in the blue shirt -- look out for him. He tried to put his hand where it didn't belong.
- MARINA: Did you tell Flint?
- LUCY: He saw it and warned the guy, but still, watch out.
(LUCY moves to the desk, opens a drawer, and pulls out clothes for her next routine.)
- MARINA: Lucy, why did you start working as a dancer?
- LUCY: Why does anybody start? Money.
- MARINA: Yeah, I guess.
- LUCY: I had my son early on. I had to find some way to pay the rent and take care of him. Not like his daddy stuck around to help.
- MARINA: I wish my dad hadn't stuck around.
- LUCY: We've all got daddy issues, girl. What'd that motherfucker do to you?
- MARINA: My folks were mean drunks -- always telling me and my sister Helen we'd never be anything but whores. Guess they were right about me.
- LUCY: Girl, fuck that. You're going to college.
- MARINA: My dad used to make us get on our knees and beg him for money when we needed it. Like, we'd have to kneel between his legs and say, "Please, Daddy, give me what I need."

LUCY: That is *fucked up*.

MARINA: Well. It was good stripper training anyway.

LUCY: Yeah.

MARINA: He . . . he would get hard, and . . . you know. I don't know about my sister -- if he ever . . . We never talked about it.

LUCY: Maybe you should.

MARINA: I'm not sure she'd want to. We didn't always get along. My dad used to say she was the pretty one; I was the smart one. They pitted us against each other a lot.

LUCY: What's she doing now? Your sister.

MARINA: She ran away during my sophomore year in high school. Now, she lives about three hours south of here. I can't blame her. I haven't been home in two years.

LUCY: You know, you should ask your sister what happened to her.

MARINA: I'm not sure I want to know.

LUCY: Maybe you *already* know, "smart one." Being the "pretty one" ain't all it's cracked up to be.

(Exit LUCY.)

ACT 1

SCENE 9

(Enter PAUL, who sits at the desk in the Cat Nip. MARINA pulls up a chair to sit next to him.)

- MARINA: Hey, Paul. How's your night going?
- PAUL: It's getting better all the time.
- MARINA: That's sweet of you.
- PAUL: So do you think Dr. Hardy noticed there was a little moment between us earlier?
- MARINA: No, she'd never think anything bad about you.
- PAUL: Did she tell you I've decided to leave St. Sebastian?
- MARINA: Aw. But you *just* started to come see me dance.
- PAUL: I was really surprised to see you here.
- MARINA: I know. I seem so innocent, don't I?
- PAUL: I just thought I would have heard about it if a student was working here. College towns are full of gossip.
- MARINA: You'd think that, but I think the "Bro-code" keeps a lid on it.
- PAUL: What do you mean?
- MARINA: I see guys from school here all the time, but I guess they don't want to say anything about me because they'd have to admit they were here, too.
- PAUL: Well, I won't tell. But between the two of us -- who comes in? Professors?
- MARINA: Sometimes. A lot of students.
- PAUL: That's easy to believe.
- MARINA: The guy from financial aid comes in just about every week. Kinda convenient. I don't have to go to his office and wait

in line. Not that it gets me any favors, unfortunately.

PAUL: My boss doesn't come in does he?

MARINA: What's he look like? Older guy?

PAUL: Yeah. He's gotta be in his sixties. (Pulls out a cell phone)
He's on the website. (Taps around on the phone, then holds
it out to Marina.) Yeah, this is him.

MARINA: Oh yeah. I've seen him in here a few times.

PAUL: That guy is such an asshole. I can't believe no one's ratted
him out.

MARINA: See? None of the men who come here are going to talk
about you. And if I ratted you out, you wouldn't come to
see me. (Laying it on thick) That would break my little
heart.

PAUL: There are plenty of other guys . . .

MARINA: None like you.

PAUL: You're just saying that.

MARINA: Aw come on, Paul. You're a great professor. You're so
passionate about conversion stories. It makes me want to be
bad.

PAUL: If only my wife felt that way.

MARINA: Aw. Poor Paul. You deserve to be treated nice.

PAUL: I do, don't I?

MARINA: Wanna get a private dance?

PAUL: How much?

MARINA: Eighty.

PAUL: That's a lot for just a dance.

MARINA: Maybe I could give you the friends-and-professors discount
if you buy two.

PAUL: If I'm gonna buy two, I might as well ask for your *other* rates.

MARINA: Other rates?

PAUL: A lot of these girls have rates for *other* services.

MARINA: Sounds like you've been naughty.

PAUL: I've had to supplement since I'm so neglected at home.

MARINA: What did you have in mind?

PAUL: Ever since I saw you dancing the first time, I've been wondering if you're . . . you know. . . in the, uh, oldest profession.

MARINA: (Sexy) Really?

PAUL: You're the full package. . . incredibly hot. Intelligent, luscious. . .

MARINA: (It should be clear that Marina's reactions to Paul are part of her *act*.) Mmmm. I'm so flattered.

PAUL: What do you say? I have money -- I can get more if I need to.

MARINA: Uhm. . . Okay. I get off in about an hour.

PAUL: Perfect. I'll stay and watch.

MARINA: Where should we go?

PAUL: I know a place.

MARINA: Mmmm. Can't wait.

PAUL: Me either.

(MARINA gives PAUL a soft kiss, then exits, as if to do a routine off stage. Enter MARK. MARK sees PAUL and nods to him. MARK sits next to Paul. They don't look at each other again. LUCY enters and begins a routine as they watch.)

ACT 1

SCENE 10

(Exit PAUL, MARK, and LUCY together.
MARINA enters and moves the desk back
to VALERIE'S office location, stage right.
Enter VALERIE - she wheels a chair from
the Cat Nip to her area and sits at the desk.)

