

Perverted Roberta
by Mira Gibson

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Characters:

Roberta: 19 years old. Tall, thin, beautiful. Daughter of Zhana.

Zhana: early fifties. Ex model. Mother of Roberta, daughter in law of Peter.

Peter: early seventies. Father in law of Zhana.

Quinton: 17 years old. Smaller than Roberta.

(The setting is the front porch of a house. The porch is elevated at least a foot from the dying lawn that surrounds it. Small plants, bushes, and shrubbery line the edge of the porch. A walk way extends from the steps of the porch out to the sidewalk. At the back of the porch platform is a screen door that leads into the house. On the porch are a light-weight round table, an uncomfortable chair, and a keg of beer. ROBERTA, 19 years old and tall, thin, and beautiful is digging the dry dirt around the edge of the porch beneath the plants. Her forearms are covered in dirt. Her hair and makeup look disheveled. Her mascara runs down her face. She is wearing a low cut, high on the thigh scarlet cocktail dress. It is 9 a.m. Roberta gets up and kicks the dirt still searching as she slowly makes her way around the perimeter of the porch. The paperboy, QUINTON, 17 years old walks on the sidewalk towards the porch. He is average looking, but cute and shorter than Roberta. He carries a satchel of newspapers to be delivered.)

Quinton: Good morning, Roberta. (she digs) Roberta? (she digs) Did you annihilate my bicycle?

Roberta: (stops digging) Annihilate. No.

Quinton: Did you bend the frame of the front wheel?

Roberta: Quinton, I'm busy. (returns to digging)

Quinton: I'll have you know I have to buy not just a new tire, but a new wheel, which means I have to save up, which means I'm going to be walking my route all August, which means I'm going to have to eat more food so I don't die walking, which means I'm going to have to spend more money on food, which means it will take me longer to save up for the wheel. But as long as it wasn't my best friend who's done this to me.

Roberta: Wasn't me.

Quinton: I've been walking, you know.

Roberta: You mentioned.

Quinton: It's taking me eight times as long, because someone busted up my bike.

Roberta: I really don't have time for your trivial problems right now.

Quinton: At nine in the morning. I always have time for people's problems. A couple of hours ago when I delivered the paper to Mrs. Sanborn and she felt the need to chew my ear off about her husband and daughter who haven't spoken to each other in years. I stayed. I listened. I even offered a word or two of advice, not that I had time to, what with my bicycle being destroyed and all by a phantom assailant who was probably wearing a red dress.

Roberta: I'm looking for something.

Quinton: Oh, are you looking for a bicycle?

Roberta: Yes, Quinton, I'm looking for a bicycle.

Quinton: Good, I'll wait then.

Roberta: Why don't you give me the paper and go? (Roberta continues to dig.)

Quinton: What are you doing?

Roberta: What does it look like I'm doing?

(Quinton chucks the newspaper at Roberta's head. Roberta turns and looks at him, then goes back to the dirt hiding her tears)

Quinton: Are you okay?

Roberta: Why would I be? I can't go around catching things with my head and still be alright on the other end. But thanks. Thanks for being there for me. Ready to cranially assault me when everyone else is too tired or can't find me.

Quinton: Does it feel better? To let out a tear?

Roberta: Where were you last night? What was so important that you weren't here? I was all by myself.

Quinton: My sister went into labor.

Roberta: When?

Quinton: At four in the afternoon.

Roberta: Just my luck.

Quinton: We named her Aidan.

Roberta: Aidan's a boy's name.

Quinton: We all really wanted a boy. (touches Roberta's head.)

Roberta: I'm fine.

Quinton: You have to see her. I bet you'd make a good mom.

(Roberta goes to the keg, pumps it, and pours herself a tall glass of beer, as Quinton asks)

Quinton: What are you doing?

Roberta: Left over beer from the party.

Quinton: What party?

Roberta: The funeral party. (drinks) This is still my mother's house. (gestures to her dress) This is my mother's dress. She wore this at the funeral party. It's a COCKTAIL DRESS.

Quinton: Why are you wearing it?

Roberta: I stole it from her last night after everyone left. She was wearing it. I had to pry it off her. (drinks down the whole glass)

Quinton: You're better than that. You don't need to make yourself look like that.

Roberta: Want one? (refers to the beer as she pumps and pours herself another.)

Quinton: It's a little early for beer.

Roberta: Want one later?

Quinton: No.

Roberta: Want me? (no response) Want me later? I was alone the whole funeral. Everyone was in the house. I stayed out here mostly. With the plants.

Quinton: I called.

Roberta: I had the telephone in my hands the whole time.

Quinton: But I called. It just rang and rang and rang and rang.

Roberta: I was holding the phone the entire night, it didn't ring once.

Quinton: Well, maybe the ringer was off, because I called.

Roberta: Maybe you dialed the wrong number.

Quinton: I didn't dial the wrong number.

Roberta: Fine. Maybe the payphone at the hospital was out of order.

Quinton: Fine. Maybe it was.

Roberta: What was it like?

Quinton: It was...gross really. I accidentally saw my sister's...you know...origin of the world.

Roberta: Gross.

Quinton: And after she gave birth, her stomach didn't flatten down like I thought it would. I can no longer consider her female. But, I held the baby. She's so small and light. So bloody. I'm an uncle.

Roberta: I remember when Candice was born and I held her. I hated it. Did you ever think about throwing her?

Quinton: No, she's so small and perfect and defenseless.

Roberta: That's why I'd throw her.

Quinton: I think you should mourn. I mean, have you mourned?

(Roberta turns back to the plants and the dirt.)

