

The Platinum Crucible

By Louise Penberthy

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Dramatis Personae

Anne, white, late 40's, medium build

Brooke, white, late 30's, medium build, Anne's sister

Elena, Latina, early 40's, heavy, Anne and Brooke's cousin

Yvette, black, mid-late 30's, slender, cousin to Anne, Brooke, and Elena

Sergei, white, late 30s, an appraiser of old houses

Time

A weekend in September, present day

Location

The living room of an old house (circa 1900); in a small town in the foothills of the Cascades in southwest Washington State.

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Production Notes

Set

The set can be as elaborate or not, as the designers please. Suggest an old house with a mix of older and newer furniture, rugs, etc.

Casting

In I, ii, Yvette says she is “73% cacao.” You can change this number to fit the actress cast as Yvette, so long as it’s between 60% and 85%.

Also in I, ii, Elena refers to herself as “50% cacao.” She means she’s 50% Venezuelan, and since Venezuelans come in all shades from light to dark, I have added optional dialog in case the actress playing Elena would look lighter, to Yvette, than 50% cacao.

Correspondingly, the actresses playing Anne and Brooke need to be white without hints of African American or Latin ancestry.

Script Notes

A “/” in a line indicates where the next speaker interrupts or starts talking.

The Platinum Crucible

Act 1.

Scene 1. The living room of an old house, built circa 1900. It is well kept up, with an assortment of furniture, some of it antique, some of it new. Oriental rugs are on the floor, old books in the built-in bookcases, perhaps a nice painting or two on the wall. Anne and Brooke are arguing, Elena trying to get a word in edgewise.

ANNE. It doesn't exist. It doesn't exist! Granddaddy never had it, Aunt Gabrielle never inherited it, it just plain never existed. We don't know that.

It does not exist. The platinum crucible just plain does not exist.

Yes, I do.

He never said he had it.

Did you ever hear him say that? Did you ever hear him say he had one?

So. You didn't hear it from Granddaddy. You heard from Aunt Gabrielle.

Aunt Gabrielle was no saint, you know. Maybe she heard it from Granddaddy and believed it.

How? Did you ever see it? Elena, did you ever see it?

Of course you didn't see it! It doesn't exist.

BROOKE. You don't know that.

We know Granddaddy had it. We know Aunt Gabrielle –
– had it, we know it existed.

You don't know that. You simply don't know that. Why would Granddaddy lie?

Why would he lie? Yes, he did.

Why would it have helped him to lie about this?

Of course I never heard it from Granddaddy. He died when I was five!

So you're saying Aunt Gabrielle lied? That makes even less sense.

What's that got to do –

ELENA. Maybe what happened is –

Maybe what happened is –

Maybe he didn't lie, maybe what –

Nobody had to lie, what probably happened is –

No, but –

ANNE. Where, in God's name, did Granddaddy get the money? Do you know how expensive those things are?

We don't know that! The whole family, poor as dirt, and suddenly Granddaddy has money to start a business and buy a platinum crucible.

And who, in the Depression, would even think to buy something like that?

She did not value it as much as we did.

BROOKE. Oh, so if you don't see something, it doesn't exist?

It had to have existed at some point. Granddaddy had to have one. To run his business.

It's not like today, when you need billions of dollars from venture capitalists.

Granddaddy was a clever man. He was intelligent.

She would never have sold it.

She valued it as much as we did. She never would have sold it.

Not this again.

ELENA. Maybe Aunt Gabrielle sold it.

Maybe what happened is, maybe Aunt Gabrielle sold it.

Maybe she did, when she closed down the business.

ELENA. Maybe she gave it away. Or threw it in the river, or the lake, or sacrificed a goat in it, or, I don't know, but because we can't find it doesn't mean it doesn't exist.

BROOKE. Right!

ANNE. But it doesn't mean that it does.

ELENA. Okay; what I'm saying is, there are other possibilities. I hope it does exist, it's such a nice story.

ANNE. Yeah. It's a nice story.

(ANNE gets up, goes to the window.)

BROOKE. Who would she have given it to?

ELENA. One of the people who worked with her, maybe, her assistant...

ANNE. (*Speaking of YVETTE.*) So where is she?

BROOKE. Probably got lost.

ELENA. (*Still speaking of their aunt's assistant.*) ... what was her name?

ANNE. She's been here before, right?

BROOKE. (*To ELENA, of the assistant.*) Oh, I don't remember.

ELENA. She worked right here.

BROOKE. (*To ANNE, of YVETTE.*) Not since we were kids. But I gave her good directions.

ELENA. She was close with Aunt Gabrielle.

ANNE. (*To BROOKE.*) Oh.

BROOKE. Stop worrying.

ANNE. It's not that easy to find.

BROOKE. From I-5, go east 58 miles. Turn left onto Third Street, turn right at the next block, go .9 miles. It's a big white house all by itself on the left. How hard is that?

ANNE. Is that what you told her?

BROOKE. Those are the directions.

ELENA. Although you can get off onto the old highway, you know.

ANNE. (*To ELENA.*) First time we came here after Aunt Gabrielle died, we got all the way to the god damn Pass before Brooke realized we'd gone too far.

BROOKE. How was I supposed to know that Third Street is called something else on the other side of the highway?

ANNE. And did you tell Yvette that?

BROOKE. She'll be fine.

ELENA. Do you think we can ask her what happened?

BROOKE. Maybe she doesn't know.

ANNE. We can't ask her.

ELENA. Why not?

ANNE. It would be tactless.

ELENA. I don't think so; we could say, we're sorry...

ANNE. ... we're sorry what?

ELENA. We're sorry that our families lost touch, or –

ANNE. She's here!

(BROOKE and ELENA join ANNE at the window.)

ANNE. That's not her.

BROOKE. Probably someone who's lost.

(ANNE goes to the front door, BROOKE following.)

ANNE. Hi, can I help you?

YVETTE. *(Off.)* Hey! How you doing?

BROOKE. How you doing?

YVETTE. I'm so glad I made it. I'm sorry to keep y'all waiting. It is okay if I park my car here?

ANNE. Uh... sure.

YVETTE. I just had so much fun, on the drive up here, I kept pulling over to take photographs. I must've filled my memory card.

(YVETTE enters, with suitcases and a small cooler.)

YVETTE. You know, if y'all don't mind me suggesting, the directions should say that if you get to the ranger station, you've gone too far. But this fine-looking ranger helped me out, so that's all right.

You must be Cousin Anne.

ANNE. Yes.

YVETTE. How you doing? You look just like Granddaddy. Just like. *(To BROOKE.)* Now, I can tell you're Cousin Anne's sister, but is your name Helen or Brooke?

BROOKE. I'm Brooke.

YVETTE. How you doing?

BROOKE. How you doing? And this is our cousin Elena.

YVETTE. Elena.

ELENA. It's nice to see you.

YVETTE. How you doing? Nice to see you. It's good to see y'all again.

My goodness, that was a long drive. Long drive. Ooh! Y'all got a cool place I could put something perishable in?

BROOKE. There's a fridge in the kitchen.

YVETTE. Well, no, not a fridge, too cold, but maybe a cupboard or something...

*(YVETTE exits to the kitchen with the cooler. Stunned silence.
They speak quietly.)*

BROOKE. That's Yvette?

ANNE. She must be adopted.

ELENA. Why must she be adopted?

ANNE. Well, look at her.

ELENA. Except, I'm not adopted.

ANNE. Right, but...

BROOKE. I suppose she could be adopted.

ELENA. I think she looks like Granddaddy.

ANNE. How can you tell?

ELENA. Around her eyes, and the way she smiles.

BROOKE. I can sort of see it. In any case, how would someone know to come here this weekend, when we'd all be here, if she wasn't our cousin?

ELENA. Right.

ANNE. I'm not saying she's not our cousin, I'm simply surprised, that's all.

(They hear YVETTE returning.)

YVETTE. Sorry to rush off like that. Just a little treat for after dinner. Whoo! I am beat. Is there some place I could freshen up?

ELENA. Sure; let me show you to your room.

YVETTE. Thank you. Careful, that's heavy.

ELENA. It's okay, so am I.

(YVETTE and ELENA exit to the stairs.)

YVETTE. I forgot how nice this house is. So well kept up! Mm, mm, I just love these details. How old is it, do you think?

ELENA. It was built in 1906.

YVETTE. Mm, mm.

(Their voices have faded out.)

BROOKE. You know, Elena was right. She does take after Granddaddy.

ANNE. She's black!

BROOKE. That doesn't mean she's not related.

ANNE. I don't remember her as black. Do you?

BROOKE. I don't remember her at all. I was just a baby last time her family came up here.

ANNE. I seem to remember there was a black kid at the Fourth of July one year. But, I don't know, I guess I simply thought she was some friend of the family, or something.

(They sit.)

ANNE. Mom wants to come down again and see the house.

BROOKE. I guess it has been a long time. / *(Continuing their previous conversation.)* So Uncle Mark –

ANNE. I thought it might do her good, to see something she remembers.

BROOKE. It probably would. So Uncle Mark must have married a black woman.

ANNE. She was asking for you the other day.

BROOKE. I keep trying to get away, but it's so hard.

ANNE. Bring the kids with you.

BROOKE. Last time, she didn't believe they were her grandkids.

ANNE. I know.

(ELENA comes down the stairs and into the room.)

ANNE. *(To ELENA.)* Did you remember Yvette was black?

ELENA. I didn't remember when I first saw her, but then I figured it out.

ANNE. It's strange.

ELENA. It's no stranger than me being Latina.

ANNE. I guess not. I simply never thought of you as Latina. I mean...

ELENA. That's okay, I never thought of you guys as being white.

BROOKE. Thank you.

ELENA. You're welcome.

ANNE. She's a bundle of energy.

(YVETTE is coming down the stairs.)

BROOKE. I wonder what she wants the crucible for.

ANNE. It doesn't exist.

ELENA. (*Rolling her eyes.*) *Ay, chicas, se calma.*

ANNE. (*They've heard this before.*) *Se calma, yeah, yeah.*

BROOKE. Say, Yvette, you want a glass of water or something? I think we got some colas, too.

YVETTE. I don't guess y'all got iced tea.

BROOKE. No, sorry. No iced tea.

YVETTE. I'll take anything with caffeine and without sugar, thanks. But if not, water's fine.

BROOKE. Ice?

YVETTE. Oh, yes. Plenty of ice.

BROOKE. Anyone else?

ANNE. Sure. Water.

ELENA. Water.

(BROOKE exits.)

ANNE. It's been a long time since we've seen you, hasn't it?

YVETTE. Oh, yes. Must be 30, 35 years or so.

ANNE. I guess it has been.

YVETTE. Something like that.

ANNE. I hardly recognized you, it's been so long.

YVETTE. Well, now, I don't guess y'all remembered I was black, did y'all?

ANNE. No. Sorry. I'm not sure why.

YVETTE. That explains the look on y'all's faces when I walked in the door.

ELENA. I sort of remembered, but I was little the last time you were here.

YVETTE. That's all right. It's all straightened out now.

This is a lovely house. Mm, mm. Though, funny, I remember it as being bigger. Much bigger.

ANNE. It is big. Four bedrooms, attic, basement, a huge pantry...

YVETTE. You right. Of course you right. Guess it's cause I was just a little bitty thing when I was here last. Y'all must come here a lot, being y'all so close.

ANNE. For holidays, sure. When we can.

ELENA. Holidays, yes, and I come here in the summer for vacation, too.

(YVETTE walks around the living room, looking at the books, the furniture, and the paintings.)

YVETTE. Aunt Gabrielle sure had good taste. These things are lovely.

ANNE. We were thinking we could each pick what we wanted, and if more than one person wants the same thing, we can draw straws or something.

YVETTE. Sounds fair.

(YVETTE goes to the window.)

YVETTE. Lovely view. Just a lovely view. Sure is off the beaten track, though.

ELENA. It's beautiful here, you should see it when it snows.

YVETTE. How long did she live here?

ANNE. You mean after she moved back? About 35 years.

YVETTE. Wow. Long time. *Long time.*

Have y'all decided what you're going to do with it?

ELENA. It's up to all of us.

ANNE. We'll probably have to sell it. I don't think any one of us could buy the others out.

YVETTE. Has it been appraised?

ANNE. We had an appraiser come yesterday. He specializes in houses of this era.

YVETTE. What did he say?

ANNE. He had to do some more research. He's coming by later.

(BROOKE enters with three glasses of water and a glass of co-cola. They all sit.)

YVETTE. So. Pardon me if I'm being blunt, but, have y'all found the platinum crucible? If no one else wants it, I do.

ELENA. Um.

BROOKE. No, we haven't found it yet.

ANNE. I think it's just some family legend –

BROOKE. Anne doesn't think it exists.

ANNE. (*Continuing.*) – that grew out of proportion.

YVETTE. That would be too bad.

BROOKE. I think it exists. Too many people know about it, or knew about it, and talked about it. And Granddaddy had to have had one for his business.

YVETTE. That's what I always heard.

ANNE. If it does exist, Brooke wants to use it as a good luck talisman.

BROOKE. Not a good luck talisman. I'm not superstitious. I want it on my shelf, as influence.

YVETTE. Like, feng shui?

BROOKE. No, I don't believe in that stuff. But I think it would have a good aura, because Granddaddy's business was so successful.

YVETTE. What do you do?

BROOKE. I'm a daytrader.

YVETTE. What does a daytrader do?

BROOKE. I buy stocks to hold for only a short time. 15, 20 minutes, 25 at the most.

YVETTE. 25 minutes? I thought you were going to say a few months.

BROOKE. I make money on the fluctuations of the market throughout the day.

YVETTE. I see. The crucible would be good voodoo for you.

BROOKE. Yeah, in a way.

YVETTE. (*To ELENA.*) What about you?