- MARINA: Hey Dr. Hardy. Any work for me today?
- VALERIE: (Startled) Oh. Yes. I could use someone to make copies for me. No big rush -- today or tomorrow is fine.
- MARINA: Sure. I have class with Paul -- Dr. Stockton -- in a few minutes, but I can do it afterward.
- VALERIE: Great. I'll leave some books in your mailbox.
- MARINA: Okay. How is your book coming?
- VALERIE: It's all right. I've been pretty distracted lately.
- MARINA: I was meaning to ask you -- I'm thinking about writing my senior paper on Milton, and since that's your class, I wanted to know if you'd be the chair of my thesis committee.
- VALERIE: I would. But I don't think I can.
- MARINA: Oh. Okay.
- VALERIE: I don't know if I'm going to be coming back next year.
- MARINA: What? You're kidding.
- VALERIE: No, I'm very serious.
- MARINA: Why?
- VALERIE: Well, I've been denied tenure. That means I'm being fired.
- MARINA: No way. That's impossible. You have to fight this.
- VALERIE: I am. I wrote a very thorough appeal, but I think I just made the administration even more angry.

MARINA: Can I write a letter for your appeal? I'll go talk to people.
Whose office do I go to?

VALERIE: I don't really know that you can do anything.

MARINA: Don't just give up. The students need you.

VALERIE: If it were up to me, I'd stay until I retired, believe me.

MARINA: Can't you sue them?

VALERIE: I talked to a lawyer, but they said it looks pretty grim. They said it's practically impossible to win tenure cases. Judges and juries think that schools are better equipped to make these sorts of decisions than courts.

MARINA: But if they make the wrong decision, what recourse do you have?

VALERIE: Not much.

MARINA: That's completely unfair.

VALERIE: Yeah. I know.

(Enter MARK. He and MARINA notice each other. MARK takes a second to compose himself, then enters VALERIE's space.)

MARK: Sorry to interrupt. Could I speak to you, Dr. Hardy?

VALERIE: Sure. Marina, could we talk later?

MARINA: Yeah. Of course.

(Exit MARINA, dejected.)

MARK: I forwarded your appeal to the provost.

VALERIE: Thanks.

MARK: There's nothing more I can do about it. All the administration cares about is simple data. Charts and graphs don't lie.

VALERIE: Is there a chart for the numbers of lives I've changed?

MARK: There's a chart for how many English majors graduate and get jobs in their field. That's not in your favor.

VALERIE: Some of them go to graduate school.

MARK: So what? You said yourself there aren't any jobs in your field. For twenty years, we've lured students in with the promise of better jobs and higher salaries. But English doesn't provide those sorts of things. You have more graduates working at Starbucks than anything else.

VALERIE: It's not our fault if students can't get jobs immediately.

MARK: Students think it is. And they've wised up. You're never going to have the number of majors you used to have. You can't. So cut your losses, hold your head high, like Paul Stockton, and leave with dignity.

VALERIE: How dignified is it to discuss personnel decisions?

MARK: Paul's made it public that he's leaving. He's taking the buyout.

VALERIE: I guess you made him see the writing on the wall. A Catholic school doesn't create jobs for Theology majors, right?

MARK: Look, I know you have one more year left with your terminal contract, but if I were you, I'd negotiate with the provost to leave at the end of this school year. Think of how difficult it will be to come to work every day next year, knowing that you're being fired. They might let you have a year's salary and your insurance. It's not unprecedented.

VALERIE: My appeal hasn't been decided yet. I'm not talking to the provost until it is.

MARK: You know you're never winning this appeal. You're going to have one more year of teaching, and then you'll be done.

VALERIE: Sounds like you've made up your mind.

MARK: It's not about me. The president wants to clear out dead wood.

VALERIE: Dead wood? Mark, I have given my *soul* to this school.

MARK: You can keep your soul. We didn't ask for it.

(EXIT MARK.)

ACT 1

SCENE 11

(Mark enters the Cat Nip. Enter Lucy.)

LUCY: Hey, handsome. You look like you could use a little company.

MARK: It's been one of those days.

LUCY: Wanna talk about it?

MARK: Not especially.

LUCY: All right.

MARK: So. Do you use your real names here?

LUCY: Not usually.

MARK: What's your name?

LUCY: What do you want it to be?

MARK: Hmm. . . Could I call you "Valerie"?

LUCY: Sure. That's a pretty name.

MARK: All right, Valerie.

LUCY: Should I call you something special?

MARK: Just Dr. Townsend.

LUCY: So, Dr. Townsend -- any interest in some special services tonight?

MARK: Actually, I did have something in mind, Valerie.

LUCY: A private dance?

MARK: I'm willing to pay more for something *really* special.

LUCY: Depends on what it is.

MARK: Number 1: I get to say, "Valerie, you are such a fucking bitch" as much as I want.

LUCY: Sounds like you have a problem with a girl named Valerie.

MARK: Number 2: I get to fuck you as hard as I want.

LUCY: Valerie has so much experience being a little bitch. I can take anything you dish out.

MARK: Anything?

LUCY: Anything.

MARK: Valerie, you're such a little slut.

LUCY: You like it, honey.

MARK: Don't fucking tell me what I like, Valerie. I'm the boss.

LUCY: You're the boss, Dr. Townsend. You're the boss.

MARK: Number 3. How much would you charge to let me choke you? For say, 5 seconds?

LUCY: I don't do that.

MARK: How about a thousand dollars?

LUCY: Five seconds?

MARK: Five seconds. Get whoever you want to watch. They can time it. But you're my bitch tonight, and I want you to act like you *love* being my bitch.

LUCY: Being a bitch is my specialty, baby.

MARK: Dr. Townsend, if you don't mind, Valerie, you fucking bitch.

LUCY: (Lucy signals to a bouncer offstage, indicating that she wants him to come with them.) Looks like my bouncer can come along. We can go now -- if you want.

MARK: Yeah. Let's go.

(Exit Lucy and Mark. End of act 1.)

ACT 2

SCENE 1A

(The photocopier light is seen in the dark. Lights up on the desk center stage with a lectern on it. VALERIE stands behind the lectern, teaching her Milton class.)