Roberta: My fingernails are dirty. My hands feel really dry. Like if I flex them the skin will crack and bleed. It's from the dirt. The summer's been too hot and dry. Do you think someone looking out of their window could see my hands right now? Mrs. Sanborn, maybe. It's crazy how someone can die and three days later there's a funeral. That's all the time you have to adjust, and then it's over. Maybe it takes longer if you have to save up for the coffin.

Quinton: I haven't mourned either. I'm not sure I know how. My sister cried a lot yesterday. She cried and held the baby and cried some more and so did my mom. It's funny, it was like they were mourning.

Roberta: I heard my mom crying in the shower. She doesn't like me to know when she cries. (goes over to the plants) I feel bad for them. They never get watered. See this plant? How yellow it is? It's hardening. More and more everyday. There was a little plant beside it. The little plant was green. It was stealing all of the nutrients from this plant. It was sucking up what little water there was. So I pulled out the littler one.

Quinton: Maybe you should plant one in there to replace it.

Roberta: No. Anything near this plant is going to take from it.

Quinton: Your mom's going to notice. She's going to be pissed.

Roberta: It's my mom's fault. She watched them not get watered. She noticed.

Quinton: Is that what you've been doing all morning? Gardening?

Roberta: And waiting for you.

Quinton: Is that why you broke my bike? So that I would definitely come? Because I would have to?

(Roberta picks up the paper nonchalantly. Quinton approaches and tries to take the paper.)

Quinton: I'm supposed to give that to your mother.

Roberta: I live here too.

Quinton: Do you know what's in there?

Roberta: (does not let him grab the paper as he tries) What's in here?

Quinton: Technically, Roberta your name is not on the address, hers is-

Roberta: What's in here? (flips through the paper as Quinton keeps trying to grab at it.)

Quinton: It's not good.

Roberta: What's not good (keeps flipping)

Quinton: They can't print things about minors, so it's all about your mom.

Roberta: They can print things about minors unless they're arrested. (sees the page, stops stares for a moment.) That's her glamour shot.

Quinton: I know.

Roberta: That's her 1978 Glamour magazine cover shot!

Quinton: Give it.

Roberta: That's an article about my dead sister? And she gave them HER FUCKING COVER GIRL PHOTO?

Quinton: Shhh. Isn't she asleep?

Roberta: I DON'T CARE IF SHE'S ASLEEP!

Quinton: Be quiet.

(Roberta tries to read the article, Quinton ruffles the paper and tries to take it from her as he explains)

Quinton: Listen, it's a brief article. Not even an article, just a paragraph really. And your mom- your mom- she, what she was trying to do is spare your sister's image. You know, how papers, and the press, how they twist things to make them interesting. Like entertainment. So she turned the story on herself to spare you and Candice. That's all. That's all. No one made Candice out to be crazy.

Robert: Candice wasn't crazy.

Quinton: No, she wasn't. Not at all. So it's supposed to be a story about a mother's grief.

Roberta: No one interviewed me.

Quinton: To spare you.

Roberta: Stop touching me.

Quinton: I've got to get on with my route and I need a bicycle.

Roberta: Don't leave me here.

Quinton: If I don't finish my route, I'll get fired. People complain, you know, when the Sunday morning paper arrives in the afternoon.

Roberta: I don't have a bicycle.

Quinton: Yes you do.

Roberta: I don't think you should leave right now.

Quinton: I have to.

Roberta: You can't have my bicycle.

Quinton: What if I promise to come back later?

Roberta: (tightly grips on him) You have to come back later!

Quinton: Later when?

Roberta: As soon as you're done with your route.

(ZHANA, the 55 year old mother of Roberta stands beyond the screen door in the house at the back of the porch. She is a beautiful woman who still has much of the looks she possessed during her modeling years. In her arms is a giant bag of Miracle Grow. She also carries with her gardening tools in a giant basket.)

Roberta: And you have to stay with me.

(seeing Zhana, Quinton tries to move away, but Roberta latches onto his shirt.)

Roberta: (aggressively tugging him) Promise! (shakes him) Promise it!

(Quinton nods)

Roberta: You should have stayed before! (slaps his arm) You should stay with me!

Quinton: Alright.

Roberta: Alright isn't a promise.

(Quinton descends the porch under the pressure of Zhana's staring, but he forgets his satchel of newspapers to be delivered. Zhana enters through the screen door lugging the giant bag of Miracle Grow.)

Roberta: This is Quinton.

Quinton: How's it going?

Zhana: (to Quinton) I trust you've delivered the paper?

(Quinton nods. Zhana gives him a "you're staring at me" face and Quinton leaves around the back of the house to get the bicycle.)

Zhana: Roberta, I don't condone you dressing so inappropriately. Certainly not at this hour. Go inside and change, please, before one of the neighbors sees you.

(stares at dress for a moment) Is that my dress? That's my dress! Roberta! Take it off!

Roberta: I'd rather not.

Zhana: Look at it! It's filthy! You came into my bedroom where you've no right to be and removed my clothes? I've never snuck into your room and disrobed you. Never.

(Zhana descends the porch and drops down her gardening tools.)

Roberta: What's all that for?

Zhana: I spent the entire evening last night paranoid that someone would come out here and see what a disaster the Hungarian bromes have become.

Roberta: They have a name?

Zhana: These are supposed to be Japanese roses. That's couch grass. And there's purple lythrum around here somewhere.

Roberta: I thought they were all just...bushes.

Zhana: Well, your Grandpa Peter would have known, and he would have told me what a shame it was, and, I'm glad he didn't come out here. How was your night last night?

Roberta: Fine.