ELENA. I want it to sell; I want to cut it up into little pieces, like the Berlin Wall, or Mount Saint Helens ash, and sell it as souvenirs.

ANNE. I don't think you'd sell very many.

BROOKE. Yeah, I don't think you'd make any money.

ELENA. I think I would.

BROOKE. We're not even sure how big it is.

ELENA. It had to have been decent sized, he wouldn't been able to do anything with it otherwise.

BROOKE. Yes, but "decent sized" for what?

ELENA. He melted glass in it.

BROOKE. Why platinum, anyway?

ELENA. It takes a high heat and it's chemically inert.

BROOKE. Like, how high heat?

ELENA. Its melting point is 1,769°C.

BROOKE. Wow.

YVETTE. What's that in Fahrenheit?

BROOKE. Approximately 3,200°F.

YVETTE. Stick a fork in me, I'm done!

ANNE. After the appraiser gives us his report, we'll have to decide what to do with the house. None of us can afford it on our own, can we?

ELENA. I can't.

YVETTE. If I could, I'd want it in New Orleans.

BROOKE. I'd want it in Seattle.

So Granddaddy could melt glass in the crucible without melting the crucible.

ELENA. And without getting platinum in the glass. For jewelry, it's usually alloyed with rhodium, or iridium; it's like gold, too soft when pure, alloying it with something makes it better.

(ANNE is fanning herself.)

YVETTE. Are you hot, Cousin Anne?

ELENA. *I'm* hot.

YVETTE. It's not that hot, is it?

ELENA. For here it is.

BROOKE. *(Speaking of ANNE.)* She's always hot.

ANNE. Shut up.

YVETTE. *(Realizes Anne must be going through menopause.)* Oh.

ANNE. Yes. Oh.

BROOKE. I keep telling her this is nothing compared to Atlanta.

Anne. Yeah, yeah, and you didn't have air conditioning.

BROOKE. I didn't. This one apartment I lived in, for three years, it had no air conditioning.

YVETTE. No air conditioning?

BROOKE. Nope. No air conditioning.

YVETTE. Mm, mm. How long were you in Atlanta?

BROOKE. Twelve years. It's where my kids were born.

YVETTE. Mm, you got kids?

BROOKE. Mm, hm. Two boys. I'll show you. *(Finds a packet of photos.)*

YVETTE. Photos? Actual photos? Printed on paper?

BROOKE. I know, isn't that weird?

YVETTE. You got that right. I don't hardly know what to do with them. You can't press a button and change them.

BROOKE. No buttons. You have to pick them up and move them.

YVETTE. Cute boys. Real cute.

BROOKE. That's Trey, and the younger one is Marcel.

YVETTE. They cute. Where they this weekend?

BROOKE. With my partner, at home. *(Pointing to a photo.)* That's her.

YVETTE. Real cute.

(To ELENA.) I'll bet you have a nice, big family.

ELENA. No, I don't have any kids.

YVETTE. No kids? Now that's a shame. You and your husband don't want none?

ELENA. I'm not married.

ANNE. Here. Mine, you can press a button to see. That's John, and that's Carla.

YVETTE. They all grown up. They favor you, don't they?

ANNE. John more than Carla. He graduated from college last spring. Carla just started.

YVETTE. There some nice kids in this family.

ANNE. John's all right. Carla is a pretentious little shit.

ELENA. Anne!

ANNE. She is. She has been ever since she turned 15. I hope college will shake her up a bit.

BROOKE. She's all right.

ANNE. Of course, if anyone mistreats her, I'm on the first plane back there to beat them up.

YVETTE. So, what you want the platinum crucible for?

BROOKE. (*To ANNE.*) Play along.

ANNE. All right. You want to know what I want the crucible for?

YVETTE. If you don't mind saying.

BROOKE. (*To ANNE.*) Yes.

ANNE. Do you?

BROOKE. Any time now.

ANNE. You really want to know?

BROOKE. Anne! (*To YVETTE.*) She's been doing this all day.

YVETTE. Spill, Cousin Anne.

ANNE. I want it for a chamber pot.

YVETTE. A chamber pot?

ANNE. A chamber pot. So I can stick it under my bed and use it. Every night. Copiously.

YVETTE. Now, that's a novel idea.

BROOKE. Talk about pretentious shits.

ANNE. Shit on Granddaddy. Just like he shit on us.

BROOKE. He didn't shit on us.

ANNE. Oh, yes, he did. Copiously.

YVETTE. I don't know anything about this, y'all. Catch me up.

BROOKE. Anne's being cranky. She's always resented Granddaddy.

ANNE. Why did he let Aunt Gabrielle close the business?

BROOKE. He had dementia by then.

ELENA. She didn't close it until well after he died.

ANNE. And why did he leave it to the only one of his children who didn't have children of their own? He should've left the business to my mom. Then I could've had it.

BROOKE. *Our* mom.

ANNE. You didn't want it. You never wanted it.

BROOKE. She's still *our* – I was a little young!

ANNE. For God's sake, all I'm saying is he should have left it to someone who wanted the business.

ELENA. He never even asked my dad.

YVETTE. I didn't know about it.

ANNE. That's never made sense to me. How come your family broke off contact?

YVETTE. Well, now, it wasn't my family that broke off contact. It was Granddaddy.

ANNE. How come?

YVETTE. Cause my daddy adopted me.

BROOKE. You're adopted?

ANNE. That explains why you're black!

ELENA. I swore you looked like Granddaddy.

YVETTE. Oh, I do. He's still my granddaddy.

I'm not my parents' daughter. But Granddaddy *is* my granddaddy.

ELENA. I'm my own grandpa?

YVETTE. Granddaddy had a thing with one of the workers in his factory. She was a black woman, name of Claudette. She had my mama. He had shipped her off to New Orleans, and when *she* died, my daddy and mama – your Uncle Mark and Aunt Sophie – adopted me.

ELENA. Granddaddy had an affair?

BROOKE. Granddaddy had an affair with a black woman?

ELENA. Did Grandma know about it?

YVETTE. It was more of a thing, rather than an affair.

ANNE. What's the difference?

YVETTE. Didn't last as long. (*To ELENA.*) Yes, she knew.

BROOKE. (*About the affair.*) My God, we never knew.

YVETTE. Granddaddy wanted me and my real mama out of the family.

BROOKE. That was cold.

YVETTE. Real cold.

ANNE. I knew Uncle Mark didn't marry a black woman. I knew it.

YVETTE. Oh, he did. She's just real light.

ANNE. I need a drink.

YVETTE. So did Granddaddy.

ANNE. Anybody know where Aunt Gabrielle kept the liquor?

(ANNE starts looking around.)

BROOKE. I didn't know there were even black people around here. Not in the 1930's.

YVETTE. She was one of the few.

ELENA. *(To ANNE.)* I already looked, you won't find anything.

ANNE. Where did you look?

BROOKE. Granddaddy was always so Catholic and straight-laced.

ELENA. All over, sideboard, kitchen, pantry, laundry room, outhouse.

YVETTE. He undid his laces then!

ANNE. What outhouse?

BROOKE. I guess he did!
(To ELENA.) Secret passage?

ELENA. *(To BROOKE.)* Yeah, there too.

BROOKE. *(To YVETTE.)* So, did he have only the one child with your grandma?

ANNE. What secret passage?

YVETTE. Yep, just the one.

BROOKE. Well, it's more like a secret closet. You know about it.

ANNE. No, I don't.

BROOKE. Between here and the kitchen.

ELENA. I'll show you.

BROOKE. Let her find it. Cause she's messing with us.

(To ANNE.) You were here. That one weekend. Aunt Gabrielle told us, and we went looking for it. It was Thanksgiving, I was 12, Elena was 16, you would have been...

ANNE. I would've been in college.

BROOKE. But you still came home for Thanksgivings.

ANNE. Not after the first year.

BROOKE. Yes, you did. Until your senior year.

YVETTE. So, this secret passage?

ELENA. Yeah, the secret passage; go ahead, Anne.

ANNE. I hate playing hide and go seek before I've had something to drink.

(ANNE starts going around the room, tapping, looking.)

ELENA. Listen for the hollow sound.

ANNE. It all sounds hollow.

YVETTE. Why would a house like this have a secret passage?

ELENA. It's more like a priest hole.

YVETTE. A priest hole? In the North?

BROOKE. Maybe the crucible is in there.

(To ANNE.) Okay, maybe your chamber pot is in there.

(To YVETTE.) So, do our mom and Elena's dad know that you're not Uncle Mark and Aunt Sophie's child?

YVETTE. Oh, yes.

BROOKE. They never said anything!

ANNE. Come on, you guys, give me some help here.

ELENA. You're warm.

YVETTE. *(To BROOKE.)* I think they were squeamish.

ELENA. *(To ANNE.)* You're getting colder.

BROOKE. About having a mixed-race half sister?

YVETTE. Yeah.

ELENA. Funny, me they don't mind.

(About what ANNE is doing.) I thought it was there, too, remember?

BROOKE. Yeah. Didn't we almost break that?

ELENA. We thought Aunt Gabrielle would be angry with us. But she didn't mind.

BROOKE. *(To ANNE.)* You're getting warmer.

ELENA. *(To YVETTE.)* Did they ever meet? Your mom and my dad and everyone.

YVETTE. No, no, Granddaddy got my grandma and my mama out of here right quick.

BROOKE. *(To ANNE.)* You're really warm.

ELENA. I guess it was easy to arrange certain things back then.

BROOKE. *(To ANNE.)* You're hot!

ANNE. Yes, I am. I better find this quick, or...

(A hidden door in the wall pops open.)

ANNE. Oh!

ELENA. Told you!

(ANNE slips into the secret passage. We hear thumps and bumps.)

ANNE. It's nasty in here.

BROOKE. What are you doing?

ANNE. Anybody got a flashlight?

BROOKE. There's nothing to see.

YVETTE. I got a lighter.

ANNE. Can I borrow it?

BROOKE. What in hell are you doing?

ELENA. *j Virgen Santa!*, you'll burn the whole house down.

ANNE. You're blocking the light. Dammit, Brooke, stand back.

(ANNE emerges, holding a jug.)

BROOKE. You're filthy.

ELENA. What is that?

ANNE. No idea.

It smells like whiskey or something.

BROOKE. I could swear there was nothing in there.

ANNE. Secret panel.

BROOKE. You *do* need a drink.

ANNE. *(To ELENA.)* Could you bring me a glass?

BROOKE. Don't drink it.

ANNE. I'm just going to pour a little out.

(ELENA brings ANNE a glass from the sideboard nearby. ANNE dusts off the jug, pours a little of its contents into the glass, sniffs it.)

ANNE. It is whiskey. Or vodka. Or something.

YVETTE. No, y'all, it's moonshine.

BROOKE. Moonshine?

YVETTE. Mm, hm. Moonshine.

ELENA. Aunt Gabrielle drank moonshine?

YVETTE. Sure looks like it.

BROOKE. *(To ANNE.)* Don't drink it!

ANNE. Just a sip.

(ANNE carefully tries the moonshine.)

ANNE. God!

That's actually pretty good.

BROOKE. We don't know where that's been.

ELENA. In the secret passage.

(YVETTE tastes the moonshine.)

YVETTE. Whoo! That is strong. It's good, though. Real good.

(YVETTE gives the glass to ELENA.)

ELENA. Wow, it's nice, not harsh at all. *(Holds the glass out to BROOKE.)*

BROOKE. No. You're not getting me to try it.

ELENA. Come on, take a sip.

BROOKE. No. I am not –

(A phone rings. The women look around. Each checks her cell phone, pulling it out of a pants pocket, rummaging around in a purse, looking where she was sitting.)

ELENA. It's not mine.

YVETTE. It's not mine. Where is it coming from?

BROOKE. It's not mine.

ANNE. (*Surprised.*) Mine's turned off.

(*The phone stops ringing.*)

ANNE. So, did anybody get a call?

BROOKE. No.

ANNE. Weird. Aunt Gabrielle must have a phone we don't know about.

ELENA. You know what? It didn't even sound like my ring, but I checked anyway.

YVETTE. I know, I do that all the time. All the time.

ELENA. (*Of the moonshine.*) Come on, Brooke, give it a try.

(*The phone rings again.*)

ANNE. It's over here somewhere.

(*Finally, they find the phone, which is hidden in some strange and obscure place – let the director and set designer go wild here. ANNE answers.*)

ANNE. Hello?

They hung up.

BROOKE. It must've gone to voicemail.

ANNE. That's no problem. Wait. We don't know Aunt Gabrielle's password.

BROOKE. No, we do. Remember? We had the phone company reset it so we could get in and change the outgoing message.

ANNE. What did we change it to?

BROOKE. It was something obvious. Her birthdate? Her address?

ANNE. No... the date of Granddaddy's death?

BROOKE. The license plate of her car?

ANNE. Didn't we make up something combining all of our birthdates?

BROOKE. No, it was something else. Something really obvious.

ELENA. Obviously.

YVETTE. Why don't we just *69?

(*They look at the phone.*)

YVETTE. It's a dial phone.

ELENA. Maybe we can use the zero.

YVETTE. Worth a try.

(YVETTE dials 069.)

BROOKE. Wait a minute.

(BROOKE presses the disconnect button.)

ELENA. Why did you do that?

BROOKE. It's not the numbers, it's the tones.
A dial phone won't work.

YVETTE. She's right, y'all.

Maybe there's something else we can dial. Like a special phone number.

ANNE. You guys, this isn't going to work.

ELENA. Wait, wait, I have an idea. Pick up the phone, and I'll hold my cell phone up to the receiver, and I'll do *69 on my cell phone.

ANNE. We don't want to *69 *your* phone.

ELENA. No, the sound will go through the landline.

ANNE. You have to press the actual buttons.

*(YVETTE picks up the receiver of the dial phone, ELENA holds her cell phone close to the receiver and presses *69.)*

YVETTE. Did you press send?