VALERIE: Temptation is a micro-epic of the human experience. When one is tempted, all one must do is *nothing*. And yet, nothing is one of the hardest things to do. As we shall see in *Paradise Regained*, even Christ himself was tempted by Satan in the desert. All of us are tempted at one time or another in our lives. How we react to temptation says a lot about our character. So like *Paradise Lost*, this will be a familiar story, but told in a new way. Get started on *Paradise Regained*, and read Book 1 and 2 for Monday.

(VALERIE exits. Enter MARINA and PAUL. PAUL has his pants unzipped, and is tucking in his shirt, as MARINA straightens her own clothes and hair. They have just had sex in his office.)

ACT 2, SCENE 1B

PAUL: It's a good thing I'm going away in a couple of months.

MARINA: Yeah?

PAUL: If I stayed, I'd probably never stop seeing you.

MARINA: It's not the first time you've given in to temptation.

PAUL: Well. . . the first time with a student.

MARINA: Maybe it's just me you can't say no to.

PAUL: Maybe. I used to be able to exercise some restraint.

MARINA: It's overrated.

PAUL: It always makes me a little sick being with you.

MARINA: How is that supposed to make me feel?

PAUL: I don't know. I just want you to know I still have a conscience.

(A pause.)

MARINA: Do you know what I like about you?

PAUL: What?

MARINA: You know the very worst things I've ever done, and you still like me.

PAUL: That's God's role -- liking you in spite of yourself.

MARINA: So you're God now?

PAUL: (Laughs) Oh right, you're the one who thinks that God is an asshole. Valerie Hardy has corrupted you.

MARINA: No, I believe I was corrupted by a theologian.

PAUL: (Laughs) Technically, we're all corrupt.

MARINA: Humanity . . . pieces of shit.

PAUL: Amen.

MARINA: I think if I really believed in God I'd stop fucking you.

PAUL: You're proof of the existence of God.

MARINA: Or the devil.

PAUL: (Looks around to see if they're alone, then leans in to kiss her neck.) See you in hell.

MARINA: Better bring your wallet.

PAUL: (Sighs) What am I going to do without you?

MARINA: Get back together with your wife?

PAUL: I don't know if she's interested.

MARINA: Maybe you should talk to her.

PAUL: Do you charge extra for marriage counseling?

MARINA: First one's free.

PAUL: You're going to be a great businesswoman someday.

MARINA: (Beat) Do you know about Dr. Hardy's tenure case?

PAUL: Everyone does. She's been very public about it. Too public.

MARINA: Then you know she needs help.

PAUL: (Reluctant to get into it) There are a lot of politics behind the scenes that I don't think you understand.

MARINA: You're not turning against her, are you?

PAUL: It doesn't matter what I think, really.

MARINA: It matters to me.

PAUL: Well, I think she's complaining a lot more loudly than she should. It's hurting the PR angle of her case. As liberal as faculty members usually are, they get nasty about traditions being upheld and hierarchies being preserved. Valerie doesn't play the game, and that's always been her problem with the administration. (Marina starts to protest, but he cuts her off.) I'm not saying it's right. I'm saying it's reality.

MARINA: What's she done that's so wrong?

PAUL: Put it this way -- people think she's really aggressive.

MARINA: Okay. . .

PAUL: She's got a great reputation as a teacher and a scholar. But as a team player? Not so much.

MARINA: It's hard to be a team player when no one will stand up for you. She's got to stand up for herself. How can that be a bad thing?

PAUL: (Shrugs) "Those who exalt themselves shall be humbled."

MARINA: But you're friends, right? Can't you stand up for her?

PAUL: No one's going to listen to me. I'm leaving, too.

MARINA: You can't try?

PAUL: I have no leverage.

MARINA: Sure you do. You know you do.

(Implying that Paul could rat out his bosses
to help Valerie.)

PAUL: As you said, I wouldn't be able to say anything without
ruining my own reputation.

MARINA: You could say I told you. Say that your class inspired me
to end my sinful ways, and I confessed everything to you.
Then, you felt obligated to tell. . . I don't know. Who would
you tell?

PAUL: Yeah. Who?

MARINA: Aren't there any women in the administration?

PAUL: None that can make any difference in Valerie's case. The
campus lawyer is a woman, but you can bet she's playing
defense for the school.

MARINA: A woman lawyer would be all over this! Please, just talk to
her.

PAUL: No, Marina. Don't ask me again.

(Exit PAUL. MARINA hesitates a moment,
then exits.)

ACT 2

SCENE 2

(Enter VALERIE, JILL, and MARK. They gather around the desk for the meeting.)

- MARK: Alright. Let's get started. The provost asked us to update you about your appeal.
- VALERIE: Yes. . .
- MARK: Your appeal has now gone through the Personnel Policies committee, and they have a response.
- VALERIE: What did PPC say?
- MARK: PPC has recommended that you be promoted, since promotion and tenure are separate decisions.
- VALERIE: Really? I didn't know you could be promoted separately.
- MARK: Well, of course. After you're tenured, you can still be promoted, so of course they're separate decisions. And the odds of promotion are good. Your recommendations from outside reviewers were stellar. If you're promoted, you'll get a raise that's backdated to the beginning of the year.
- VALERIE: What did PPC say about the tenure decision?
- MARK: They recommended that your terminal contract be changed to a year-to-year contract and that you be allowed to reapply for tenure next year or at another negotiated date.
- VALERIE: That would be so amazing. I really hope that the administration listens to them.
- JILL: Unfortunately, Personnel Policies is only an advisory committee and doesn't have any authority to enforce their opinion.
- VALERIE: But will it go to the board?
- MARK: That's up to the provost.
- VALERIE: Okay. . .

JILL: I'll be frank, Valerie, I think it's unlikely that the tenure decision will be overturned, even if you're promoted.

VALERIE: But with your support and PPC's support, surely I'll be given another chance. You guys wrote the letters I asked you to write, didn't you?

JILL: I submitted mine to the provost.

VALERIE: Could you give me a copy?

MARK: It's all a part of your employee file.

VALERIE: So it's online then?
(Valerie pulls out a laptop and starts searching for the file.)

MARK: As long as the file's been updated. . .

VALERIE: All right. I'll take a look.

JILL: Now?