Zhana: I didn't know where you were the whole night. I had to run around and play hostess. I hated that her entire sixth grade class came. I hated that. All those shoes on our hardwood floors. Scuff marks. Spilt sodas. And wherever I went I could hear people talking about Candice as though I couldn't hear them. Did you hear them talking?

Roberta: No.

Zhana: I know you were drunk most of last night.

Roberta: So were you.

Zhana: Really, Roberta I can't stand to see that dress in shambles. Take it off.

(Roberta takes off the dress. She stands in her bra and underwear on the porch. Quinton comes around the house to the lawn with the bicycle. Roberta extends the dress to Zhana who does not take it. Zhana is aware of Quinton, but Roberta is not.)

Zhana: I meant in the house, Roberta! People can see you!

(Quinton runs and grabs his satchel and rides off down the sidewalk. Zhana picks up the gardening hoe and begins to whack the dirt around the plants to turn up the soil. She has no skill at manual labor such as this.)

Zhana: I don't condone this kind of behavior.

Roberta: What do you think you're doing?

Zhana: What does it look like I'm doing? Some people find this relaxing. (she whacks the ground with grunts)

Roberta: How come no one interviewed me for the article?

Zhana: (stops everything with a sense of graveness, then lightly asks) Oh, that's right. Where's the paper?

Roberta: How come no one wanted to hear what I have to say?

(Zhana looks around for the newspaper, spots it on the porch where it was left, and grabs it.)

Zhana: I told you when the reporter was coming. I told you a day in advance. You forgot. I wasn't about to keep the man waiting while I scoured the neighborhood looking for you. (she flips through the paper, finds the page, stares at it.)

Roberta: I don't remember you telling me.

Zhana: Quiet. (reads)

Roberta: I would like to have said something.

(Zhana skims and reads. Roberta descends the porch, takes the hoe and turns up the soil.)

Zhana: (trying not to look up from the paper) Stop that, you'll hurt the couch grass.

(Roberta drops the hoe and ascends the porch and pumps and pours herself a beer. She drinks the beer.)

Zhana: (distracted from reading, looks up from the paper) I sincerely hope you are not drinking. (finishes reading)

(Zhana rolls the paper and tucks it into her belt. She runs her fingers through her hair, as though she is processing the article. She looks at her hands. Her fingers are webbed with her hair. She shakes off the strands of hair that came out in her hands.)

Zhana: Disgusting. (she runs her hands through her hair a bunch of times, each time shaking loose the hair on her hands, until she runs her hands through and they come out with no hair on them. Zhana then goes back to the hoe, picks it up and whacks the ground. Roberta descends the porch and puts herself between the plants and her mother.)

Roberta: Stop it! I'll do it. (takes the hoe from her mother.)

Zhana: How many strands of hair are you supposed to lose a day? Ever since the accident clumps have been falling out.

Roberta: It wasn't an accident.

Zhana: Of course it was an accident.

Roberta: Do you think maybe, she's better off?

Zhana: No. Never. Life is precious. It's all we have. I'll never understand why she did it. (runs her hands over her hair, lets the dead hair fall from her fingers) See? Does this happen to you? My mother never lost her hair.

(Roberta runs her hands through her hair.)

Roberta: A couple. (shakes them from her fingers)

(Zhana takes another soil stirrer from the basket and begins to work.)

Zhana: Would you look at this? This bush should have roses on it right now.

Roberta: There's never been roses out here.

Zhana: There used to be.

Roberta: I've never seen any.

Zhana: When you were a little girl there were flowers, and right around the time Candice was born.

Roberta: That was so long ago.

Zhana: Well, if I can salvage this area, then I'm going to make this place presentable.

Roberta: I wouldn't have turned that article into my own personal bio.

Zhana: DID YOU READ IT? I'M NOT EXACTLY HAPPY.

Roberta: I don't like it that no one asked me about anything.

Zhana: I don't like it that you go running around with school boys.

Roberta: He's not that much younger.

(Zhana ascends the porch and exits through the screen door into the house. Roberta takes the newspaper that fell from Zhana's belt and quickly buries it under the purple lythrum plant. After a moment Zhana returns with a handkerchief, which she wraps on her head while standing on the porch. Roberta hops up from the plant.)

Zhana: (while wrapping her hair) I don't like it just the same. This is a time for the family to stick together. Not a time to obey our lingering teenage angst running wild and deflowering the neighborhood virgins.

(Zhana descends the porch and finds the coiled hose at the side of the porch behind a small bush and brings it out.)

Roberta: You don't know what you're talking about.

Zhana: Don't I?

Roberta: Now you want to water the lawn?

Zhana: It's never too late, some of these plants are still salvageable.

(Zhana turns on the water. The hose sprays everywhere and it is difficult for Zhana to control. She accidentally sprays the porch and Roberta, before quickly turning the water off.)

Zhana: I'll deal with that later. (drops the hose down and then takes a moment.) What am I doing? We haven't talked about anything, Roberta. I'm finding myself in a very strange place. I've learned that when your mother dies, as mine has, your connection to life, and in a sense your bridge back to Heaven disappears. It's very scary. But when your daughter dies, Roberta my role as the bridge back to Heaven is weakening. I could be doubly disconnected, but I have you. We must be a support system for each other. Please. I'm your connection to life. I'm still your mother.

Roberta: Why would Candice kill herself, Mom?

Zhana: A ten year old girl does not do this to herself unless she is very unhappy. And sometimes when young girls become that unhappy it's not because of you or me, but because chemically there's something not right in their brains.

Roberta: How does a ten year old girl learn to load a gun?

Zhana: You know she didn't- your father keeps- you know how he keeps them. I don't know what she was thinking and I don't know how she- Candice was disturbed and that's that. Roberta, I know you must blame yourself, must be blaming yourself, because you never looked out for her or showed her you cared, but don't blame yourself no matter how easy it would be for you to think yourself the one to blame, you must not do that.