ELENA. Hang on.

BROOKE. You don't have to press send for a landline.

ANNE. Wait, that won't work with a dial phone!

ELENA. She's right.

No, wait, it was on vibrate!

(ELENA puts her phone in tone mode. They try it again.)

YVETTE. What's happening?

(There's a knock on the door. ANNE goes to answer.)

ELENA. It's working! *Virgen Santa*, it's working. Three six oh... Anybody have a piece of paper?

YVETTE. No.

ELENA. Shit.

BROOKE. Repeat it to yourself. Keep it in your memory.

YVETTE. Hang on, I'm looking for a piece of paper.

BROOKE. *(To ELENA.)* Repeat it to me!

ELENA. Shut up; shit. Three six oh, seven five two, eight four six eight six. You got that?

(ANNE and SERGEI enter.)

ANNE. *(To SERGEI.)* They're trying to figure out who called our aunt's number.

ELENA. You got that?

BROOKE. Three six oh, seven five two... what?

ELENA. Eight... shit.

SERGEI. Eight four six eight six.

ELENA. Eight four six eight six.

BROOKE. Eight four six eight six.

ELENA. Okay.

(She starts dialing the number. It takes a long time, of course.)

ELENA. Jesus, dial phones are weird.

SERGEI. Excuse me...

ELENA. It's ringing.

BROOKE. Thank God.

(A phone starts ringing.)

SERGEI. *(Answers his cell phone.)* Hello?

ELENA. Hi, did you call us just now... ? *(Figures it out.)* Oh. *(Hangs up.)*

ANNE. Everyone, this is Sergei. The appraiser.

SERGEI. Hi.

Scene 2. After dinner. Anne, Elena, Brooke, and Sergei are sitting around the living room. Yvette is distributing coffee.

ANNE. *(Continuing what she had been saying.)* See, I thought I'd have more time to do my own research. Especially after I got tenure. And after I could teach some classes on autopilot. I try not to do that, but History 101? And "American Experience: Origins to 1877?"

BROOKE. Chicory!

YVETTE. Mm, hm. I brought some with me on the plane.

SERGEI. *(To ANNE.)* Do they still make you teach those?

ANNE. It's a good little liberal arts college, they want all the students to benefit from all the professors. I bet your dad doesn't have to teach classes like that.

SERGEI. Not since he got tenure. "Big research institution," you know.

ANNE. And I still do like it. But students these days. I had this one kid, near the end of summer term. He's in my office, trying to persuade me that he should pass the class, and he's failing. Meanwhile, he's texting his buddy about where they're going to party that night. While I'm explaining to him why exactly he's failing, and that it includes his partying too much. So I asked to see his phone. And I took the battery out, and I smashed it.

YVETTE. You did not.

ELENA. What did he do?

ANNE. Stared and spluttered. I told him to get the hell out of my office and go study. What is it with kids nowadays, that they can't untether themselves from their god damn cell phones?

(SERGEI'S cell phone rings.)

SERGEI. Sorry.

This is my colleague calling me back about the house. Really. Excuse me.

(SERGEI exits.)

ANNE. So now I'm two weeks into my sabbatical, and I have no idea what I'm going to work on. One of my colleagues, he got this year-long job with this big company, doing longitudinal studies of their production practices, and he got papers out of it, *and* he got a salary. He made more money last year than any of us have made in five.

BROOKE. Yeah, yeah.

ELENA. I thought you had a research topic.

ANNE. Oh, I do. I do.

ELENA. So?

ANNE. I have a research topic.

BROOKE. It's a cool topic. Come on, tell them.

There was that order of nuns here, Aunt Gabrielle used to tell us stories, during Prohibition they used to make hooch.

ELENA. I remember, the Sisters of Charity of something.

YVETTE. Hooch!

BROOKE. Yeah, you can you believe it?

ELENA. She said Granddaddy used to drink it.

YVETTE. (*Replying to BROOKE.*) Sure. Religious orders have always made alcoholic beverages. Beer, liqueur, wine, you name it, they made it.

BROOKE. But not hooch.

YVETTE. Well now, you got that right. Not hooch.

BROOKE. Not hooch. Not nun like.

YVETTE. You got that right.

BROOKE. Not nun like at all.

ELENA. (*To ANNE.*) So, why don't you work on that?

ANNE. Cause I can't find any original documents! The archives of the Order have nothing on this particular convent. Which makes no sense, because their foundress was a historian, and she... but anyhow...

BROOKE. (*To the others.*) They were being cagey, saying they couldn't tell her anything.

ANNE. I almost pretended I was working on another project, to try to get at the info a different way. / I was thinking of something stupid, like –

YVETTE. You were going to lie to nuns?

ANNE. What? No, the archivists. They're not nuns, they're just lay people. And they were lying to me, so – but anyhow, I tracked down some letters that this one nun wrote to her family, a Sister Rose from Rome, Georgia. Moonshine is made all up and down the Appalachians, right? There's this one letter from September 1923, where she asks her mother to send her the recipe for applejack! That their corn whiskey has been doing well, / and they've got this great crop of –

YVETTE. Excuse me, what's applejack?

ANNE. So, meanwhile, I'm looking / through newspapers...

BROOKE. (To YVETTE.) It's like apple brandy.

ANNE. Yeah. So. In the spring of 1920, there's an article about this torrential rain and wind storm, and the roof of the schoolhouse is leaking like crazy. / So they're going to –

BROOKE. We have some letters Grandma's sister wrote to her, saying she was glad this house didn't get damaged.

BROOKE. Say, Yvette, is there any more coffee?

(YVETTE offers around more coffee.)

BROOKE. There had to have been some big donors.

YVETTE. (To ANNE.) Sure you don't want some?

BROOKE. Yum, yum. This is really good.

YVETTE. Thank you.

ELENA. It is good.

BROOKE. That sounds plausible. So –

ANNE. But that's not – so, they're going to take up a subscription to pay for it, only about a month later, there's this article that says they've only raised enough money to pay for repairs, not replace it...

ANNE. But. So, in July of 1923 there's an article about the picnic supper and evening of recitations to, get this, celebrate the new roof of the schoolhouse. The *new* roof. And then, in April of 1924, they dedicate a new chapel. Where did they get all this money?

But there were no donors. Not after 1917. And. And. This is another big thing. Starting a couple years after the passing of Prohibition in this state, deaths from poisoned bootleg alcohol start showing up in the death records of the county.

And they increase a little bit, every year. And then, in early 1923, they go down. And by 1924, there's next to none. So, couldn't this be due to the Sisters making alcohol?

But no one has any actual documents! I've looked everywhere. I even wrote to the U.S. Treasury to see if they ever busted up a still there! At this point, I want to search every attic, basement, and outhouse from I-5 to the Pass.

(SERGEI comes back in the living room.)

YVETTE. I guess you could spend the entire year doing just that. Looking in every attic et cetera.

ANNE. Yeah. I'm beginning to think Aunt Gabrielle was wrong.

BROOKE. Granddaddy told her. He was alive then.

ANNE. I think it's simply a story. Like the crucible.

ELENA. Can you interview people?, people who remember what happened?

ANNE. None of them are still alive. Everyone's dead.

SERGEI. What are you looking for?

ANNE. There was this order of nuns here, up until about 1950, I've been looking for their records.

SERGEI. The ones who made moonshine?

ANNE. Yeah. How do you know about them?

SERGEI. My great-grandpa died of bad moonshine. A bunch of men did. That's why the nuns started making it.

ANNE. Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Could I interview your great-grandpa?

SERGEI. No. He's dead.

ANNE. Life is so tedious.

BROOKE. You look like a teenager, sprawling there.

ELENA. She does!, a whiny teenager.

YVETTE. "Mom, there's nothing to do!"

ELENA. "I'm so bored."

BROOKE. "Mom. Let me text my buddy, he might have done something interesting in the past two minutes."

ANNE. Let's have Moonshine Coffee.

SERGEI. Say what?

BROOKE. Anne found this jug, she's convinced it's moonshine.

ANNE. *(To SERGEI.)* Smell it. What do you think?

SERGEI. This is exactly like the jugs we found in my grandpa's house. After he passed away. See this mark?

ANNE. Oh my God. *(Reads.)* Laudare, Audiuvare, Laborare. *("Lau DAH ray, ah dee oo VAH ray, lah bo RAH ray.")*

BROOKE. What?

YVETTE. "To praise, to... help, to work." Or "to aid, to work."
Catholic school education.

ANNE. Oh my God. Hallelujah. Halle-fucking-lujah.

ELENA. What?

YVETTE. She gone crazy.

ANNE. That's their motto! That's their motto! Hallelujah!

BROOKE. What on earth is she talking about?

SERGEI. I think she means that's the motto of the nuns. The Order of Sisters of Charity of St. Isidore.

ANNE. Oh my God! I could just kiss you, Sergei. I just could.

ELENA. Anne!

BROOKE. *(To YVETTE.)* You're right. She gone crazy.

YVETTE. Seriously crazy. Craziest cracker I ever seen.

BROOKE. Mm, hm.

ANNE. *(To SERGEI.)* Oh my God. Did your family keep any of those jugs? Please tell me they did.

SERGEI. Yeah. I have them.

ANNE. Oh. My. God.

SERGEI. You can have them, if you want.

(ANNE flops down on the sofa.)

ELENA. *(To SERGEI.)* We're usually not this giddy.

SERGEI. That's okay. I'm enjoying myself.

(ANNE pours some of the moonshine in her coffee cup.)

BROOKE. Anne! Don't drink that!!

SERGEI. Oh, it's fine. We had it tested. There was some in the jugs my grandpa left.

ANNE. Ha!

Hold out your cups, everyone.

(ANNE pours some moonshine into each coffee cup.)

ANNE. To Granddaddy!

ALL. To Granddaddy!

ANNE. That hits the spot.

BROOKE. Not bad.

SERGEI. It's good stuff. Those nuns really knew what they were doing.

YVETTE. I think it's time for my surprise. Y'all hang on just a minute, now!

(YVETTE exits towards the kitchen.)

ELENA. *(To SERGEI.)* So, if you're from here, how did you get a name like Sergei?

SERGEI. My grandparents were Communists.
Seriously.

ELENA. Were they open about it?

SERGEI. Sure, everyone knew. It was one of those eccentricities people shrugged off.

ANNE. I didn't know there were Communists in this area.

(YVETTE returns, carrying a box and some small plates. In the following, we hear ELENA and SERGEI'S conversation clearly; the others less so.)

ELENA. How did they end up here?

SERGEI. They came from Russia, and hid out in a small town.

(YVETTE is taking things out of the box and cutting them up into small squares, which she puts on the plates.)

ELENA. Cool, so "McNee" must come from the other side of your family.

SERGEI. A lot of people think I'm joking when I say my name is Sergei McNee. I tell them I'm mixed race.

ELENA. That's good.

SERGEI. You really *are* mixed race, aren't you?

ANNE. *(To SERGEI.)* Say, Sergei...

ELENA. Yeah, my dad is from the Hampton family, so he's white, of course, and my mom's from Venezuela.

SERGEI. Have you been there?

ELENA. Venezuela?, yes, several times; have you ever been to Russia?

SERGEI. Not yet. But I've been to the tenement on the Lower East Side in Manhattan where they lived for a while. *(To ANNE.)* Sorry?

SERGEI. I doubt it, sorry. *(To ELENA.)* Do you speak Spanish?

ELENA. Yes, I'm fluent, do you speak Russian?

SERGEI. I've been studying. I don't speak it much.

ELENA. Learning a different alphabet must be hard.

SERGEI. It's not bad.

ANNE. Sergei?

ANNE. Does your family have any of your great-grandfather's papers?

BROOKE. *(To ANNE.)* How would that help?

ANNE. There might be names, mentions of activities, that sort of thing...

BROOKE. Really?

BROOKE. Yvette has the floor.

YVETTE. Now. Y'all just got to taste this. It is better than cool ginger water in the middle of a hot summer.

YVETTE. Y'all. May I have a little attention here for my present to y'all?

YVETTE. Thank you. Now. Y'all are going to be the first to taste my newest creation.

(YVETTE hands around plates with small samples of chocolate. On each is a small cup containing water.)

BROOKE. Is this real gold?

YVETTE. Yes, it is. Now, I'm going to teach y'all how to taste chocolate. First thing, cleanse your palate. All y'all, take the water in your mouth, swish it around like mouthwash, then spit back in the cup.

(They all do it.)

YVETTE. First, take the piece to the left on y'all's plates. Sniff it, then take a bite, let it melt on your tongue. Move it around so you taste it fully. What does it taste like?

ANNE. Chocolate.

BROOKE. Anne.

YVETTE. Of course. But what specifically?

ELENA. It smells aromatic, like, when you turn over a garden in the spring; or maybe... peat?

BROOKE. Now that you mention it, it reminds me of red Georgia clay.

ELENA. Yeah, spicy and earthy.

BROOKE. Like... cinnamon?

ELENA. Cinnamon and cardamom.

SERGEI. Is it okay if I guess?

YVETTE. It's not guessing game, it's just, what do y'all taste?

SERGEI. Marjoram?

ANNE. Aren't we guessing what you put in this?

ELENA. Cinnamon, cardamom, habañero, with undertones of... oregano?

BROOKE. I was going to say, it has this hot aftertaste.

ELENA. It's got warm stuff in the middle, but... coffee?, or really dark caramel.

BROOKE. Caramel. Okay.

YVETTE. Good. Good. Anne?

ANNE. I feel like I'm at a wine tasting.

YVETTE. But, see now, in a way, you are. Chocolate is as subtle and flavorful as wine.

ANNE. But you're adding these things, aren't you? Wine just *has* those flavors.

YVETTE. Right. Chocolate just has these.

ANNE. Okay.

YVETTE. Now, take a taste of the other.

BROOKE. Wow. It's like it's sweeter. Or more flavorful.