VALERIE: Yeah, that way, I can talk to you guys about how to strategize, based on what you've said.
(VALERIE stops typing, and starts reading, while JILL and MARK talk.)

JILL: Oh, Mark. Did you receive the adjunct contracts I sent over?

MARK: My admin has them, I think. I'll take a look later.

JILL: We're having to hire three more part-timers than we normally do.

MARK: Not a problem. Our incoming freshman class is going to be pretty big, so if we want to keep the classes capped at 18, I knew we'd have to have some extra adjuncts.

VALERIE: Or, you know, you could have me teach writing.

JILL: We don't know what your status is going to be yet.

VALERIE: But if you say you need me to teach writing, that would be good for my case.

(Neither JILL nor MARK responds. VALERIE reads silently for a moment.)

- JILL: We don't really need to be here for you to read letters. If you want another meeting --
- VALERIE: Wait a minute. Jill? What the hell is this?
- JILL: What?
- VALERIE: (Reads from letter) "Dr. Hardy directly asked that this letter speak to the 3, 5, and 10 year projections of department needs, specifically referencing future retirements. The EEOC dictates that I shall not speak on that basis, and my own ethics require that I will not. I can only direct you to the enrollment data submitted by the department and claim that Dr. Hardy's expertise and interest in Renaissance literature, dramatic literature, writing, and editing offer a flexibility that can meet potential staffing needs."
- JILL: And?
- VALERIE: You make it sound like I'm breaking the law.
- JILL: You've being pretty blatant about your age discrimination.
- VALERIE: Age discrimination? Chairs and deans need to be able to project staffing needs over 3, 5, and 10 years. It says so in the Faculty Handbook. If you're saying that you refuse to do your job, that's something else entirely.
- JILL: I know what my job is.
- VALERIE: I'm not discriminating against anyone. I'm asking the department to get real about staffing needs.
- MARK: We can always hire adjuncts.
- VALERIE: There are service requirements that we can't ask adjuncts to do. Full-time professors are needed for that sort of work, especially if people retire.
- JILL: You don't know who's retiring. None of us has a crystal ball. Hell, you could drop dead tomorrow.

VALERIE: That's ridiculous. You can't make an assessment of the department's needs because I could randomly die. Any of us could.

JILL: Good thing we have that hefty St. Sebastian life insurance.

VALERIE: God. I'm losing that, too. Free college for my children, life insurance. . .

JILL: Look on the bright side. Kids with a deceased parent usually get great scholarships.

VALERIE: Are you saying I'm worth more to my children dead than alive?

JILL: Well, for the next few weeks or so.

VALERIE: *Fuck you!*

MARK: Valerie!

VALERIE: She's stabbing me in the back, Mark. Both of you are. (To Mark) There's nothing new in here from you. Did you decide not to write a new letter?

MARK: I didn't see a need to.

VALERIE: No need? Did you read my appeal? This is about prioritizing the health of the university and student learning.

MARK: I don't think one professor's removal means the university is going to collapse.

VALERIE: It's not just me. You've asked multiple people to leave. Careers are at stake. This isn't just about my own selfish bullshit. This is about the good work that we can do here, whether it satisfies your charts and graphs or not.

MARK: That's enough. You'll hear from the provost by the end of the month. We're done.

(MARK and JILL exit. VALERIE stands there, shaking, for a moment, then makes an exasperated sound and exits.)

ACT 2

SCENE 3

(Enter LUCY, who pushes the desk to the Cat Nip backstage area. Enter MARINA, counting money.)

- LUCY: Look at all that fat cash! So you're *not* too good for fast money?
- MARINA: (Shrugs) Lonely men. Who knew?
- LUCY: Every woman for the last 5000 years.
- MARINA: My Theology professor is my biggest client.
- LUCY: So much for religion.
- MARINA: The first few times with him, it was over in, like, five seconds.
- LUCY: He's getting used to it now?
- MARINA: He's got a routine anyway.
- LUCY: You need to charge more. Either that, or you gotta tease him or get *dirty* with him -- keep him interested and keep the money rolling.
- MARINA: I don't seem to have a problem getting him to come back.
- LUCY: Girl, you've got yourself a sugar daddy.
- MARINA: Eh. He's not filthy rich. He's more like a "Splenda Daddy."
- LUCY: Milk it for all it's worth.
- MARINA: I paid off my spring tuition, and I've almost got the first tuition payment for the fall covered now. But Paul's leaving in July. He got a new job out of state, so it's not a permanent thing.
- LUCY: Well, if he's hooked, at least he's going away soon. You keeping it up after he leaves?
- MARINA: It's definitely not as hard as I thought it would be.

LUCY: (Laughs) Just stay lubed up.

MARINA: Yeah, I learned my lesson on that.

LUCY: And keep a straight face. Some of them are so pathetic you just wanna laugh at them.

MARINA: Sometimes they like it when you put them down. *Tell me how small my cock is, mommy.*

LUCY: Most just want attention.

MARINA: You know how hard it is to listen to some of these guys and appear to be interested?

LUCY: (Laughs) I should have been an actress.

MARINA: You do rake in the cash.

LUCY: One of my regulars is this guy, (sarcastically) *Doctor Townsend*. Real power-trip motherfucker.

MARINA: Yeah, I had him once. He works at St. Sebastian -- he's like a dean or something? He's Paul's boss, whatever that is.

LUCY: Has he been weird with you?

MARINA: They're all weird. Why? Does he want you to be his girlfriend?

LUCY: No. He's just super-dom. He likes a little choke action.

MARINA: Holy shit! Lucy! You can't let Townsend do that.

LUCY: It's just a few seconds.

MARINA: Do you at least have a safe word?

LUCY: You've never been choked before have you?

MARINA: What if he gets out of control? Whatever he's paying you, it's not worth it.

LUCY: (Joking) You're right, smart one. I've got so much here to live for. The really weird thing is he's obsessed with this lady from work, Valerie.

MARINA: Valerie?

LUCY: Yeah, that's what he calls me. He's like, "you bitch, Valerie." "Suck it, Valerie." Shit like that. He can't stop saying that fucking name.