Roberta: Are you listening to yourself?

Zhana: See, this is why I can never bring up important things with you.

Roberta: You're crazy.

Zhana: And what is that supposed to mean? Really, Roberta, it's because you refuse to articulate yourself that you are a failure at handling bigger things. And I can't handle this alone. Snap out of it.

(Roberta becomes cross, goes to the keg, takes the tap nozzle, places it at her crotch, and looking at her mother with a dead pan expression, presses the tab. It looks as though Roberta is pissing towards her mother.)

Zhana: I will not have you conducting yourself without dignity!

Roberta: Is dignity a red cocktail dress on a drunken whore?

Zhana: I can't take this. Jesus, look at you! Look at yourself! You're naked on the porch. Put some clothes on.

Roberta: All of my clothes are dirty.

Zhana: Because you refuse to do the laundry.

Roberta: The washer's broken.

Zhana: I didn't know that.

Roberta: Yes, you did. I told you.

Zhana: I don't remember you telling me.

Roberta: Would it have mattered if you did?

Zhana: I would have gotten someone to fix it.

Roberta: Can I wear something of yours?

Zhana: My clothes are extremely expensive.

Roberta: I have no clothes, Mom.

Zhana: Yes, pick out something simple. Anything you like, but something simple, Roberta and come down with it and show me so I know.

(Roberta picks up the dirty scarlet dress she was wearing before. She puts it back on. Zhana shakes her head or rolls her eyes exasperated. Zhana removes her handkerchief and fusses with her hair.)

Zhana: Do you think I should stop brushing my hair? Just leave it alone?

(Roberta approaches Zhana and leafs through her hair.)

Zhana: Why is my hair falling out? I miss my mom. She could fix this. Just stop. You're making it worse. My mother would know of some *thing* I could do. You always need your mother, at any age.

(Roberta steps back. Zhana places the handkerchief on the table and returns to the plants. She spots the purple lythrum. From the point Roberta buried the newspaper under it, the plant has been rapidly yellowing.)

Zhana: Was this, this yellow before?

(Roberta joins her mother in examining the plant.)

Zhana: Was it?

Roberta: I don't remember.

(Zhana wraps her hands around it and begins to tug it from the earth. It won't budge.)

Roberta: Don't pull it out!

Zhana: It could be diseased, Roberta, I have to. What if it spreads to the other plants?

Roberta: It's not diseased, it just needs water.

Zhana: Help me pull it out, I'm not strong enough.

Roberta: NO!

Zhana: Stop being stubborn and give me a hand.

(Roberta takes the handkerchief from the table and wipes her hands on it like a rag as she says)

Roberta: I wouldn't touch it. It makes the hands awfully dry.

Zhana: You've got dirt on your hands. You'll get that dirty, give it to me.

Roberta: No, you have to pull out the plant, so pull out the plant.

Zhana: I can't pull out the plant, I've stopped, now give that to me.

Roberta: I'm figuring out a way you could wear it. (wraps her head in it)

Zhana: That's enough Roberta, please-

Roberta: You asked me what I would do-

Zhana: It was my mother's please-

Roberta: This was your mother's? This chair was your mother's. (takes it)

Zhana: Roberta-

Roberta: The table was your mothers, the house was your mothers, the mailbox was your mothers-

Zhana: You want what I have?

Roberta: But you've got no claim on the dirt.

Zhana: Have it all!

Roberta: So back off!

Zhana: HERE! (removes a pearl ring from her finger)

Roberta: The dirt is mine.

(Zhana chucks the pearl ring at Roberta)

Roberta: Owe.

Zhana: That ring is priceless! You want everything? Take it from me! Why don't you take my hair too? (tears handkerchief away from Roberta) Your father and I are getting a divorce! He'll be by later to try to take everything I've built and own, and I think it's just great you're taking it first. I think this is a bad time for a divorce, don't you? He's just running away from Candice. (looks at Roberta imploringly) I don't get it. The family shouldn't collapse now.

(Roberta picks up the ring and looks at it.)

Zhana: I got that ring in Paris. In 1969. We were doing a photo shoot of jewelry. I got to keep it. The photographer told me I should keep it, that I deserved it. It was stealing, but we did it anyway.

Roberta: So it wasn't even your mother's.

(Zhana rises and pulls out the yellow plant with a huge grunt. She tosses it back on the lawn and begins to weed around the soil. Roberta is hurt by this. She composes herself and thinks. She goes down into the plants to where the purple lythrum was and digs up the newspaper, stares at it, and throws it back on the lawn. Zhana cannot see her do this. Zhana notices Roberta when Roberta picks up the uprooted yellowed purple lythrum and replants it just where it was.)

Zhana: It would be more helpful if you actually pulled the weeds out. Why don't you go inside and get the washer straightened out, would you? Call the guy. Oh, actually call Grandpa.

Roberta: I'm not going to call Grandpa.

Zhana: Alright, I will.

(Zhana rises, ascends the porch steps, and goes inside. Roberta goes to the table, almost sets the ring back on the table, then collects the handkerchief and places the trinket, the handheld mirror, the flask, and some bobby pins in the handkerchief. She thinks, then seriously writes a sentence on paper and puts it in. She wraps it up in knots so that it is a little package, descends the

stairs and buries the little package in the dirt beneath the Japanese Rose bush. As she's burying.)

LIGHTS CHANGE TO LATE AFTERNOON SUN.

(Roberta's hangover becomes unbearable and she is exhausted. She slowly lies down in the plants and passes out.)