ELENA. The coffee taste is less bitter, less harsh; and the caramel is still dark, but less dark.

SERGEI. I can't tell what's different, but it is better.

ELENA. More cardamom, poblano instead of habañero, and... much less peat.

BROOKE. Yeah. It still reminds me of red Georgia clay, but it's... nicer red Georgia clay.

SERGEI. So this is your business?

YVETTE. That's right. I have a shop right in New Orleans, but not in the tourist area. I targeted my niche very carefully. Women between the ages of 35 and 55, upper-middle-class, who identify as having discriminating tastes and friends that they like to treat. And impress.

SERGEI. I'm impressed.

BROOKE. Black or white?

YVETTE. Black.

ANNE. The chocolate?

BROOKE. The customers.

YVETTE. But I get white, too.

ANNE. Chocolate?

YVETTE. No. White is just *candy*.

ANNE. I'm sorry, the only difference I can tell is that the first one tastes a little metallic.

YVETTE. Right on, Cousin Anne. Right on.

ANNE. What?

YVETTE. Less metallic.

Now we come to the platinum crucible. I get my chocolate, my stock, from a supplier I know, who gets the beans from Mexico, where people have successfully started growing the best variety of beans again. I take it from there. Now, one of the things you do when making chocolate is to temper it. You heat it to a certain temperature, and let it cool. But you have to control it very carefully. To set up the final crystal structure, the microsized crystals – they're what give chocolate its smoothness. The first chocolate you tasted, I tempered that the normal way. But the second one, I tempered that in a pot made of platinum.

So I'm going to introduce a new line of chocolates, Platinum Chocolates. And I'll sell them to very best of my clients, the best people in all of New Orleans.

And that's what I want the platinum crucible for.

ANNE. Yvette. I'm sorry to be blunt, but I can't taste the difference, and I don't think most people will be able to.

ELENA. I can.

ANNE. The tongue is simply not that sensitive. I mean, a few molecules of metal here or there, what on earth does it matter?

ELENA. It matters if you know chocolate, / and you just said you could –

ANNE. I know chocolate. I eat good chocolate. The 62.5%, Madagascar bean, single origin, woodfired, dark chocolate. The 89% ultra dark Ghana chocolate with undertones of tar. The 95.9% super-duper dark, fair trade, hand-picked, flowery overtones and fruity undertones, with a ripe, blackstrap / molasses finish –

ELENA. Anne.

ANNE. The chocolate industry has gotten so pretentious.

YVETTE. All that means is, Cousin Anne, is that you're not in my niche.

ELENA. So, what percentage of cacao is in these?

YVETTE. They're 73% cacao. Like me.

ELENA. *(Laughing.)* From Africa, right?

BROOKE. *(Also enjoying the joke.)* Yeah, West Africa.

YVETTE. Mm, hm! Ghana, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire.

BROOKE. Ooh, Côte D'Ivoire.

YVETTE. That's the Ivory Coast to you, Miss Thing.

BROOKE. Ooh.

ELENA. I guess I'm 50% cacao.

[Optional dialog for if the actress playing Elena doesn't look 50% cacao to Yvette.

[YVETTE. Now, if you don't mind my saying, you don't look 50% cacao to me.

[ELENA. Cacao comes in all shades in Venezuela.]

YVETTE. Some good stuff come out of Venezuela.

ELENA. I know.

BROOKE. Ooh.

ELENA. What are you, Sergei?

SERGEI. *(Outrageous Russian accent.)* Am pure Russian cacao from steppes of Siberia, grown on patriotic collective farm and made in factory without capitalist, profiteering labor. Last long, taste always same.

ELENA. Long live glorious Republic of Soviet Union!

BROOKE. Well, Anne, I guess we're just plain white chocolate.

ANNE. I guess.

BROOKE. Plain, white, British Isles chocolate. Only I prefer mine without nuts.

ELENA. I guess you do!

ANNE. Did we drink all the hooch?

ELENA. I think so.

ANNE. Damn.

YVETTE. So, when we gon' vote on who gets the crucible?

ANNE. We have to find it first.

YVETTE. We could vote on who gets it if we find it.

ANNE. That seems premature.

SERGEI. How big is this crucible, if you don't mind my asking?

ELENA. We don't know, none of us has ever seen it. We can't even agree on whether or not it exists.

SERGEI. A sort of family legend.

ELENA. Exactly.

SERGEI. Our family legend is that Great Grandpa helped tar and feather this kid who was accused of rape during the Depression.

ELENA. *¡Virgen Santa!*

SERGEI. I don't think it's true.

ELENA. I hope not.

ANNE. Sergei, what did your friend say about the house?

SERGEI. Right. The house.

He had good news. His clients are satisfied that the work your aunt did is in keeping with building standards and materials of the time it was built, and they're pleased with the upgrades she made to the infrastructure.

ELENA. I knew it, I just knew it.

SERGEI. Now, if it was in an urban area, or closer to such an area, it would be worth a lot more. But here, you could still get about two million. That's before estate taxes, of course, and income tax. So you'd be looking at about one million net. Maybe a little more.

ANNE. One million dollars?

SERGEI. Give or take.

YVETTE. One million dollars?

BROOKE. Oh. Well. One million.

ELENA. Puh. A mere million.

BROOKE. Small potatoes.

YVETTE. It's a chunk of change.

BROOKE. A chunk of vegetables.

ELENA. Or are they fruits?

BROOKE. No, that's tomatoes. Not potatoes. (*Singing.*) 250,000 bottles of beer on the wall, 250,000 bottles of beer! You take one down, pass it around, 249,000 bottles of beer on the wall! No, wait, 249,999 bottles of beer on the wall. 249,999 bottles of beer on the wall, 249,999 bottles of beer! You take one down, pass it around, 249,998 bottles of beer on the wall! (*Etc., ad nauseam.*)

ANNE. Oh, God.

ANNE. Someone stop her now.

YVETTE. I have this pillow, and I ain't afraid to use it.

YVETTE. I ain't afraid to use it, now!

ANNE. Sit on her or something.

ELENA. Yeah, Brooke, I'll sit on you, and that won't be pleasant.

YVETTE. Uh, huh! I'll smother you and Cousin Elena will squish you. You stop this right now!

Sorry! Sorry! I'll be good. (*But she continues.*) 249,995 bottles of beer on the wall... (*etc., ad nauseam.*)

YVETTE. Don't make me use this pillow. Don't make me do it.

BROOKE. I'll be good. I will. Whew.

YVETTE. You gon' settle down now, Miss Thing?

BROOKE. Yeah. Yeah. I'm settled down.

ELENA. (*To YVETTE.*) What were you calling Anne earlier? Crazy something?

YVETTE. Crazy cracker.

ELENA. Yeah, crazy cracker, you could add those to your product line. Crazy Crackers! They come in all shades of white!

YVETTE. With pink frosting!

ELENA. Get them while they're fresh!

BROOKE. It's just, it's just that that's a lot of money. A lot of money.

ANNE. Is there any more hooch?

BROOKE. Yeah. I need a drink.

ELENA. *(To ANNE.)* No. You just asked that.

SERGEI. Was there only the one jug?

ELENA. Yeah.

ANNE. That's all we found.

SERGEI. Where did you find it?

ELENA. In the secret passage, in a panel; Anne found it.

SERGEI. When I was growing up, I heard stories about a back part of the basement in this house.

ELENA. I looked in the basement.

SERGEI. Back behind it. Where the house is close to the hillside.

ELENA. Behind the basement?

SERGEI. There's supposed to be another room back there.

(ANNE gets up, goes towards the hallway that leads to the basement.)

ANNE. *(To SERGEI.)* Well, come on.

SERGEI. Okay. I've never seen it myself.

(They exit.)

YVETTE. Um, now, maybe this ain't none of my business, but is Anne... does she have a drinking problem?

BROOKE. Yeah. Her problem is, there's not enough to drink.
Not that I'm aware of.

YVETTE. *(To ELENA, about the chocolate.)* Help yourself, if you want more.

ELENA. Thanks. It's good.

YVETTE. Help yourself.

Do you think it'd be worth it to get a metal detector? Maybe Aunt Gabrielle buried it in the yard. The crucible.

ELENA. She could have.

YVETTE. Between the four of us, we've looked everywhere else.

ELENA. I wonder if Sergei has any connections to get us into the factory.

BROOKE. I still say we break in.

ELENA. Anne's too law-abiding, she'd turn us in.

BROOKE. Then we won't tell her. We'll sneak down tonight, after she's gone to sleep.

YVETTE. It's a small town, y'all. Everyone will know what we're up to before we do. She'll be standing on the front porch, racking a shotgun.

BROOKE. I'd pay to see that!

YVETTE. Cousin Brooke, you sure perked up when Sergei mentioned the money.

BROOKE. Yeah.

YVETTE. How much the house is worth.

I don't mean to pry, just trying to get to know y'all.

BROOKE. It's okay.

I want to take my family to China. Janice has never been back. She was only six months old, so she doesn't have any memories of it. I want her to see it. She's wanted to for a long time, but we've never had the money.

YVETTE. Does she speak Chinese?

BROOKE. Some. The kids have both been studying Mandarin for several years. We've been able to afford a private school, which is so great for them. And there are a lot of mixed-race kids there, which makes their lives a lot easier.

YVETTE. I know something about that.

BROOKE. Yeah. Everyone is comfortable around people of different races and with mixed-race people. We love it there.

YVETTE. Sometimes you just got to be some place where folks get it.

BROOKE. Yeah. Sometimes you just got be where folks get it.

YVETTE. Ain't that the truth.

BROOKE. Because a lot of folks don't get it.

ELENA. What is taking them so long?

BROOKE. Go down and check on them, if you want.

So I've been working hard for some time, to raise the money so we can do this, even if would it only be for a summer, or a month. If we could sell this house, we could spend a whole year there, no problem. It would be educational for the kids, it would be nice for Janice, and for me... well, I speak barely any Mandarin, but I'd do it for my wife and kids.

YVETTE. So this is why you wanted the good voodoo from the crucible.

BROOKE. Yeah.

We should finish that chocolate before it melts.

YVETTE. Go on, help yourself.

BROOKE. It really is good. Don't pay any attention to Anne.

YVETTE. She kind of prickly, ain't she?

BROOKE. Prickly. That one way of putting it. Yeah, she's always been prickly.

YVETTE. Does she take after your daddy's side of your family? Y'all don't look that much alike.

BROOKE. We get that a lot. Part of it's the age difference. She's 12 years older than I am.

YVETTE. That makes sense.

ELENA. I wonder what's down there.

YVETTE. Maybe they'll find the crucible.

BROOKE. Maybe there's a secret tunnel, for bootleggers.

(We can hear ANNE and SERGEI coming up from the basement.)

YVETTE. Or catacombs! Maybe all of Anne's nuns are buried down there.

ELENA. I hope not!

(ANNE and SERGEI enter, carrying boxes.)

ELENA. There you guys are.

BROOKE. What did you find?

YVETTE. Now, that doesn't look like hooch.

BROOKE. Or dead nuns.

ANNE. I found them! Everything! It's all here.

BROOKE. What's all here?

ANNE. The documents! Ledgers, day books, everything! In these boxes.

ELENA. How did they end up here?

ANNE. No, no, don't touch. Wash your hands first.

BROOKE. Good Lord.

ANNE. I'm serious. First thing I have to do, I have to catalogue everything.

ELENA. Did you find the crucible?

(ANNE is exiting to go wash her hands.)

SERGEI. No. Sorry. It could be at the bottom of one of these boxes, though.

ELENA. What's that one?

SERGEI. I don't know. It was off to the side.

(SERGEI hands the box to ELENA.)

ELENA. Maybe it's the crucible.

BROOKE. *(To SERGEI.)* Did you find any more hooch?

SERGEI. *(To ELENA.)* It would be nice for you guys if it was. *(To BROOKE.)* Yes, there were two or three jugs down there.

BROOKE. And Anne didn't bring them up?

SERGEI. She lost interest after she saw what was in the boxes. I'll go get them.

ELENA. Oh, don't worry about it.

SERGEI. It's no problem.

(SERGEI exits.)

BROOKE. *(To ELENA.)* Anne's going to kill you for opening that.

ELENA. Let her kill; anything in this house, it belongs to all of us, not only her.

YVETTE. What's in it?

(ELENA pulls papers out of a large manila envelope.)

ELENA. This is a manuscript of some kind. A memoir, Aunt Gabrielle was writing a memoir.

BROOKE. She was?

ELENA. Yeah, look.

BROOKE. She's talking about Granddaddy.

YVETTE. It's about Granddaddy?

BROOKE. So far, yeah. No, wait, now she's talking about herself. God, this is fascinating.

YVETTE. (*Looking in the box.*) Hey, y'all, this is the original of her will.

ELENA. Let me see.

Wow.

YVETTE. (*Looking in the box again.*) Letters. They're all from the same man. Oh Lord, y'all, these are love letters.

ELENA. Love letters?

YVETTE. Mm, hm. My, my.

ELENA. Wow. I didn't know Aunt Gabrielle had a boyfriend.

BROOKE. Hey, you guys, what was the date on Aunt Gabrielle's will?

YVETTE. My, my, these are sweet.

ELENA. (*To BROOKE.*) It was about two, three years ago.

BROOKE. This is dated six months ago.

(*ANNE enters, her hands washed, with a journal and pencils.*)

ANNE. I told you guys not touch anything.

BROOKE. Oh my God.

ANNE. Are your hands clean?

BROOKE. Hey, Anne...

ANNE. What?
What?

BROOKE. Does this look like Aunt Gabrielle's handwriting to you?

ANNE. Yes, it does.

BROOKE. You better read this.

(*ANNE reads the will.*)

ANNE. She didn't sign it. So it's not valid.