MARINA: Jesus. One of my professors is named Valerie.

LUCY: He probably wants to hate-fuck her or something. And he *really* wants me to love it, too. "*Oh God*, you're so hot. Valerie's your bitch. Valerie's your bitch."

MARINA: I think I'm gonna be sick.

(MARINA goes to the trash can and vomits in it. Shaken, she stands there for a moment.)

LUCY: Damn, girl. You act like he's doing it to you.

(Exit Lucy.)

ACT 2

SCENE 4

(Enter VALERIE)

MARINA: So how did the meeting go the other day about your case?

VALERIE: Initially it was promising, but it feels like things are falling apart.

MARINA: Why?

VALERIE: (Sighs) Let's just say you should never underestimate the pettiness of people at a university.

MARINA: I've been thinking about it, and I thought maybe there's a way I could help you.

VALERIE: What do you mean?

(MARINA looks around to make sure no one is listening.)

MARINA: You know, the gentlemen's club at the bottom of the hill?

VALERIE: Yeah, I guess.

MARINA: Well, I work there.

VALERIE: Okay. . . I don't see how this has anything/ to do with --

MARINA: I dance there. And the guys here, they come to see me and my . . . friends.

VALERIE: Why are you telling me this?

MARINA: Your boss goes there pretty regularly.

VALERIE: What?

MARINA: A *lot* of men head down the hill at night. Most of them have been in at least a few times since I started working there. Mark Townsend, especially. . .

VALERIE: Jesus Christ. The dean? You're sure?

MARINA: (Nods) And he pays for . . . well, other things.

VALERIE: Sex.

MARINA: Yeah.

VALERIE: (Slowly) Holy shit.

MARINA: A lot of guys from St. Sebastian do.

VALERIE: (Pause) Paul?

MARINA: Yeah. *He* pays extra not to use a condom.

VALERIE: You've got to be kidding me.

MARINA: Look, I just thought -- if you had something on these guys, maybe you'd be able to use it somehow to stay.

VALERIE: I . . . don't know what to say.

MARINA: Say you'll save yourself.

VALERIE: Marina. I appreciate you wanting to help me. I do. But you're telling me to blackmail people to keep my job.

MARINA: You don't understand these guys. They shield each other. They do dangerous shit and never have to answer for it. And you're getting kicked out for being. . . what did he say? Aggressive? -- for being aggressive.

VALERIE: What?

MARINA: You *should* be aggressive. You should *fight*. You should do everything in your power to save yourself.

VALERIE: I think . . . I need to think. I need to get out of here.

(VALERIE starts to exit. Enter Paul)

PAUL: Flier?

(VALERIE and MARINA are clearly embarrassed.)

MARINA: I have to go to work. I'll see you later.

(Exit MARINA, clutching her stomach)

VALERIE: (Uncomfortable, but tries to act natural. Nervous laughter)
Ah, the infamous pink flier.

PAUL: I'm heading to the protest. I've got the next shift.

VALERIE: I thought you just made the copies -- I didn't think you'd be handing them out.

PAUL: Between the two of us, I'd rather be doing something else.

VALERIE: (Uncomfortable beat) Like what?

PAUL: Class prep. I'm lecturing on Kant's categorical imperative in my ethics class tomorrow.

VALERIE: (Chuckles, then to herself) Oh dear god. (To Paul) Then why are you going?

PAUL: I'm the faculty liaison for Campus Ministry, so the students asked me to take shifts.

VALERIE: You could have said no.

PAUL: Well, it's part of my job. And I certainly don't *agree* with abortion.

VALERIE: That doesn't mean you have to publicly protest it.

PAUL: I suppose we'll have to agree to disagree.

VALERIE: I don't agree to disagree. But I don't have time for this. I ... I have to go.

(Exit Valerie. Paul starts to exit opposite, but
Marina enters)

PAUL: I thought you were going to work.

MARINA: I am, but I wanted to talk to you first.

PAUL: Okay, what's up?

MARINA: I've thrown up, like, three times in the last 24 hours.

PAUL: Okay. We can reschedule for Friday if you want.

MARINA: I never throw up.

PAUL: Food poisoning?

MARINA: I don't think so.

(She puts her hands on her lower abdomen.
PAUL looks at her for a moment.)

PAUL: You said you were on birth control.

MARINA: Apparently it isn't perfect.

PAUL: Is it mine?

MARINA: Of course it's yours.

PAUL: I don't know how many clients you have. I had to ask.

MARINA: No you didn't. And you're my only bareback client.

PAUL: Fine. I'll bring you money. You're getting rid of it. End of discussion.

MARINA: (Angry/surprised laugh) Where's your conscience now, Paul?

PAUL: Look, I'm not trying to be an asshole. I gave you money for a service. Playing baby daddy to the hooker's kid is not part of the deal.

MARINA: Don't you even care how I feel about this?

PAUL: I can't imagine you'd feel any differently than I do. You're what? Twenty-one? You have your whole life ahead of you. This will ruin your life.

MARINA: Did your kids ruin your life?

PAUL
They certainly changed it.

MARINA: (Smirk) Yeah, from what I can tell you're a super great dad. A real martyr for the family.

PAUL: As your mentor/

MARINA: Mentor?/

PAUL: /I'm telling you. You don't want this. You're hormonal -- not thinking rationally.

MARINA: You're right, even God sacrificed a child now and then.

PAUL: Enough with your God-is-an-asshole bullshit. Make an appointment. I can drop you off, like, a block away from the building and give you money for a cab home.

MARINA: You wouldn't even stay with me?

PAUL: How can I risk that? Students are protesting at those clinics all the time. I'd say wait a couple weeks until summer break when the town empties out, but you can't start showing. And we can't have you changing your mind.

MARINA: I didn't know I'd made up my mind in the first place.

PAUL: People know what you do. And with this, everyone will think you're a whore.

MARINA: You know what? Fuck you, Paul.

(Marina exits. Paul looks at the fliers, and exits opposite.)