LIGHTS FADE EVEN DEEPER TO ORANGE OF SETTING SUN

(Zhana comes out and stares at the plants. She notices Roberta. Zhana gets the hose again and begins to water the plants. At first she is careful not to spray Roberta, but then Zhana sprays Roberta quickly. Roberta does not wake up or move. Zhana continues to water, from time to time she touches the soil to see how damp it's become. She gets mud on her hands and feet by doing this. She examines the Japanese Rose and discovers a bud on the plant. She stares at the bud trying to remember if she had seen it before. The dirty newspaper catches her eye. She goes to it and picks it up. She runs her hands through her hair exhaustively. A clump of wadded hair comes out in her hand. She stares at the hair, horrified. She goes to the reflective windows on the porch and examines her scalp. She sees a bald patch. She goes to the table and looks for her bobby pins. She cannot find them. She looks more and notices many items missing. She gets up and looks over the railing of the porch to places the items could have fallen.)

Zhana: ROBERTA!

(Roberta does not wake up. Zhana runs her hands over her hair. She ties her hair in a bun. Quinton enters walking the bicycle down the sidewalk and up the walkway to the porch.)

Zhana: Hi.

Quinton: Hey.

Zhana: (smiles) Hey.

Quinton: Is Roberta around?

(Zhana looks at Roberta in the plants.)

Quinton: What happened?

Zhana: Hangover, I imagine.

Quinton: Oh.

Zhana: She's out cold.

Quinton: Oh no.

Zhana: Yeah.

(The bud of the Japanese Rose slowly begins to open.)

Zhana: Have you read this? (refers to newspaper)

Quinton: Yeah.

Zhana: Give them two days and they can destroy your image. I'm surprised they didn't scale the walls last night and take paparazzi photos of my bedroom. (smiles)

Quinton: Why would they do that?

Zhana: I was making a joke, Quinton.

Quinton: Oh, good one.

Zhana: How have you been?

Quinton: I finished my route.

Zhana: Good for you. You're a good boy.

Quinton: I just came by to return Roberta's bicycle.

Zhana: Actually, that's my bicycle, so thank you.

Quinton: No, I mean, I'm the one who needed it so thank you.

Zhana: You're welcome. Did you get home okay last night?

Quinton: (looks at Roberta nervously) Yeah, I mean, I just walked home, so yeah.

Zhana: It seems you and Roberta have the worst timing.

Quinton: Not usually.

Zhana: Let me give you a hug.

Quinton: Should she be passed out like that?

Zhana: She's fine.

(Zhana attempts to hug Quinton. He backs away shyly and Zhana, embarrassed, backs away as well and plays with her hair.)

Zhana: I wonder what I'd be like if I'd had a son. I can see why Roberta likes you.

Quinton: I'm worried she knows I came here last night. Not that that should matter, I mean, I came here to see how she was doing, but I don't want her to think, because I ended up staying and she was passed out, I mean, when I left last night she wasn't here. Do you think she woke up, saw us talking and left upset? She broke my bike.

Zhana: Quinton, you did nothing wrong.

Quinton: Then how come this morning you acted like you've never met me before?

Zhana: Because secrets are fun.

Quinton: Well, I mean, why does it have to be a secret if we did nothing wrong?

Zhana: We were just talking.

Quinton: I know. So, why is it a secret?

Zhana: Because, Quinton, (smiles) they're more fun. (Zhana lays her arms on Quinton getting mud on his shoulders) Because you can do anything you want in a secret and not regret it. Because you know it won't be published in the paper the next day. A secret can't shame you.

Quinton: (backs away again) I'm really, really good friends with Roberta.

Zhana: But what does that mean- what does "friends" mean, really.

(Quinton disengages goes over to Roberta. He gets down and places a hand near to her nose to see if she's breathing.)

Zhana: Is she still breathing?

Quinton: Yeah.

Zhana: We better get her inside. Besides, she couldn't be good for the plants.

(Zhana joins Quinton. They hoist her up by her torso and legs and carefully ascend the porch and exit into the house. The Japanese Rose has fully bloomed. An unusually long moment passes. Quinton, then bursts out from the screen door with mud on his face. Two steps later, Zhana bursts out calling after him.)

Zhana: Wait! You misunderstand me! I wasn't trying to-

(Quinton has exited running down the walkway and down the sidewalk the same way he came from at the top of the scene, as Zhana calls after him running down the porch steps. She stops in the lawn. She covers her mouth with her hand ashamed of what she's done. She runs her hands through her hair. A massive quantity of hair comes out in her hands. Zhana's eyes fill with tears at the sight.)

Zhana: WHY IS MY HAIR FALLING OUT?!

(Zhana turns back towards the plants, notices the rose and stares at it. She goes to it laughing. She smells it. She recoils in disgust covering her mouth from gagging.)

Zhana: Eche. (sniffs again and recoils)

(Zhana grabs the rose and pulls it off the bush. She throws it to the ground and stomps on it. She returns to the plants and examines them. She picks up the hose as if to begin watering. She thinks, then quickly coils the hose and puts it in its place on the side of the house where she got it. A seventy year old man, PETER, who is the father of Zhana's husband, Charlie, approaches the house. He

appears to be an average country casual type. He has a book of prayers in his hand. They see each other.)

Peter: So, the washer needs fixing?

Zhana: It does, but that's not why I called you. (refers to the plants) What am I doing wrong?

Peter: (examines the plants in silence.) Whenever you think you're doing something wrong by the way of plants, it usually means you're doing too much. Just leave them alone.

(Peter takes from his back pocket a copy of the newspaper.)

Peter: This was a clever piece of fiction.

(The Japanese rose has developed two more buds, which snap open.)