(*ANNE hands the will back to BROOKE, goes to the boxes, starts carefully taking ledgers etc. out of them.*)

BROOKE. Did you read it carefully?

ANNE. Yes.

I know about that.

BROOKE. You know?

ANNE. Oh, yes. I've known for a few years.

ELENA. Known what?

BROOKE. And you didn't say anything?

ELENA. Known what?

YVETTE. What are you talking about?

ELENA. What does it say?

BROOKE. In this will, a holographic will, dated just six months ago, which we believe to be written by our Aunt Gabrielle, she leaves – aside from a few modest bequests to her nieces, she leaves the bulk of her estate to her daughter.

ELENA. Her daughter?

YVETTE. Aunt Gabrielle had a daughter?

BROOKE. Apparently she did.

ELENA. She never had any children, what daughter?

YVETTE. But you're saying this will isn't valid, right?

BROOKE. It's not signed, so I don't think it is.

ELENA. An adopted daughter, you mean?

BROOKE. No, she says "natural daughter."

YVETTE. Good Lord, I thought me being the darkey in the woodpile would be the biggest secret of the weekend. I was *wrong*. What could be worse?

BROOKE. Who the hell is Aunt Gabrielle's daughter?

(SERGEI enters, two jugs of hooch in hand.)

SERGEI. Anyone need another drink?

Act II, Scene 1. An hour later. Anne sitting at the dining-room table, studying the documents from the boxes. Elena, Yvette, and Brooke are sitting in the living room, reading Aunt Gabrielle's memoir, handing the pages to each other as they finish them. Brooke is last in line but a fast reader.

BROOKE. The problem is, there are so many gaps in this, she could have had her daughter anywhere in a 12-year period. Why couldn't she have been more specific?

ELENA. You expect her to come right out and say, on May 10th, or whatever, I gave birth to an illegitimate daughter?

BROOKE. It is a memoir.
And we don't know it was illegitimate.

ELENA. She says in her will she's unmarried.

BROOKE. In the first will. Not in the handwritten one.
(To YVETTE.) Are you done with that page yet?

YVETTE. Read the letters again.

BROOKE. I've read them twice.

YVETTE. Read them again. You might've missed some clues.

BROOKE. I didn't miss any clues.

(BROOKE waits for YVETTE to finish reading.)

BROOKE. Wait! What her boyfriend said, in that one letter, it could mean anything!

YVETTE. I told you.

BROOKE. It *could* have been that he was Protestant, but it could have been that he was black or something.

ELENA. I suppose.

BROOKE. It's true. Granddaddy wasn't happy that my dad isn't Catholic. But he also wasn't happy that your mom isn't white.

YVETTE. He was furious about me.

BROOKE. (To ELENA.) Even though she is Catholic.
We should try to find him.

ELENA. It'd be an invasion of his privacy.

(YVETTE finishes the page she's been reading, and hands it to BROOKE.)

ELENA. Here's another gap, she talks about going away "for her health."

(ELENA hands the page to YVETTE.)

BROOKE. When?

ELENA. Just before she moved back here, a few years before.

BROOKE. *(Meaning the daughter.)* She could be my age.

YVETTE. Or my age.

(BROOKE reaches for the page ELENA just put on YVETTE'S stockpile, but YVETTE stops her.)

YVETTE. You'll get them out of order.

BROOKE. *(Meaning the different speeds at which they read.)* I think we're out of order.

(BROOKE fidgets, waits, starts humming "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall" without realizing it.)

ELENA. You're doing it again.

YVETTE. Ask Anne if she wants help.

ANNE. No, I don't want any help.

BROOKE. Same answer as last time.

ELENA. She talks about that side porch...

YVETTE. The one I hid in?

BROOKE. What's she say?

ELENA. It wasn't termites, she says something about it not being original and not really belonging; when she was restoring the house.

YVETTE. That explains it.

ELENA. I'm glad she tore it down, it looked awful.

BROOKE. I wonder what she looks like? Aunt Gabrielle's daughter.

ELENA. Like Aunt Gabrielle.

YVETTE. Yeah.

BROOKE. Right, but seriously. Would we recognize her if we saw her on the street?

ELENA. She'd look like Granddaddy.

YVETTE. It's easier to tell for some of us.

BROOKE. No, no, I can tell you look like him. Anne was the one people couldn't tell who she looked like. *(To ANNE.)* Remember?

Elena looks like her mom, of course, but also a lot like our mom. Everyone said Aunt Gabrielle and I could've been twins we were little. But Anne – Mom said she looked like our dad, Dad said she looked like Granddaddy, Uncle Joe said she looked like Great-Aunt what's her name, Aunt Gabrielle said she didn't know who she looked like.

ELENA. People said *I* looked like Great-Aunt what's her name.

BROOKE. Whatever. I'm just wondering what she looks like.

(BROOKE fidgets, starts to hum, stops.)

BROOKE. So, Anne, do the numbers all add up?

ANNE. Yeah.

BROOKE. I mean, does it explain all of Granddaddy's money?

ANNE. I'm more interested in the nuns.

BROOKE. Maybe the daughter was deformed or something. Or was retarded, like they used to say.

(To YVETTE.) Sorry, this is making no sense.

(BROOKE takes the stockpile of papers from by YVETTE.)

BROOKE. I'm reading faster than you.

YVETTE. Fine, just fine. Just don't get them out of order.

BROOKE. They're numbered.

YVETTE. Oh.

(ELENA reads the last page, and puts it down.)

ELENA. Well, that's it, Granddaddy's dead.

She mentions the crucible, she said Granddaddy always wanted to have it near him when he... at the end of his life.

YVETTE. She say what she did with it after he died?

ELENA. No, that's where it ends.

YVETTE. Maybe it was his chamber pot.

ANNE. No, it was his crucible.

ELENA. *(To the tune of "Let's Call the Whole Thing Off.")* You say chamber pot, I say crucible...

BROOKE. *(Meaning the boyfriend.)* I still say we try to find him.

ELENA. (*Still talking about Granddaddy.*) He's buried right up there, in the cemetery.

BROOKE. That was easy.

ELENA. Granddaddy.

BROOKE. (*Shaking her head.*) The boyfriend.

YVETTE. Granddaddy had a boyfriend?

ELENA. No, no, just your illegitimate grandmother.

YVETTE. My *mother* was illegitimate. My grandmother was his "thing."

BROOKE. I don't want to talk about Granddaddy's thing.

YVETTE. My grandmother was legitimate.

ELENA. Except for having an affair with him.

YVETTE. It wasn't an affair.

ELENA. Yeah, yeah, it wasn't long enough.

BROOKE. Granddaddy had a short thing?

YVETTE. Just read. And don't you start humming again.

(*BROOKE reads.*)

ELENA. Do you think Grandma knew? Wasn't she a member of that anti-drinking group, what was it called?

YVETTE. Knew what?

ELENA. That Granddaddy was a bootlegger for the nuns.

YVETTE. She had to have known.

ELENA. That the money all came from illegal booze.

YVETTE. Could have been worse. Could have been a slave trader.

ELENA. Well, there is that.

YVETTE. It bothers you, doesn't it?

ELENA. Yeah.

YVETTE. It's not like the nuns was making bad stuff, you know.

ELENA. I know.

YVETTE. It was good stuff.

ELENA. I know.

YVETTE. It was a humanitarian act, if you look at it right.

ELENA. I know, I'd be happier if it hadn't been against the law.

(ANNE stands, rolling her shoulders and otherwise taking a break from examining the documents.)

ANNE. I think it makes Granddaddy dashing.

YVETTE. Dashing. Now that's a nice thought.

ANNE. Racing along the back roads in a souped-up '21 Model T, hiding booze in the hollowed-out back seat, doing those turns where you yank on the parking brake and do a 180.

YVETTE. That's where NASCAR came from, you know.

ANNE. I know. Southern bootleggers getting away from the treasury men.

YVETTE. Competing to see who had the fastest car.
So, Cousin Anne, you happy?

ANNE. Oh, yeah. This is a treasure trove.

BROOKE. Happiest I've seen her in a long time.

ANNE. There's this one colleague of mine, I can't wait to tell her. She was sure it was all a fabrication.

BROOKE. And now you have something to do this year.

ANNE. And the year after that, and the year after that. I'm going to get papers, presentations, grant proposals, travel to conferences... this is great.

YVETTE. And classes? You could teach a special-topics class, couldn't you?

ANNE. Oh, sure. I'll have to revise my seminar. But that comes later.

YVETTE. I bet you pretty tired of teaching by now. How long you been teaching?

ANNE. Twenty years. Wow.

YVETTE. Twenty years. My, my!

ANNE. Yeah. No, teaching's great. *(Suddenly.)* Wait, what day is it? I have to put in an application for a research assistant.

BROOKE. Right now?

ANNE. No, no. Before the end of the month. And I know just who I want.

YVETTE. It must be tedious, teaching all the same classes over and over for 20 years. History 101, and what was that other one you mentioned?

ANNE. I don't teach all the same classes.

YVETTE. The one on American History?

ANNE. We have lots of classes in American History.

BROOKE. I think she means that "Origins to 1877" one.

ANNE. I hope Sergei's mom has the books from the store.

YVETTE. (*Overlapping ANNE.*) "Origins to 1877." That was it. Why 1877?

ANNE. It's a good dividing point.

YVETTE. It's in the middle of Reconstruction.

ANNE. Yes, but a lot of things changed in... it's complicated. It's too late to call him, I'll bet.

ELENA. Yeah, too late.

YVETTE. (*To ANNE.*) You said those classes was tedious. You was tired of them.

ANNE. I didn't say that. /

BROOKE. I think she was just saying –

YVETTE. (*After ANNE: "I didn't say that."*) Didn't you? I was pretty sure you did say you was tired of them. / Teaching them on auto-pilot.

ANNE. Anything gets familiar after a while. Are you getting at something in particular?

YVETTE. I'm just asking you about teaching. / Just asking you, do you...

ANNE. Because you seem to be trying to get me to say something particular. I use these techniques on my students, you know.

YVETTE. I just wonder how much you really like teaching. Cause you sounding like you don't.

ANNE. I like teaching. What gave you the impression I don't? You must have parts of your job that you do over and over, that aren't your favorite. But that doesn't mean you don't like them. If you've never been a teacher, it's hard to understand.

(ANNE goes back to the table. At some point, YVETTE will take some of the pages BROOKE has finished.)

BROOKE. So.

How do we go about finding Aunt Gabrielle's daughter? Birth records? Adoption records?

ELENA. Aren't adoption records sealed? only the person who was adopted can get them.

BROOKE. Well, birth records, then. There has to be a record of the birth. / Anne, wouldn't there be –

ANNE. I looked.

BROOKE. Where?

ANNE. Here and all the surrounding counties.

BROOKE. Maybe she went to Tacoma, or Seattle, / or some big –

ANNE. There, too.

BROOKE. That means she was born somewhere else. We need to keep looking. You can dial into the university, right?

ANNE. What? Why?

BROOKE. Don't you have access to those special databases?

ANNE. Go up to the UW. / Anyone can access them –

BROOKE. It's three hours away!

ELENA. (*Explaining to YVETTE.*) The University of Washington.

BROOKE. And they're closed. Can't you dial in from here?

ANNE. Even if I could, it's not as easy as you think.

BROOKE. Private detective? There's got to be a way.

ELENA. What would we do if we did find her?

BROOKE. Say hello. How are you. So nice to meet you. / Where have you –

ELENA. What would we do? Honor Aunt Gabrielle's latest will? give all of her estate to this woman? whoever she is?

YVETTE. (*Speaking of Aunt Gabrielle.*) If she didn't sign that will, is it valid?

ELENA. What if it is? (*Speaking of the daughter.*) Or what if she could use it to contest the previous will? Think of it, all of our inheritance tied up in litigation for years and years. We couldn't get at the money, the house would stand empty...

YVETTE. In Louisiana, she'd have a good claim to a fair share of it. / A good claim to –

ANNE. Inheritance laws in Washington are a lot different from Louisiana.

BROOKE. Aren't you guys even curious? As to who this woman is?

ELENA. Of course I'm curious, but I think we should be cautious.

BROOKE. We could, I don't know, make her an offer. Offer to split the estate five ways.

YVETTE. No way. Huh uh.

BROOKE. We'd each get one fifth less than we're getting now. Is that so much?

YVETTE. No way.

ELENA. We have no way of knowing she'd take that.

BROOKE. It sounds fair to me. / Doesn't it sound fair to –

ELENA. Fair? When it comes to money, people have a way of not being fair anymore.

BROOKE. But doesn't it sound fair to you?

YVETTE. I think she's saying, we don't know what she's like. We don't know what she'd consider fair.

BROOKE. (To ELENA.) I don't get it. She's family. *Familia*.

ELENA. She's not my family.

BROOKE. She's your cousin.

ELENA. My family, *mi familia*, is my Venezuelan family, she's just Anglo.

BROOKE. We're Anglos.

ELENA. Right, / yes, but –

BROOKE. Is that how you think of us?

ELENA. You don't understand, it's different on my mom's side of the family.

YVETTE. But help me out here, y'all. Are we under any obligation to find this woman?

BROOKE. Of course we are!

YVETTE. I'm not sure, cause the laws in Louisiana are so different.

ANNE. Rather than speculate, we should ask a lawyer.

BROOKE. You looked for her birth certificate, you must think we should find her.

ANNE. I was curious. Historian's habit.

BROOKE. You mean, even if you'd found out that this woman existed, you wouldn't try to contact her?

ANNE. No.

BROOKE. No?

ANNE. No.

BROOKE. I don't believe that.

ANNE. I wouldn't.

BROOKE. That's not true.

ANNE. Excuse me?

BROOKE. You'd try to find her.
"Historian's habit."

ANNE. You said contact her, not find her.
What if she doesn't want to be contacted?

ELENA. "Historian's habit," and she's
talking about nuns.