ACT 2

SCENE 5

(Enter VALERIE, carrying a letter)

VALERIE: Well, this is it. (She opens the envelope. Reads) Dear Dr. Hardy --

(Enter MARK -- his speech below is the contents of the letter.)

MARK: The Faculty Board of Appeals recommended that your case be reconsidered by the Promotion and Tenure committee, in light of new evidence regarding the needs and conditions of the English department. The committee recommended promotion; however, they can no longer support your tenure application based on newly received data. The Board of Trustees, the president, and the provost have accepted the committees findings. Backpay for your promotion will be included in termination payments this summer.

(Exit MARK. VALERIE is visibly upset. She goes to the desk, takes out her Shakespeare book, and opens it to a random page. Reads aloud.)

VALERIE: “There’s small choice in rotten apples.”

(She shuts the book, hugs it close. Enter MARINA)

MARINA: Dr. Hardy?

(Valerie wipes her face, tries to appear normal.)

VALERIE: Yes?

MARINA: Are you alright?

VALERIE: What did you need?

MARINA: I read your proposal about Shakespeare subverting the Bible.

VALERIE: (Short laugh) Okay. What did you think?

MARINA: It inspired my Milton paper topic. I felt like a subversive,

feminist analysis could reclaim Eve. The analogy that Milton makes to Pandora was the key, I think. Both stories are about hope, especially the end of *Paradise Lost*.
(Quoting from memory)

“Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitarie way.”

There’s so much hope in that ending.

VALERIE: “The World was all before them.” It *is* beautiful.

MARINA: You don’t seem to think so now.

VALERIE: No matter the myth, women are blamed for evil in the world. (Sighs) I guess what I should say is -- the Greeks didn’t really think about hope the way we do. They believed in fate -- if your fate is already sealed, hope is foolish. An evil within yourself.

MARINA: Okay. . .

VALERIE: I think I’ve been fooled by hope a lot lately.

MARINA: Did something happen?

VALERIE: I got my final denial. My appeal is over.

MARINA: Oh no.

VALERIE: Yeah.

MARINA: I’m really sorry.

VALERIE: Yeah. Me too.

MARINA: I’m not staying here if you’re leaving. There’s no way.

VALERIE: Oh, Marina. I’m not the only professor here.

MARINA: I should transfer somewhere.

VALERIE: You’ll probably lose a lot of credits if you transfer.

MARINA: Maybe. But it would be cheaper. And maybe there's something to be said for starting over.

VALERIE: Maybe.

MARINA: I've been thinking about that a lot.

VALERIE: Marina. I don't blame you for what you're doing.

MARINA: It's not just that.

VALERIE: Okay.

MARINA: I . . . I have an appointment on next Tuesday. I need someone to pick me up. I won't be able to drive.

VALERIE: Do you have someone?

MARINA: Not really.

VALERIE: Where is it?

MARINA: At the women's clinic downtown.

VALERIE: Okay.

MARINA: They said I'd be in a lot of pain. I don't have insurance, so maybe more pain than normal.

VALERIE: Oh. (Figuring it out) I'm so sorry.

MARINA: Certain people can't be seen at places like that, so . . .

VALERIE: I see.

MARINA: They have no problem paying for it, though.

VALERIE: Paul?

MARINA: Yeah.

VALERIE: God. I'm so sorry. (Beat) I can come with you if you want.

MARINA: You'd do that for me?

VALERIE: Sure.

(Marina hugs Valerie, and exits.)

ACT 2

SCENE 6A

(Enter Paul, carrying fliers. Valerie approaches him.)

PAUL: Here for the protest? I have a sign you could hold if you want.

VALERIE: Look, Paul, I've had several students tell me they're uncomfortable with these protests. They're a huge distraction.

PAUL: This is Catholic identity work, Val. It's important.

VALERIE: *Do not pretend* that you, of all people, really want abortion to be illegal.

PAUL: What are you saying?

VALERIE: You know, Paul, you have all these pink fliers out here. You hand these things out, and all you can think about is aborted fetuses. I see these, and I see countless women being used and judged without anyone ever hearing their side of the story.

PAUL: A life is a life, regardless of the stories.

VALERIE: (Accusingly) I've heard many shocking stories, indeed.

PAUL: I don't know what/ you mean.

VALERIE: /Oh, I think you do.

PAUL: (A pause as this sinks in) And what are you going to do about it?

VALERIE: You know what I'm going to do.

(Enter MARK, pushing the desk center stage, then he sits.)

ACT 2, SCENE 6B

MARK: So what you're saying is --

VALERIE: According to the faculty handbook, Paul should be put

on immediate probation, and once the facts are known, dismissed. All this should be disclosed to his next appointment to protect their students.

MARK: You know, Valerie, this is really low.

VALERIE: Excuse me?

MARK: A well-loved professor decides to cooperate with the administration, and this is what you do? Are you so bitter toward the institution that you'll try to ruin a man's life?

VALERIE: He's her *professor*. Don't you think there's anything wrong with their relationship? Ethically? Morally?

MARK: Paul is a married man. An upright man. A Catholic.

VALERIE: (Laughs quietly and rolls her eyes) Jesus Christ.

MARK: This isn't funny.

VALERIE: (Sarcastically) No it isn't. It isn't funny what men in this country can get away with. Presidents still get elected no matter whose pussy they grab. Judges still get confirmed even if they sexually assault women. Priests still "hopscotch from parish to parish" fondling children.

PAUL: I'm not like those guys.

VALERIE: Brave rhetoric from a man who pays for abortions while protesting them at work.

MARK: You have no evidence.

VALERIE: I'm taking her to her appointment. She can't fake that. But it doesn't matter, does it? You'll protect him, even while he reaps the benefits of the very thing he objects to.

PAUL: You know, Valerie. You really are a bitch.

(Exit PAUL)

VALERIE: (Yells after him) And you're proof that God's an asshole.

MARK: God is an . . . *asshole*?

VALERIE: It's . . . Sorry, it's . . . a reference to my Milton class.

MARK: You'd better not be teaching students that God is an asshole.

VALERIE: Oh for the love of God, have you read *Paradise Lost*? God is a total asshole.