Zhana: (stares at the newspaper, then at the bicycle, then at the random piles of dirt, and begins to cry) I'm so embarrassed that you're seeing my lawn like this. I've been gardening all day.

(Peter weakens, maybe rolls his eyes from Zhana's state and approaches her.)

Peter: You don't have to figure out why she did this. And you don't have to talk to newspapers to prove to people you're upset. You just have to accept it, Zhana.

Zhana: I won't accept it.

Peter: Death makes room for life.

Zhana: (refers to the plants) Should I pull them out then?

Peter: Enough with the plants. Let them do what they do. I'm talking about the article.

Zhana: It came out all wrong.

Peter: Which is why you shouldn't have spoken with them.

Zhana: The press does what they like.

Peter: You shouldn't have spoken with them. You should have listened to me. I told you that article was going to make gun owners look like idiots and that's exactly what it was.

Zhana: It wasn't my fault.

Peter: I know it wasn't your fault, Zhana, but you gave them leeway.

Zhana: I thought they were going to write about Candice and her psychology-

Peter: Well, I told you they weren't. They made it sound like the gun went off in a play fight between the girls. Do you know how that reflects on the family?

Zhana: I know. I'm sorry, Peter. (begins to cry again)

Peter: It wasn't your fault. Hey, Zhana, you weren't thinking clearly.

Zhana: If Charlie had been here- Since the accident I saw Charlie once, at the funeral.

(Zhana sniffs the air quickly and discretely. She goes to a giant bag of Miracle Grow on the porch and angrily throws down handful after handful of the stuff onto the plants, especially the Japanese Rose.)

Peter: Stop with that. It doesn't help to put so much on.

Zhana: These plants are so unhealthy.

Peter: (rises to her) Alright. (goes to hold her) It's going to be okay. Calm down. (looks at her hair) Oh, Zhana. (examines her hair.)

Zhana: I can't take this stress. It's unbearable. And I can't find my handkerchief. I look much better with my handkerchief.

Peter: You've got to relax.

Zhana: I found her, Peter.

Peter: You? I thought Roberta did.

Zhana: Roberta and I got home at the same time, but I found her.

Peter: Charlie didn't mention that.

Zhana: Charlie wasn't home. He left me all alone. I hate your son.

Peter: It's never a bad thing to hate your husband every once in a while.

(Zhana laughs. Peter smiles.)

Peter: You don't hate Charlie.

(Zhana's smile quickly slides off her face.)

Peter: You shouldn't.

Zhana: I know.

Peter: You don't, do you?

Zhana: No, of course not, Peter.

Peter: You know, when my first wife died, it was terrible. The most difficult thing I've ever gone through. I wanted to hate everyone and I did. That's what made it difficult, you see?

(Zhana nods.)

Peter: And what made it better? Vodka.

(Peter takes a small bottle of vodka from his jacket. He holds it up in the air and looks at it.)

Peter: Let's not look down at ourselves, but up to greater things.

(Peter ascends the porch and pours vodka into two glasses on the table. He hands Zhana the drink.)

Peter: (toasts) To death, which always makes room for life. (they clink glasses and drink. The two roses slowly begin to bloom.)

Zhana: Am I a bad mother?

Peter: I didn't love my first wife because she was a great mother.

Zhana: Why did you love her?

Peter: Because she was there.

Zhana: Charlie doesn't love me at all. (pause) She didn't have a face, Peter.

Peter: Drink up. Don't let your mind run circles on you.

(Peter takes a long drink, as does Zhana. There is silence. Peter then extends the book of prayers towards Zhana.)

Peter: I thought reading it might soothe you. I know your mother had a similar one.

(Zhana looks at the book and turns it over and over in her hands.)

Zhana: My mother went to Church every Sunday. I never did. Oh, I loved it that she went, because I loved when she came home. She had to go in order for me to love her coming home. I wonder if Candice had moments like that with me.

Peter: I'm sure she did. (takes another long swig which encourages Zhana to take a long drink. As Peter says the following he refreshes Zhana's drink.) You know, when I was growing up, my mother and my sister had a very strong relationship. I was always out of the loop. They probably didn't even notice, but man they could laugh and laugh for hours. What I'm trying to say is that the glue between you girls, it's not gone. It's still there.

Zhana: Oh, one time last month, I came home from work. Roberta was crying. I could hear her in the living room. The second I got in the house Candice ran up to me. She was looking right into my eyes, like she needed me. I'll

never forget that look. So happy I was home. But she wasn't happy, just something in her look that showed she was happy that I was home, that she needed me. (thinks) That's not really the same.

Peter: Well, I'm sure there are a million others. Need more? (refers to vodka as he refreshes his glass) Sure you do. (refreshes her glass)

Zhana: Why couldn't they put that in the article?

Peter: Because they don't care about what's good and sweet, about nice stories between women. They want to use our family as an example for why no one should own a gun. Zhana, I'm worried this situation is going to turn into a federal case.

Zhana: What do you mean?

Peter: How are the guns being kept now?

Zhana: Well they're not strooned all over the house, anymore.

Peter: Alright, now, Charlie made some mistakes.

Zhana: He sure did, Peter. They were all over the house. There's been times I've sat down on the couch and found a gun under my cushion.

Peter: Where are they now?

Zhana: I locked them in a closet.

Peter: I'm going to take them with me.

Zhana: You can't, Peter, I'm sorry but you can't.

Peter: Do you want this to turn into a federal case? That article was a step in the wrong direction. And if there are still guns in a house where a kid died, then the laws around here are going to change for the worse.

Zhana: Fine. Take them. Why don't you take the gun that killed my daughter too? I don't see how this is a federal case. And I don't see why you think you can take them.