BROOKE. What if she does?

ELENA. Get it?

ANNE. Then she'll contact us.

BROOKE. Not if she doesn't know we exist! You see everything as an academic
exercise.

ANNE. You just want to find her so you can avoid her.

BROOKE. What?

ELENA. You guys...

ANNE. So you don't have to worry about someone showing up to do you out of your
year in China.

BROOKE. What's that supposed to mean?

ANNE. "I want to take Janice and the kids to China!" "I want to take Janice and the kids
to China!" Over and over.

BROOKE. I do want to take them to China.

ANNE. The rest of us would like to go on a nice long vacation from responsibility, too,
you know!

BROOKE. I have no idea what you're talking about.

ANNE. Oh yes, you do.

ELENA. Come on, don't fight in front of... don't fight.

BROOKE. (To ANNE.) Where the hell
is this coming from? If you really want
to go on a vacation, then go on a
vacation! Who's stopping you?

YVETTE. In front of who? Don't fight in front
of who? The stranger? The outsider?

ELENA. No, no, I'm only saying –

ANNE. A vacation, sure! Not an all expenses paid, year-long sabbatical in a foreign country.

BROOKE. What does it matter to you what I do?

ANNE. It matters a hell of a lot!

BROOKE. And you're getting a sabbatical! Why shouldn't I?

ANNE. Oh, Brooke, you are always so full of yourself. The protected, younger daughter. I shoulder all of the burdens, and you just do what you want.

BROOKE. That does it. *(Stands to leave.)*

ANNE. You want to find Aunt Gabrielle's daughter to make sure you're safe from her.

BROOKE. Go to hell.

(BROOKE exits.)

ELENA. You know, Yvette, half the time I have no idea whether you're joking or not; you say stuff with this look in your eye, like you're making a statement to see how people will react, like you're turning up the heat under the frog in the water.

YVETTE. No, I am really interested in why you think I'm an outsider.

ELENA. I know what it's like to be an outsider, so I was trying to be nice to you, now I'm sorry I bothered.

(ELENA is about to leave, then stops.)

ELENA. No, wait, you leave; there's no reason for me to leave because you're being a bitch.

YVETTE. Excuse me?

ELENA. You heard me.

YVETTE. This is my house as much as it is yours now.

YVETTE. No, now, don't be backing down from what you're saying. Don't fight in front of who?

ELENA. *(To ANNE and BROOKE.)* Come on, you guys.

YVETTE. Don't fight in front of who?

ELENA. I didn't mean ...we don't really know you.

YVETTE. Right. I'm an outsider.

ELENA. You're still family.

YVETTE. As far as y'all know.

ELENA. *(To ANNE.)* Anne.

YVETTE. I could have just come here to swindle y'all out of some of your inheritance.

ELENA. No, it isn't; you admired how beautiful it is, but you weren't here working to make it beautiful. I was. So you leave.

(Stalemate. Finally, with great dignity, YVETTE gathers herself and leaves. ELENA sits. She starts to read Aunt Gabrielle's memoir again. ANNE returns to examining the ledgers. BROOKE enters, looks around where she was sitting and finds her cell phone, and exits. ELENA reads and ANNE studies the ledgers. YVETTE enters, looks around where she was sitting, finds her cell phone, exits. ELENA pulls out her cell phone, starts to make a call, considers the time, doesn't finish. ELENA reads, ANNE studies the ledgers.)

ANNE. I've never heard you talk to anyone like that before.

ELENA. God, I can't believe I said that, but I really did feel like she was attacking me.

ANNE. I agree. She does say stuff simply to see how we'll react.

ELENA. I feel like a bug under a microscope around her.

ANNE. Brooke seems to get along with her.

ELENA. Brooke *acts* like her.

ANNE. I was going to say, she acts black.

ELENA. Yeah.

ANNE. Brooke doesn't care whether Aunt Gabrielle has a daughter or not. When she's interested in something that way, she wants to know about it so she can know it's not a threat to her. She's done that all her life.

ELENA. I have to admit, my first thought was, that woman could get some of my money.

ANNE. You're right, people change. I mean that about all of us.

ELENA. Look, what if we destroy that will? No one would ever know.

ANNE. There's no way we could get everyone to agree not to say anything, and there's no way we could all trust each other. Think about it.

ELENA. Yeah, you're right.

ANNE. What?

ELENA. No, no, you're right.

ANNE. What are you thinking?

(BROOKE enters.)

ANNE. Elena, what are you going to do?

(ELENA indicates BROOKE.)

ANNE. Oh.

BROOKE. (To ANNE.) Can we talk?

ANNE. You know what, Brooke? No.

BROOKE. Well. Excuse me.

ANNE. All our lives, you and I have been crap at settling problems. I always come away feeling mauled.

BROOKE. *You* come away feeling mauled? I come away feeling mauled. / You think I don't –

ANNE. And see, this is what you do! You always appropriate what I say, to make your own points.

BROOKE. What, so you're the only one who feels a certain way?

ANNE. You never listen to me. You're too busy taking what I say and transforming it into something for you to say.

BROOKE. Bullshit.

ANNE. See? This is why I'm not having this kind of conversation with you.

(YVETTE enters.)

YVETTE. (To ELENA.) Can we talk?

ELENA. You know what, Yvette? No.

YVETTE. Well. Excuse me.

What is it with you people? Y'all always so quarrelsome, and y'all don't know how to make up.

BROOKE. Oh, shut up. What gives you the right to come here and criticize us? You don't even know us.

BROOKE

ANNE

ELENA

YVETTE

(To BROOKE.) And that's my fault how? When did you ever pick up the phone?

(To YVETTE.) What does that have to do with anything?

BROOKE

ANNE

ELENA

YVETTE

(To YVETTE.) I tried! I tried to get in touch with you for years, and you never responded.

You did not.

Yes, I did! You're always judging us, you look at us like you're better than us.

I do not judge you. You judge me. You look at my clothes and my hair and my nails and you sneer. You dress awful. Even a heavy woman like you, you could still present yourself better.

I do not sneer.

At least I take some care with myself.

(To YVETTE.) Don't talk to her like that. You dress like you think you're in Manhattan.

(To BROOKE.) Oh, now you come to someone's defense. Now you start supporting someone.

You look like a stupid painted doll; if that's how you look normally, I'd hate to see you when you're dressed up.

At least I dress up.

We're in the country.

(To YVETTE.) You are overdressed for this place.

(To BROOKE.) And you act like you in the country, too.

Excuse me?

You ignored my cards at Christmas, you ignored my e-mails, you ignored all of my attempts to get in touch with you...

(To ELENA.) I never got your cards! I never got your e-mails!

She did try.

...and now you expect to come waltzing back here and act like you're a member of the family?

BROOKE

ANNE

ELENA

YVETTE

(To YVETTE.) You
sure don't act like it.

Yeah! Take your
things and leave.

You've been
needling us ever
since you got here.

I'm tired of your
drama.

Don't tell us when
to fight!

(To ELENA.) Yeah!

We will! If you keep
acting like this.

And pushing, and
prying...
... like we're bugs
under a microscope.
Or frogs in hot
water.

That's none of your
business.

(To ELENA.) What?

Whose side are you
on?

Now that there's
money, you are; I
think you should
get out; take your
things and leave.

(To ANNE and
BROOKE.) Actually,
I agree with her.

Whenever we get
together, you two
are so important
always; you two
fight, and I hover at
the edges.

I am a member of
the family!

This is my house,
too. You can't order
me out.

Oh, so now the two
of you agreeing on
something. Now the
two of you in
accord on some-
thing. Y'all been
spoiling for a fight
ever since I got
here. Y'all ought to
fight and just get it
over with. Get it
over with.

She right about that.

BROOKE

ANNE

ELENA

YVETTE

You do not! You sit back and poke in with some little observation.

Get everything out in the open for once and for all.

(To ANNE.) You do not!
You're always so passive aggressive. "Oh, you just want to take your family to China. What about poor little old me?"

I try! I try all the time! She won't –
(To BROOKE.) Yes, I do!

I have not taken advantage of you!
I have not!

Yeah, what about me? Huh? You've taken advantage of me all your life.

Appropriated my words ...

You're always "poor me, younger sister, always picked on."

¡Ay! Virgen Santa.

Forget it. I don't want to fight in front of other people.

(To BROOKE.) A little late for that, you know. A little late.

(To YVETTE.) Shut up.

(We start to hear sirens in the distance.)

Fine. Fine. Don't mind me! Just the little Negro cousin, hanging around in the background. Just hanging around.

I knew you'd play the race card sooner or later. I knew you would.

BROOKE

Oh, come on. You don't think white people can talk about race? Only you can talk about race?

You hypocrite! You've been talking to me like it's all fine. Like it's okay.

I miss the South! I was trying to make you feel at home.

(Checking her cell phone without realizing it.)

Jesus, you look for any excuse...

ANNE

(To BROOKE.) And then you go off to some other fight.

(ELENA'S cell phone rings.)

(Checks her cell phone to see if it's ringing.)

(ANNE goes to Aunt Gabrielle's phone; it's not ringing.)

What's going on?

ELENA

¡Maldita negra presumida! We're not hicks, we welcomed you – we welcomed you even though you're a stranger completely, and you talk weirdly –

“¡Negra!”
It means black!
(Answers her phone, says to YVETTE.)
¡Chinga tu madre!

YVETTE

You been talking about race the entire time I been here! The entire time.

You're not really talking to me. Uh, uh. You like all the other white people leave the South, want to talk to some black person from the South.

Want to talk to some darkey for old times' sake.

Y'all just a bunch of Seattle hicks. Dress like crap, act like crap, think you the best thing God ever created.

Excuse me?
(Automatically checking her cell phone.)

I know you did not just call me nigger.

BROOKE	ANNE	ELENA	YVETTE
<i>¡Negra!</i> It means "black," not... not you know what.		(<i>Into phone.</i>) Hello?	Excuse me?
I don't know! I don't speak Spanish!		Yes. Hang on. (<i>She moves to one side.</i>)	(<i>To BROOKE.</i>) No, the other thing! "Chinga" what?
So what?		(<i>Into phone.</i>) What?	Well, you know the word for "black."
I don't!	Elena, what's wrong?	(<i>To everyone.</i>) Be quiet.	If you know "black," you probably know that "chinga" thing, you just don't want to tell me. Oh, I know you do.
Fine! I know what it means. Okay?		(<i>Into phone.</i>) No, not...	So tell me. Huh?
No!		Oh, my God.	And why not? Just why won't you...
Cause you'll get even more insulted! Jesus, one minute you're complaining I'm insulting you, the next minute you – no, it was Elena, not me.	You guys, I think something's wrong.	Oh my God. Is anyone inside?	Oh, so you is insulting me. You is. Uh, huh.
But it's still not me who said it – what the fuck are we arguing about?	Hold it, you guys. <i>(Note: BROOKE and YVETTE keep arguing until ANNE's line below. They can improvise more dialog if necessary.)</i>	Oh, God. Thanks for –	It doesn't matter who said it, someone did.
Yes, you are! Jesus. You're totally picking a fight with me.	(<i>Yelling.</i>) You guys, be quiet!	... okay.	You tell me! I ain't arguing. I'm just replying to you.
		Yes. Stay safe. Bye! <i>(ELENA goes upstairs in a hurry.)</i>	You could end it any time you like. Any time.

ANNE. *(Calling up the stairs.)* Elena? What's wrong?

BROOKE. *(To ANNE.)* What's going on?

YVETTE. There better be some good explanation for all this.

(ELENA comes downstairs, with purse and car keys.)

ELENA. The factory's on fire, that was Sergei calling; 50% involved, possibly people inside.

(ELENA exits out the front door. ANNE goes to the window.)

BROOKE. Our factory?

ANNE. *(Pointing out the window.)* Look.

BROOKE. Oh, my God. Those were the sirens!

(We hear a car starting up and driving away.)

BROOKE. Oh, my God.

ANNE. You have your keys? Mine are upstairs.

BROOKE. Yeah.

(ANNE and BROOKE hurry out. YVETTE is left standing in the middle of the living room.)

Act II, Scene 2. The next afternoon. Anne and Brooke are talking, sipping coffee.

ANNE. It's not like we were going to do anything with it.

BROOKE. It would have made good lofts.

ANNE. We decided we didn't want to be long-distance landlords.

BROOKE. Condos. Not rentals.

ANNE. No one around here is sophisticated enough to want them.

BROOKE. I still think you're being harsh.

ANNE. It never would have worked.

(They drink their coffee.)

BROOKE. It was sad, watching it burn.

ANNE. Yeah. I had some nice memories of it.

BROOKE. What happened to that blue vase? The one with the swirly, you know... Didn't Granddaddy make that for us once, when we were there?

ANNE. That's right. I forgot about that. I have no idea where that is.

Aunt Gabrielle must have had insurance. For the building, at least, if not the contents.

BROOKE. I hope so.

ANNE. I don't think there was much left in there.
That was some argument we had last night.

BROOKE. Yes, it was.

ANNE. I was watching Yvette in there, and she reminded me of Aunt Gabrielle. The way she would talk with Granddaddy when she got excited.

BROOKE. Really? Because Yvette was barely around Aunt Gabrielle. Once when she was five or something, and that's all.

ANNE. People in families often talk alike. It's in the genes.

BROOKE. Must be.

ANNE. Yeah, when I was watching her last night, I thought, she argues so much like Aunt Gabrielle.

BROOKE. She was just being unbearably Southern. I'll bet she takes after her mother.

(They are quiet for a moment.)

BROOKE. Look, about Mom. I can try to make time to help you out.
The thing is, Mom doesn't like me.

ANNE. Of course she likes you.

BROOKE. No, she doesn't. She never has.

ANNE. She likes you, she's simply not demonstrative.