MARK: You can forget about your terminal contract. No way am I letting you teach here for another year.

VALERIE: We're *supposed* to interrogate texts, Mark. If God's a character in a book, then he's under scrutiny -- just as much as Hamlet or Victor Frankenstein.

MARK: You're contractually obligated to uphold the values of the Catholic faith, whether you're a believer or not.

VALERIE: Contracts are irrelevant if you're going to let Paul get away with this.

MARK: We're not talking about Paul right now. We're talking about you. You *cannot* teach students that *God* is an *asshole*.

VALERIE: Then, I cannot teach *at all*.

MARK: You *really think* God is an asshole?

VALERIE: (Angry) I don't give a shit about God. The point is -- your strip club buddy has taken advantage of a student.

MARK: Excuse me --

VALERIE: You and Paul worship at the same temple from what I've heard.

MARK: I have no idea what you're talking about.

VALERIE: You don't? And I suppose you've never darkened the doors of the Cat Nip.

MARK: You'll be hearing from my lawyer -- making up lies about me. You're a nasty woman. How you could imagine me . . . that proves what a depraved --

VALERIE: Oh yes -- (mimicking what he says about Paul above) you're "a married man. An upright man. A Catholic." And yet, here I am -- an atheist, reporting ethics violations. And

believe me -- you will be part of this. I'm going to HR. I'm going to the press. I'm going to anyone who will listen.

MARK: Don't you dare --

VALERIE: You know what? I was right last fall. When I said that it was your fault that the university was losing money. Your fault that the faculty has no morale – you and Jerry's fault? I was right. Everyone knows it. Everyone knows what incompetent pieces of shit you are. All you want is tuition dollars and professors that will suck off your egos -- and I am not your bitch. This school is a nothing more than a *brothel*. One way or another, you're all fucking students.

MARK: You're never teaching another class here again. Ever. Clean out your office. I want you gone.

VALERIE: You can't force me out. I'm allowed a terminal year.

MARK: Not if I have anything to say about it. You'll have a buyout contract by the end of the day.

(MARK exits. VALERIE sits at the desk, very upset.)

VALERIE: (Pause) Shit. SHIT! (Very angry.) These fucking men. This fucking profession. (Starts to cry.)

(After a few moments of crying, VALERIE opens a desk drawer, pulls out her Shakespeare book, opens it and reads aloud.)

VALERIE (Continued): "I wasted time and now doth time waste me." My God, Shakespeare. At some point, you must have been a teacher.

ACT 2

SCENE 7

(Enter MARINA on the phone, coming to center stage. VALERIE's phone rings, and she opens a drawer, picks up a phone and answers.)

- MARINA: Dr. Hardy? Hey, it's Marina. I'm sorry to bother you at night.
- VALERIE: Marina? What's wrong?
- MARINA: I went to work a little bit ago.
- (Enter FLINT. Blue and red police lights flash in the background. Marina joins him in the flashback.)
- MARINA: Flint, what's with the police cars?
- FLINT: Hey, Marina. How'd you get in here?
- MARINA: I came in the side door. What's going on?
- FLINT: Hey, once this gets cleared up, you still want extra hours?
- MARINA: I have to take a few days off, starting Tuesday. Just tell me what's going on.
- FLINT: The ambulance came for Lucy about an hour ago.
- VALERIE: Your friend at work? What happened?
- FLINT: She was with one of her regulars. That older guy -- what's his name?
- MARINA: Townsend?
- VALERIE: Mark.
- FLINT: Yeah. You know how to get a hold of him?
- MARINA: He works at the university.
- FLINT: The cops are gonna wanna talk to him.
- VALERIE: What happened?

FLINT: Townsend was the last person she was with.

VALERIE: The last person she was with?

FLINT: Yeah, she's gone, man.

MARINA: Gone?

FLINT: Yeah, she ain't coming back, kid. She's dead. That Townsend guy left, and we didn't see her come out. So the bouncer went in there and found her.

MARINA: She's *dead*?

FLINT: Yeah.

MARINA: What the fuck, Flint? What happened?

FLINT: I don't know, okay? We don't know. But the cops need that guy's name.

MARINA: Mark Townsend.

FLINT: Right. Mark Townsend.

VALERIE: Was she alone with him?

FLINT: He's been here so much, nobody thought anything of it.

MARINA: She shouldn't have been alone with him, Flint.

FLINT: Lucy could always take care of herself.

MARINA: Jesus. I don't know what to do.

VALERIE: You have to get out of there, Marina.

FLINT: We're gonna be closed tonight. Just get out of here.

MARINA: Okay.

FLINT: And before I forget -- that guy, Paul, was here asking for you.

MARINA: Paul?

FLINT: What are you, fucking high? Look, I gotta talk to the cops. Don't you say anything to them. You hear?

(Exit FLINT.)

VALERIE: Do you have someplace safe to go?

MARINA: I know a place.

VALERIE: You can come to my office if you need to.

MARINA: It's okay. I'll see you Tuesday.

(Exit Valerie. Marina starts to exit.)

ACT 2

SCENE 8

(Marina doesn't quite exit. Enter PAUL)

PAUL: Marina?

MARINA: What are you doing here?

PAUL: I've been all over looking for you. Listen, I've got a bag packed. I'm leaving tonight.

MARINA: What are you talking about?

PAUL: I'm taking off. Laura went through my phone when I was playing with the kids. She knows about us.

MARINA: So?

PAUL: So? Look, I'm sorry about the other day. I was wrong. We can make this work. I was just shocked and didn't know what I was saying. But I'm leaving, now, and I want you to come with me.

MARINA: What for?

PAUL: What for? Do you really want to keep doing what you're doing? I saw the cop cars. I heard about the girl. This is dangerous. You don't want to end up like her.

MARINA: You didn't seem to mind what I was doing for the last few months.

PAUL: I wasn't thinking. The past few months have been like my biggest fantasy come true. I only feel alive when I'm with you.

MARINA: Yeah. Until your conscience catches up with you.