Peter: I'm not taking them, I'm getting them for Charlie.

Zhana: Why isn't he here to get them for himself? He should be here. He should have stayed. He left the memorial after the first five minutes. He should have stayed and told me to my face he wanted a divorce. He called the house and told the answering machine while a room full of guests listened. I had to shut the phone off after that. HE'S LEAVING ME! HE WANTS TO LEAVE? THIS IS HIS FAULT. If he gave her any attention. Either of them. He wasn't in their lives, Peter. He's never in the same room as Roberta, and he would have started the same distant bullshit with Candice eventually. (accusatorily) Isn't it interesting that she took her own life with the thing that Charlie loved most? The thing he spent all his time with?

Peter: (angrily) First of all, this is not Charlie's fault. This is Candice's fault. I know that's hard for you to hear, but it's the truth. This was not an accident, and you know it. It was a choice. Second of all, Charlie's not asking for a divorce.

Zhana: He asked for a divorce in that message.

Peter: He's not thinking clearly right now.

Zhana: If he doesn't want a divorce then why doesn't he come home?

Peter: Because I told him not to.

Zhana: Why?

Peter: Because I'm his father and I advise him during times when he cannot advise himself. This is a mess and it's stemming from Charlie and his irresponsibility with firearms.

Zhana: This is about my daughter. She killed herself, Peter. You are focused on the wrong thing.

Peter: I'm focused on the right thing. Now, I mourned my grand-daughter, but I won't mourn forever, it's not productive and it doesn't solve the problem. That's what women do, which is why they rarely see the root of the problem, they just go around emotionally distraught, but they don't fix the problem. I'm fixing the problem.

Charlie got real messed up over the years and I'm gonna get him straightened out. I don't expect you to understand all that. But I do expect you to trust me and not question me. (his face shows he smells something putrid in the air)

Zhana: So that's it? I'm just supposed to believe you and trust you? I'm just supposed to sit around here and not mind that my husband is bailing on our family.

Peter: He's not bailing. He's taking some time so he can come back and be the kind of husband you deserve. Do you smell that?

Zhana: But I don't love him because he's a good husband. I love him because he's here. But he's not here anymore. You see?

Peter: WHAT THE HELL IS THAT SMELL?

(Peter rises and follows the smell in the air.)

Zhana: It's the roses.

Peter: (smells a rose) Oh! That is rank!

Zhana: I got rid of one earlier. Just tear it off the bush and kill it.

Peter: Useless, more will grow, it's a plant. It's got to be something in the soil that's supplying it with a bad smell.

Zhana: Just get rid of the flowers.

(Zhana angrily approaches the rose bush. She rips the two roses off and stomps on them.)

Peter: That's not going to do anything. The problem will be fixed for a while and then it will reek again, don't you listen? It's in the plant.

Zhana: Fine, Peter, fine. You're always right. So fucking right all the time.

(Zhana pulls the entire Japanese rose bush out of the ground. It takes a moment of wrestling to get it to come lose.)

Peter: God, now, you don't have to do that, either. You never take the time, Zhana to figure out how to fix problems. Too hasty. Ignore it or annihilate it, that's your way.

(Zhana finally gets the bush out and flings it behind her. The bundle Roberta made out of Zhana's handkerchief comes lose as well and plops on the ground. They both see it. Zhana unwraps the handkerchief and takes out the contents.)

Peter: What's that?

Zhana: My stuff. Roberta took it. I must have been in the house. (takes the note, reads it.)

Peter: What's that say? (grabs note reads it, grimaces)
Do you know what the meaning of this is?

Zhana: How could I?

Peter: Roberta's playing some sort of sick game?

Zhana: Why would she?

Peter: Absolute filth.

Zhana: What do you think this is about?

Peter: It's junk Roberta made. That sort of thing- This is why I have to keep Charlie away from here. Away from her.

Zhana: What are you talking about Peter? What is this?

Peter: (agitated and angry) What do you think it is? Roberta made it! You think it has some deep inner meaning? There's something not right with her. She's a- She's always been, just sick. You were always too ignorant to see it, but Charlie could see it. It gave him a hard time.

Zhana: What do you mean?! Why aren't you being plain with me?

Peter: ROBERTA'S A PERVERT. ROBERTA'S A WHORE. SHE WALKS AROUND WITH NOT MUCH TO COVER HER. SHE STICKS THINGS, PHALLIC THINGS TO HER CROTCH.

Zhana: When did you see my Roberta behaving that way?

Peter: Charlie tells me these things. It gave Charlie a hard time. The kind of hard time you don't want to be getting from your daughter.

Zhana: (freezes and grows severe.) What kind of a hard time are you talking about?

Peter: WHAT KIND OF A HARD TIME DO YOU THINK I'M TALKING ABOUT?

(There is a moment of silence. Zhana touches her hair and a thick wad of hair falls out.)

Peter: No family's perfect. You work with what you've got. (pause) I'm gonna go get the guns. I'm going to take all of them. I'll call you when I think my son's doing better. Don't talk to the paper anymore. I'll undo your mess, don't do anything. (pause) Hey. (little pause) Hey. Don't do anything.

(Zhana looks at Peter.)

Zhana: I lied. They're still all over the house. I couldn't touch them.

(Peter goes up the porch, through the screen door and into the house. Zhana approaches the plants. She re-buries the bundle. She kicks away the uprooted Japanese Rose bush. She digs in the dirt looking for more relics. She tries to uproot the Hungarian Brome, but it won't come out. She kicks the dirt around. She gets the hose and turns on the water. She begins to flood the plants and soil. She desperately throws handfuls of Miracle Grow on the plants. Quinton walks down the sidewalk, sees Zhana, hesitates, then walks up the walk way towards the house.)