BROOKE. Last time we were there for her birthday, I left the room for a while, and when I came back in it was like she was a different person. She was happy, and relaxed. And then she saw me and her face turned to stone and she looked away.

ANNE. I think that's just her dementia.

BROOKE. She told me once that she used up all her energy raising you, and when I came along she just didn't have any left. Funny thing was, she said you were a difficult child to raise, but she still likes you and she doesn't like me.

ANNE. She had to work by the time you were born.

BROOKE. No, she went to work because she didn't want to raise me.
Do you remember her being pregnant with me?

ANNE. Sure. I was 11. Or maybe 12 by then, but in any case, sure, I remember.

BROOKE. But that was the year Mom and Dad went to London.

ANNE. Right, but she was pregnant before they left. I remember her having morning sickness. / She doesn't act like she likes me much anymore, you know.

BROOKE. No, because given when I was born, she couldn't have been pregnant with me until after they left.

ANNE. I don't think you were a difficult pregnancy, if that's what you're asking. She simply – their marriage wasn't going well for a while. I always figured something happened in London.

BROOKE. Do we have any pictures from that time?

ANNE. Tons. Aunt Gabrielle probably has some somewhere.

BROOKE. Do we actually have any photos of Mom pregnant with me?

ANNE. Of course we do. What are you getting at?

BROOKE. Think about it. We don't have any photos of Mom...

(We hear ELENA coming down the stairs.)

ANNE. Are you saying you're not...

BROOKE. *(To ELENA, about a file folder she has.)* What's that?

ELENA. Sorry, I'm interrupting something.

BROOKE. It's okay.

ELENA. I found the insurance papers for the factory, they were in that desk in my room; the building was well insured, and the contents.

(ELENA hands BROOKE the folder.)

ANNE. Let me see.

BROOKE. Wow. That much? And the contents, too?

ELENA. There wasn't much in it.

ANNE. Wow.

ELENA. The fire inspector will want to talk to us, and Sergei said we should call the agent right away; but if the fire doesn't look suspicious, and Sergei said it didn't, they should pay out quickly.

BROOKE. Oh, thank God.

ANNE. *(At almost the same time.)* Oh, thank God.

ELENA. Is there any more coffee?

BROOKE. Aren't you happy?

ANNE. It's a lot of money.

ELENA. Does either of you want some more?

BROOKE. No, thanks.

ANNE. I'm good. What's the matter?

ELENA. You seem glad the factory burned, both of you are happy.

BROOKE. I'm not glad. I'm just glad it was insured.

ANNE. We had no idea what to do with it.

ELENA. I did, I wanted to move my studio there.

BROOKE. You did?

ANNE. You never said anything when we were discussing it.

ELENA. We weren't discussing it, the two of you were. *(Speaking of coffee.)* I'll make some more.

(ELENA exits towards the kitchen.)

ANNE. We were all discussing it, I know we were. She never said anything about it.

BROOKE. She said something about her lease being up for renewal, and her rent was going to go up, I remember that.

ANNE. That building was so old, anyway.

BROOKE. Look, about Mom, I just don't have any money to spare.

ANNE. I know you want to go to China, I know it's going to be expensive, / but Mom needs more and more, and I simply have to have time to work –

BROOKE. I'm not doing well. I've lost a lot of money.

ANNE. How much?

BROOKE. Everything I made, even some of our original investment. Janice is furious. And scared. And don't bother telling me I made a bad choice. Not all of your choices have turned out well, either. I got overconfident, but I'm going back to my original plan, and I'm sticking with it.

Do you have to hold office hours this year?

ANNE. Why didn't you say something?

BROOKE. Do you have to hold office hours?

ANNE. Yes. One day a week.

BROOKE. Can you do Wednesdays?

ANNE. Sure.

BROOKE. Wednesdays are my worst days. I should take Wednesdays off anyway. I can go down there and visit her.

(ELENA returns.)

BROOKE. When the insurance pays out, I can – *(To ELENA.)* Is the coffee ready?

ELENA. No, I just started it.

BROOKE. Right. Sorry.

ELENA. I'm interrupting something again, aren't I?
I just came to get the will, the handwritten one.
Wasn't it right here?

ANNE. It was there last night.

ELENA. Did either of you move it?

BROOKE. No.

ANNE. Of course not! I think Yvette was looking at it last.
What did you mean about "we" were discussing the factory?

ELENA. You two talked about it, I barely said a thing, you kept saying it was useless and we couldn't do anything with it, except Brooke thought it could make apartments, but you just said that would never work. I said I had an idea, but you two didn't listen.

BROOKE. Do you really want to move your studio here?

ELENA. I like it here. I'm tired of Seattle, I want some peace and quiet, and I thought I'd hire some of the people who lost their jobs when that foundry closed, you know? if they had the right skills; I want to expand my line.

BROOKE. Oh.

ANNE. Couldn't you rebuild? When we get the insurance money.

ELENA. It wouldn't be the same.
Has either of you seen Yvette?

ANNE. Not this morning, no. I mean, today.

BROOKE. I thought I heard her in the bathroom earlier. Maybe she went out for a smoke.

(ELENA goes to the window.)

ELENA. Her car's gone.

(ELENA goes to the table, where the ledgers still are.)

BROOKE. You know, I sort of remember you had an idea for the factory. I'm sorry I didn't pay more attention.

ELENA. Thank you.

ANNE. What are you looking for? Please don't touch those.

ELENA. I'm looking for the will.

ANNE. It's not there. Why do you need it, anyway?
Please, leave those things alone.

ELENA. They belong to all of us, you know, any of us can touch them if we want to.

ANNE. I'm the only one who knows what to do with them. / So please, leave them alone. That's my –

ELENA. What to do with them? What *you* want to do with them! They belong to all of us, we can decide to split them up, or sell them to a museum, or throw them in the river, if that's what we want to do; you're not the only one who knows what do to with things.

ANNE. God, Elena, don't. Yes, okay, they belong to all of us, fine, but I'm a historian and you're not, and these – I've been looking for them for years, and now I finally found them, and it's the best set of original materials in my field I've found to work on

ever since my dissertation. You can take anything else in the house you want, as far as I'm concerned you can have it all, but for the love of God, let me have these. Set a fair price and I will buy you out. Only, let me do my work on them.

ELENA. Of course. I'm sorry.

ANNE. The will isn't there. I don't know where it is.

BROOKE. You don't really like teaching, do you.

ANNE. I hate it. I would do something else in a heartbeat if I knew what it would be.

ELENA. I was just going to say.

BROOKE. Why don't you?

ANNE. At my age? I've been teaching all my life. Besides, I have tenure.

BROOKE. We'll all have some money, you know, after the insurance pays out, and the house sells. You could take that, go back to school, and train for something else.

ELENA. Or just take some time off, do something you've always wanted to do.

ANNE. Brooke thinks she was adopted.

ELENA. What? You do?

BROOKE. Do you remember my mom being pregnant with me?

ANNE. Which makes just as much sense as I'm Aunt Gabrielle's daughter, cause they thought they couldn't have a child, so they adopted me, then years later had a natural child, her. Then they felt guilty for betraying Aunt Gabrielle, so they overcompensated by liking me better.

ELENA. I'm missing something here.

BROOKE. Aunt Gabrielle was all about family. So where better to put her daughter than with family?

Aunt Gabrielle's daughter is one of us.

ELENA. No. Aunt Gabrielle's daughter is not one of us. None of us was adopted.

BROOKE. I don't look anything like Anne, our mom hates me, she and Dad were in London so they could hide that Mom wasn't pregnant, and there's a big gap in Aunt Gabrielle's memoir right then.

ELENA. There are gaps all over the place. You said so yourself.

ANNE. She thinks *she's* Aunt Gabrielle's daughter! (To BROOKE.) Don't you.

BROOKE. It fits. It totally makes sense.

ANNE. No, if one of us is Aunt Gabrielle's daughter, it makes sense to be me.

ELENA. It doesn't make sense at all; why would she hide one of you? So she had an illegitimate child, that's bad, but it'd be worse if the baby wasn't white; so it couldn't have been one of you.

ANNE. So you're saying you're her daughter?

ELENA. There were migrant workers here at the time, so it's possible; if you're going to say – if you're going to acknowledge that Aunt Gabrielle would have to have hidden her daughter, then why not go to the extreme?

ANNE. Right. So let's go to the extreme. Sergei is her daughter, and he had a sex change operation!

ELENA. Anne!

BROOKE. That would be something!

ELENA. Sergei is not a woman.

(We hear a car outside.)

ANNE. How do you know?

BROOKE. Hey, see, that's totally possible. I mean, we were talking to a different appraiser, right? Sergei just insinuated himself into our lives! He wanted to come back and take everything.

ANNE. Right! It makes total sense.

ELENA. *¡Virgen Santa!* All I'm saying is, she could have been black.

(YVETTE enters.)

BROOKE. Perfect!

ELENA. Where've you been?

ANNE. This is completely ludicrous.

YVETTE. Okay, now, if this is a repeat of last night, I'm just packing my things and leaving. I'm just packing and leaving.

ELENA. No, no, don't leave. Anne and Brooke have this idea that one of us is Aunt Gabrielle's daughter.

ANNE. It was Brooke's idea.

BROOKE. Yeah, doesn't it make sense?

YVETTE. One of us is Aunt Gabrielle's daughter? Now just how do you know this?

ELENA. See, that's just it, they don't know, they're just making things up.

ANNE. Brooke thinks *she* is.

BROOKE. You think *you* are.

ANNE. No, I think Yvette is.

ELENA. I don't think any of us is.

YVETTE. I ain't been thinking about it. I went to Evensong, like a good Catholic girl.

BROOKE. That was today?

YVETTE. I was planning to go to Mass, but I just could not drag myself out of bed in time. Now I wish I'd stayed here and listened to how y'all came to this conclusion.

BROOKE. I thought it was next Sunday. Mass and everything.

YVETTE. No, second Sunday.

BROOKE. I thought it was the third Sunday.

YVETTE. No, second Sunday. Second Sunday of the month.

BROOKE. I was sure it was – I missed Confession, too, didn't I?

YVETTE. Mm, hm. You gonna burn in hell for sure for that. I made my Confession, I'll tell you.

ANNE. For thinking dark, evil thoughts about all of us?

YVETTE. Mm, hm. You know that's right.

ANNE. We should all go to Confession for that.

BROOKE. We'd have to bring the priest here. You haven't been to Confession in years.

ELENA. Well, I know I'm not Aunt Gabrielle's daughter, even if one of us is; I'm my parents' daughter, and that's that.

(To YVETTE.) Do you know where Aunt Gabrielle's will is? the handwritten one?

YVETTE. Yeah, sure. I got it with me right here.

ELENA. What were you doing with it?

YVETTE. I was just trying to find a place to make some copies of it. But I couldn't find no place anywhere. Whoever said they roll up the sidewalk here was right.

ELENA. I wanted to look at it again.

YVETTE. Sure. Help yourself.

(ELENA takes the will from YVETTE and exits to the kitchen.)

YVETTE. I went by the factory on my way back. They finished poking around and looking for stuff. It just sitting there, black and burned, just real quiet, like it wasn't leaping with fire just last night.

Did Granddaddy blow glass himself, or did he just supervise?

ANNE. He did it himself. Not much as he got older, but, you know, to keep his hand in.

YVETTE. My daddy thinks he must have made this vase we have, but he wasn't sure. It's real pretty, this sort of swirled white and blue. Did he ever do anything like that?

ANNE. That's where it went!

BROOKE. We were wondering earlier about it. About this tall, and this wide?

YVETTE. Yeah. That's it.

ANNE. How did your dad get it?

YVETTE. No idea. We've had it since I was a kid.

There's still smoke in the air, the way everything so still. You can see it, even from here.

(ANNE and BROOKE go to the window.)

ANNE. Wow.

BROOKE. It'll make the sunsets pretty.

(ANNE exits to the porch.)

BROOKE. So how was Evensong?

YVETTE. Oh, the priest couldn't sing.

BROOKE. They never can.

YVETTE. But some folks there could, so it was all right. The priest in our parish, he sing real nice. Real nice.

BROOKE. Hey, could I ask you something?

(The phone rings.)

YVETTE. Sure.

BROOKE. Excuse me.

(BROOKE answers the phone.)

BROOKE. Gabrielle Hampton's residence. ("Hi. This is Sergei McNee.") Oh, hi. This is Brooke. ("I'm sorry about your building.") Thank you. ("But I did want to let you know that we believe no one was inside at the time.") Oh, that's great news. We were worried. ("Could I talk to Elena?") Sure, I'll get her. (*Calls towards kitchen.*) Elena? Sergei's on the phone. (*Into phone.*) She'll be right here.

(ELENA enters, takes the receiver.)

ELENA. Hello? (*"Hi, it's Sergei. How are you doing?"*) I'm fine, but how are you? (*"I'm fine, thanks."*) Did you get some sleep? (*"Yes, in fact, I just got up. I got about seven hours."*) Oh, good. (*"I'm sorry about your building. I wish we could have saved it."*) Thanks; yes, I wanted to preserve it somehow. But... these things happen. (*"I wanted to ask you something. I was wondering if you'd like to get together before you leave town. I thought maybe we could get dinner tonight. There's a nice Italian place, if you like Italian."*)

ELENA. Oh; that's really nice of you, but I think we all have plans for dinner. (*"Oh. I see."*) A family thing. (*"Sure, I understand."*) Thanks, though; and thanks for working so hard to save it. The factory. (*"That's my job. Have a good evening."*) Thanks, bye. (*Hangs up.*)

BROOKE. What did he want?

ELENA. He was saying he was sorry about the factory.

BROOKE. What "family thing?"

ELENA. He asked me out to dinner.

YVETTE. Why didn't you say yes?

ELENA. I'm not interested.

YVETTE. You sure? I thought you was interested.

ELENA. There's coffee almost ready, if you want some.

(ELENA exits towards the kitchen.)