PAUL: If I could be with you all the time, my conscience would be clear.

MARINA: What, like Jesus and Mary Magdalene running off together? Or maybe you're my knight in shining armor.

PAUL: Things happen for a reason. This baby is a sign that we

should be together.

MARINA: God, you're such a cliché.

PAUL: Oh come on.

MARINA: You know how many men like you want me to be their girlfriend?

PAUL: But we're different.

MARINA: How? Because I'm the full package? Because I'm smart and luscious? Give me a break.

PAUL: Because we have a connection. You feel it, too. I know you do.

MARINA: You know what I'm thinking about when we're together? How long is this going to take? What classes do I have tomorrow? Do I have reading to do? When are my papers due? Do I have any gas in my car? I might get some tacos after this. And I throw in a (ecstatic) "Oh Paul!" every now and then when you're clearly trying your best. Heavy breathing. A little squeal. My eyes roll back in my head. I piss a little on you to make you think I'm cumming. And you buy it every time.

PAUL: You don't fake it. I think I'd know the difference.

MARINA: You're an expert in your field -- I'm an expert in mine. You convince people there's a ghost in the sky, and I convince you that you're a hot fuck. We're both selling an illusion. And I think we both know it.

PAUL: You're wrong. I love you.

MARINA: Too bad.

(Exit Marina. Exit Paul separately)

ACT 2

SCENE 9

(MARINA enters and goes to VALERIE's office area. Enter VALERIE with some cardboard boxes. She should take things from the desk drawers and pack them as they're talking.)

VALERIE: You're early.

MARINA: Thanks for offering to take me today.

VALERIE: No problem. What time do we need to be there?

MARINA: We have a while before we need to leave. I saw the boxes outside. Are those yours?

VALERIE: Yeah, I'm packing up.

MARINA: With Dr. Townsend being questioned by the police, I don't understand why you're leaving.

VALERIE: I'm tired of fighting for my ideals. I've had to justify myself for a long time, and this semester, I started to wonder why. I became a teacher because I loved talking to people about big ideas, digging into characters and themes. But I realized the other day that half my time here -- maybe more than half -- is spent walking around in a state of anxiety. We're always pushing, always recruiting, always trying to sell students on our major, our classes, *our* goals, not theirs. I'm not in sales. I'm an intellectual. Administrators have told me for a long time that I'm a fool for caring about literature. I'm never going to convince them that literature is necessary. That without it, we've lost our souls. I'm not a good enough salesperson. And I've decided they don't deserve to be saved.

MARINA: But your students?

VALERIA: Frankly, I seem to care more about my students' education than they do. You're a rare exception.

(A brief pause.)

MARINA: Do you need any help sorting things?

VALERIE: I appreciate it, but no. It's helping me say goodbye.

(MARINA sits in a chair and watches VALERIE. A moment goes by, then Marina changes the subject.)

MARINA: So . . . Do you know Laura Stockton?

VALERIE: Paul's wife?

MARINA: Yeah. She called me yesterday.

VALERIE: Oh my god.

MARINA: I guess she had gone through his text messages at some point and wrote my number down.

VALERIE: What did she say?

MARINA: She wanted to know if I'd heard from him. She said he left in the middle of the night. No note or anything.

VALERIE: And you haven't heard from him again?

MARINA: Well, I don't know where he is, anyway.

VALERIE: Word travels fast. After I went to HR, I heard from one of my friends at Ohio State. She told me that they'd rescinded Paul's job offer.

MARINA: And he can't come back to his job here.

VALERIE: Right.

MARINA: I went ahead and applied to the state school near where my sister lives. She said I could stay with her to finish up my senior year if I get in.

VALERIE: Good for you. I'm sure you will.

MARINA: I've been wanting to reconnect with my sister anyway -- and I think I'll feel better there. There aren't any pink fliers floating around there.

VALERIE: Those won't be here forever I imagine.

MARINA: They will be for me.

VALERIE: Well. I hope the state school takes your credits. I'd hate for you to have a set back because you're leaving this cesspool.

MARINA: I think I'll be okay. But I'm failing Theology this semester.

VALERIE: That asshole. You should appeal that.

MARINA: (Shrugging) I stopped attending his class two weeks ago.

VALERIE: I can talk to someone for you. People know what Paul did. You cannot let that grade stand.

MARINA: It's okay. I think I learned plenty, and that's more important than the grade.

VALERIE: You're more forgiving than I would be.

MARINA: Not really. I just want to move on. (Pause) So what are you going to do?

VALERIE: Honestly, I don't know. We academics think the shadows on the wall are the only reality. It's time to see what's outside the cave. Maybe it'll feel like endless summer. Maybe I'll write a memoir. Maybe I'll see my children for more than an hour a day. Maybe I'll reread Shakespeare.

MARINA: I wish I hadn't sold my Shakespeare book.

(VALERIE stops, and picks up her Shakespeare book. It's clear it's precious to her. She holds out her Shakespeare book to MARINA.)

VALERIE: Here. For your library.

MARINA: I couldn't.

VALERIE: You have no idea how many anthologies I have at home. Please. Take it.

MARINA: Are you sure?

VALERIE: I'm certain.

MARINA: Thank you so much. What should I read first?

VALERIE: (Thinks for a moment.) *Pericles* -- it's a completely underrated play. *And* there's a girl named "Marina" in it.

MARINA: What's her story?

VALERIE: Well, I wouldn't want to spoil it for you. (Thoughtfully) Suffice it to say she never loses her sense of inner nobility. Even if it's not true that order is restored and peace established at the end of every chapter in real life, it's important to know that the past isn't your destiny.

MARINA: This place doesn't deserve you.

VALERIE: It doesn't deserve you either. (They hug) Are you about ready?

MARINA: Ready as I'll ever be. (They part. Beat) Do you think it's possible that Eve's fall is just another kind of creation? That outside of Eden anything is possible?

VALERIE: I suppose we'll find out.

MARINA: I hope so.

VALERIE: (Gently, taking Marina's hand) Come on. Let's go.

LIGHTS DOWN.
END OF PLAY.