YVETTE. Guess I was wrong. That doesn't happen very often.

BROOKE. Can I ask you something?

YVETTE. Sure. Go ahead.

BROOKE. Have you ever wanted to go to Africa?

YVETTE. Africa a big place.

(YVETTE and BROOKE talk softly; we should be able to hear ELENA clearly.)

YVETTE. Y'all should come down to New Orleans sometime soon. You ever been there?

BROOKE. Once. We took a trip there when the kids were little. It was nice.

YVETTE. It's a nice place. Real nice. Course, I grew up there. So I'm a little biased.

BROOKE. West Africa. Côte D'Ivoire. Ghana. Did you ever want to see where your ancestors came from?

YVETTE. Some of my ancestors come from here.

BROOKE. That's true. But this isn't your West Africa.

YVETTE. In way, it is. This is my West Africa.

BROOKE. But your ancestors weren't slaves here.

YVETTE. You can bet my Grandmama wasn't paid the same as the white workers.

BROOKE. Right, right, but West Africa's got more weight of history.

YVETTE. This place got plenty weight of history for me. My Grandmama pregnant by her white boss? She and her mama shipped off to New Orleans? No choice in the matter? It a little bit of the South, right here. Right here.

BROOKE. So is it cause that's closer? In time?

YVETTE. No, that ain't the point. You can't make something into my West Africa, if it ain't my West Africa.

BROOKE. Yeah. You're right.

YVETTE. Yeah. I am right.

BROOKE. China isn't Janice's West Africa.

YVETTE. No, I don't think so.

BROOKE. Yeah. I thought I'd say it before you did.

YVETTE. Sorry. Sorry! I wasn't going to be my usual aggressive self. I really wasn't.

BROOKE. I should take them to Disneyland.

YVETTE. And go on that one ride? "It's a Small World after All"?

BROOKE. God, no.

(ELENA enters with a cup of coffee.)

YVETTE. Look, Cousin Elena. I really interested in you and Sergei. I ain't trying to push here...

ELENA. Of course. Either of you know where the letters are?

YVETTE. No, see, my way is interactive, you know, I say something, you say something, I say something, you say something. But let me say it a little differently. I was watching y'all talk last night. He was interested, you was interested, y'all had a little spark. *(To BROOKE.)* You say something if I'm wrong, now.

BROOKE. No, you're not wrong. You're not wrong.

YVETTE. (To ELENA.) See, now, your own cousin, knows you better than I do, she say I'm right. So now tell me, and I'm really asking, why you say you wouldn't go out with him?

ELENA. Guys will ask me out, it's because they think I'm some hot Latina, that I'm easy, you know, Latinas always are having lots of sex; you even assumed I must have kids, remember? but sooner or later they always break up with me, because I'm not the way they think I am; and they're ashamed of what their friends think; their friends judge them, because they judge fat people, especially fat women.

BROOKE. And that one guy? Ralph?

ELENA. He told me he would date me, but only if we could date in secret.

YVETTE. Oh, my Lord. Oh, my Lord.

BROOKE. Yeah.

ELENA. It's the worst with white guys, white guys think I'm exotic, and then they realize that even though I'm Latina, their friends still judge them.

YVETTE. Well, now, that is cold. Seriously cold.

ELENA. Sergei sees an exotic Latina, so that's why I said no.

YVETTE. See, now, shame on me, cause I thought white guys only dated *black* women because they was "exotic." But, look, I know what you talking about.

ELENA. Excuse me.

(ELENA turns to go again.)

YVETTE. And I watched Sergei talking to you, and he was talking to *you*. He wasn't talking to no exotic, heavy Latina woman. He was talking to you. And you was talking to him, and don't you tell me you wasn't. You had so many bad experiences, you think all men like that. And now you tell yourself that all men talk to you, they ain't really interested in you. But what if you remember back to talking with him, last night, back to him calling you on the phone just now, what if you ask yourself, am I right? Could I be missing something? Cause, you know, he may not be like all the other guys who've asked you out. And I think you need to call him right back up, and you need to say you sorry you said no, and now you saying yes. And I think you need to do that right now.

Can I get an amen?

BROOKE. Amen, sister. Amen.

YVETTE. You want privacy? We give you privacy. Me and Brooke, we just slide ourselves right on out of here.

BROOKE. (To ELENA.) Really. She's right. You ought to call him.

YVETTE. Ooh, she smiling. You want me to call him? I'll call him. I'll tell him you got something to say to him.

BROOKE. Yeah. We'll prepare him. We'll tell him not to be mean to you because you said no the first time.

ELENA. *¡Ay! Chicas...*

YVETTE. We serious, now. We going to call him.

BROOKE. Um, hm. We picking up the phone right now.

ELENA. You guys can go to hell, just go to hell. *(Goes over to the phone.)* Am I going to have to *69 this phone again?

BROOKE. No, he wrote his number down there before he left last night.

(ELENA picks up the piece of paper with SERGEI'S number, starts to exit.)

ELENA. *(To YVETTE.)* Thanks. And I mean that.

YVETTE. You welcome.

ELENA. You can still go to hell, though.

(ELENA exits towards the stairs.)

YVETTE. All right!

BROOKE. We've been trying to tell her that for years.

YVETTE. Sometimes it just take someone new.

BROOKE. You're right about that.

YVETTE. Mm, hm. Sometimes it just take someone new.

BROOKE. You right about that.

(ANNE enters from the porch.)

YVETTE. She's a nice woman. Intelligent. Thoughtful.

BROOKE. Yeah.

YVETTE. She deserve all the happiness she can get.

BROOKE. You know, as long as we're in the "true confessions" part of the weekend, tempering your chocolate in platinum isn't going to make a damn bit of difference.

YVETTE. Well, you're probably right. The thing is, though, I have this competitor. Trying to push me out of my market. So I'm redoing all of my marketing materials, and I'm going to fight them off. I am going to fight them off. Now, if my customers can say,

“Oh, I get Platinum Crucible Chocolate.” They’ll be special. And they’ll pay me. *I think it makes a difference. I’m even thinking of putting little flecks of platinum in, like I did with the gold. But I want to meet my customers’ needs for elegance and exclusivity. And make money while I do it. But it’s like Cousin Anne said, a molecule here or there, who can tell?*

ANNE. I was being snotty about that. The 95.9% single-origin Ghana stuff I was saying.

YVETTE. Don’t apologize, now. I was being pretentious.

BROOKE. You were being passionate. You love chocolate.

ANNE. I really thought I could taste a difference.

YVETTE. *(To BROOKE.)* See, see? She can tell the difference.

BROOKE. Yeah, yeah.

YVETTE. Now, don’t you “yeah, yeah” me, Miss Thing. She got a better palette than you.

BROOKE. Ooh. Somebody talking trash.

(ELENA comes down the stairs.)

BROOKE. *(To YVETTE.)* Hey, I have a question for you. / Sometimes you talk –

ANNE. *(To ELENA.)* Where are you off to?

ELENA. Sergei and I are having dinner.

ANNE. That’s wonderful. He’s a nice guy.

ELENA. Yes, he is.

YVETTE. Um, hm. And we made it happen.

BROOKE. Um, hm.

ANNE. *(To ELENA.)* Where are you guys going?

ELENA. That Italian place we saw.

ANNE. That’s great. That’s really, really great. Well, have a good –

ELENA. *(On “really, really great.”)* Stop it.

ANNE. What?

ELENA. Being so happy for me.

ANNE. What’s wrong with being happy for you?

ELENA. You used to look at me at meals; holidays, vacations, whenever the families would be together. You'd say, why didn't I have some fruit, or, are you sure you really want another piece of cake; you'd say, let's go for walks together. Meanwhile, you wouldn't be touching the fruit bowl, and you'd take that piece of cake.

ANNE. You're talking about when we were kids.

ELENA. I can see the frown on your face every time you'd see me, like you were thinking, oh dear, she still hasn't lost any weight; in fact, she looks heavier than when I saw her last Christmas.

ANNE. I haven't done that in years. You know I haven't.

ELENA. And you used to make fat jokes.

YVETTE. We *are* in the "true confessions" part of the weekend.

ANNE. For God's sake, Elena, it's been 30 years.

ELENA. Some things you don't forget.

ANNE. Yes. Some things you don't forget. Like your attitude when I started teaching. Like it was too bad I couldn't get a job at a real university. That you were sure I'd have time for research.

ELENA. I never said that.

ANNE. That it was such a pretty campus. Like that was some god damn consolation prize.

ELENA. I never said that.

ANNE. This was when we were both adults. The things I did and said, I was too young to know any better. But when you came to my graduation ceremony, those things you said, you were old enough to know better.

ELENA. You were disappointed that you hadn't gotten a position at some big research university; I was trying to be supportive.

ANNE. Then maybe you can understand that I was simply trying to be supportive about Sergei.

ELENA. I used to think, that if we found the crucible – this is when I was a kid – I thought I would make a magic potion in it, so that anyone who was fat could lose all the weight they wanted; and keep it off, and be fit, and pretty; but lately I've been thinking, I'd make a potion that everyone else could drink, so they'd stop judging fat people.

(There is a knock on the door. ELENA goes to open it.)

ELENA. Hi.

(SERGEI enters, carrying a small box. One of his wrists is bandaged.)

SERGEI. Hi! You look nice.

ELENA. Thanks. Did you get hurt?

SERGEI. Burned a little, that's all.

ELENA. We had no idea you were a firefighter, on top of everything.

SERGEI. Sure. I appraise your house, and if you want to burn it down for the insurance money, I'll make a good show of fighting the fire.

(Everyone laughs.)

SERGEI. We were going through the site, looking for hot spots, and I found this.

(SERGEI opens the box.)

SERGEI. You can touch it. It's cooled off.

ELENA. What is it?

SERGEI. I think it's your crucible.

ANNE. That's it?

BROOKE. That's the crucible?

YVETTE. That little bitty thing?

ANNE. I thought it would be bigger.

YVETTE. I thought it would be cleaner.

ELENA. Not that we're not grateful.

BROOKE. Grandpa heated his spaghetti in this?

ANNE. That's simply a story. *(Catches herself.)* Sorry!

ELENA. *(To SERGEI.)* Thank you. Really. How did you find it?

SERGEI. Pure accident. I was looking for hot spots, and this made a funny noise. So I raked it out. I hope it's what you've been looking for.

ELENA. Yes. I think it must be.

YVETTE. I can't temper chocolate in this.

ANNE. It can probably be cleaned.

YVETTE. Not big enough.

ANNE. I have no idea what Granddaddy would've done with it, let alone what I would do with it.

BROOKE. Pretentious shits?

ELENA. *(To SERGEI.)* I'll explain later.

BROOKE. I don't know how much good luck it would be.

SERGEI. *(To ELENA.)* I'll wait for you outside.

ELENA. Thanks. I'll be out right away.

(SERGEI exits. The four cousins stand, looking at the crucible.)

YVETTE. Well, I don't got any use for it. One of y'all want it, you're welcome to it.

ANNE. I won't need it in the Peace Corps.

ELENA. What?

BROOKE. I sort of want it. Elena?

ELENA. It wouldn't make much in the way of souvenirs.

ANNE. Still, it was Granddaddy's. He actually used it.

(By now, they have cleaned up the crucible enough to handle, and are passing it around.)

BROOKE. It's not damaged at all.

YVETTE. It's a pretty shape.

ELENA. Yes, the curve is lovely, it fits in your hand.

YVETTE. Yeah. It does.

ELENA. I have an idea; I could make us all rings from it, cousin rings.

BROOKE. That's a nice idea.

ANNE. I like that.

YVETTE. Y'all can tell that I like jewelry.

ANNE. Carla might like one, too.

ELENA. It's big enough.

BROOKE. Do you think Aunt Gabrielle's daughter will want one?

ANNE. You know, I wonder if Aunt Gabrielle really did have a daughter.

BROOKE. That will said she did.

ELENA. I've got to go; don't make any decisions without me.

ANNE. No, no, we won't.

ELENA. I mean it.

ANNE. Okay. I promise.

YVETTE. *(To ELENA.)* We won't wait up for you.

ELENA. Ha, ha.

(ELENA exits out the front door.)

ANNE. *(To BROOKE.)* I don't know why she would do that. I'm saying she might.

BROOKE. What, like she had a sudden moment of weirdness or something?

ANNE. You don't really think you're her daughter, do you?

BROOKE. No, I guess not, it's just weird, how you and I are so different from each other. I don't know how they would have hidden it. It would have been easier if you were her daughter.

ANNE. I am not her daughter. None of us is.

BROOKE. Why would she hide that she'd had a baby? It's not like Granddaddy would have banished her or something.

ANNE. Well, I think we should at least try to find her. We owe her that much.

BROOKE. Just last night you were saying we shouldn't.

YVETTE. Lord, Lord, y'all have fun. Don't make any decisions without me.

(YVETTE heads to the front porch.)

ANNE. And I can't change my mind? I thought you wanted to find her.

YVETTE. Either of y'all seen my lighter?

BROOKE. Sorry. I borrowed it. *(Hands YVETTE her lighter. To ANNE.)* I do, but you're right, I am worried about what will happen.

YVETTE. You did?

ANNE. You had a great idea, offering her one fifth.

BROOKE. I thought that was Yvette's idea.

YVETTE. *(Calling over shoulder.)* Wasn't mine.

(YVETTE is gone.)

ANNE. Who ever's idea was, it was a good one.

(Lights fade as they continue talking.)

BROOKE. So, how would we go about finding her?

ANNE. Find her, or contact her?

BROOKE. Both. We have to do one to do the other.

ANNE. Okay, but we have to respect her privacy.

BROOKE. Of course. We'll be respectful.

ANNE. We have to be delicate.

BROOKE. We're in violent agreement on this, you know.

ANNE. You're right.

BROOKE. So. How do we go about looking for her?

The End