Zhana: (stops what she's doing) Please don't think badly of me.

Quinton: I came to see how Roberta's doing.

Zhana: Roberta's in the house still, where we left her. I'm so sorry you misunderstood me, before.

Quinton: Whatever. I just came by to check on Roberta.

Zhana: It's so hard for me to find anyone to talk to. And I miss my husband. He should be here. Oh, god, I don't even know who he is.

Quinton: Well, I really don't have time to talk, because my sister needs me.

Zhana: What do you think of Roberta?

Quinton: I think she's my friend.

Zhana: Just level with me. Is she, is there something wrong with her?

Quinton: I don't know what to say.

Zhana: What kind of person is she?

Quinton: I don't know.

Zhana: You've been hanging out with her for a year. In teenage time that's a lifetime. What is my daughter like?

Quinton: She's, sort of, secretive. But that's what I like about her. We go on adventures. Sometimes, just in the house. In all the secret rooms and chambers in your house.

Zhana: My mother designed and built this house.

Quinton: I don't know. She's playful. (little pause) And sad. She gets mad at me a lot, but I think it's just because she's sad. I'm sure she's different with you.

Zhana: Does Roberta say anything about me?

Quinton: I don't know what you mean.

Zhana: Does she say anything about her father? Did she ever tell you anything?

Quinton: No. She just likes to hang out with me. She gets really mad if she's left in the house. Not even alone, because her dad or you are around, but I think she feels alone unless I'm around.

Zhana: I'm living in a house of strangers. I feel like I know you better than anyone. I don't know my own husband.

Quinton: That sucks.

Zhana: Last night, it meant a lot that you stayed and talked to me. But I didn't tell you the one thing that was on my mind, the one thing that's been on my mind this whole time. Maybe because it makes me look self-concerned, or ignorant, as some people see it. This is the second child I've lost. Did you know that?

Quinton: No.

Zhana: I had a son named Benny. Long before Roberta. Charlie and I were living in France at the time. The three of us went on vacation. Charlie, my husband, left me on the beach with Benny. He was seven. When he was four I realized I had no idea what to do with him. What do you do with a boy? The breast feeding stage was okay, I knew what to do.

Quinton: Ah, okay.

Zhana: But since then, I had become lost with him. And he was a boy, throwing sand, at the seagulls. And he always wanted to wrestle. I hated it. And Charlie loved it and I resented Charlie for finding it funny. And why the fuck we had to bring him on vacation I'll never understand. The point is, what I can't stop thinking about, what I'm about to tell you, we were alone on the beach and I told Benny to go on in the water as far as he wanted to. I watched his little legs splash through the low waves as he went out. Do you see?

Quinton: (shakes his head) no.

Zhana: He kept turning back and smiling at me, but then I couldn't watch anymore. I turned my back on him, on my baby and walked up the beach. I think he knew. He knew what I was asking of him when I encouraged him to go out there and he went anyway.

Quinton: He drowned?

Zhana: Yes. But why would he do that? What is wrong with my children that they do that sort of thing? Benny and Candice. I can't figure it out.

Quinton: Why would *you* do that?

(Peter enters through the screen door on the porch carrying five black gun cases, and two black rifle cases.)

Peter: These are the only ones I've found. Zhana you've got to dig up the rest for me I can't find them. (sees Zhana and Quinton) Who's this?

Zhana: Roberta's friend, Quinton.

Quinton: I came to see if Roberta was around.

Peter: (stares at him hard) Huh. (sets down all the cases) I'll need that help, Zhana.

(Peter exits back into the house. Zhana looks at Quinton.)

Zhana: Our secret.

(Zhana ascends the porch and exits into the house through the screen door. Quinton notices the water running. He goes and turns off the water. He returns to the plants and stares at them. He looks at the house.)

(Quinton takes a moment to think, then exits down the walkway and off down the sidewalk.)

LIGHTS FADE DOWN TO DARK EVENING DUSK, TO AGAIN ILLUSTRATE THE PASSAGE OF TIME.

(Peter enters through the screen door of the house with two more gun cases. He bends down to pick up the other cases. There are too many to carry.)

Peter: (struggles with carrying the cases) Goddamnit.

(A moment later, Roberta comes calling for her mother and enters the porch by the time she says "check".)

Roberta: Mom, the washing machine guy needs his check!

Peter: Roberta! Pick those up. (refers to the three cases he can't carry) Come on. I can't carry them all.

Roberta: Is Mom out here?

Peter: No your mom isn't out here. And neither is your little friend. Now would you give me a hand?

(Roberta picks up the cases.)

Peter: Hold them good, because we don't want them to fall in the mud, down there. Come on. Got them?

(Peter descends the porch steps. Roberta does not. On the lawn Peter turns back to Roberta when he notices she hasn't moved.)

Peter: Come on, it's not that much to carry.

Roberta: Where are we going?

Peter: I parked up the street where they let you park.

Roberta: I have to find my mom. For the check.

Peter: Walk fast. He won't be waiting long.

(Roberta does not move.)

Peter: Such obstinacy. Do I have to bribe you?

Roberta: Let me just tell my mom about the guy.

(Peter sets down the cases and ascends the porch.)

Roberta: I don't want to go with you, Grandpa, I don't want to go.

Peter: It's just to the car.

Roberta: I don't want to go.

Peter: Charlie isn't there, just me. (grabs her arm and pulls her down the steps) Now you are pissing me off.

(Roberta trips over the bicycle and drops one of the gun cases in the mud.)

Peter: DAMN IT! (he hits her head to rebuke her) That's exactly what I didn't want to happen.

(Roberta cries. Picks up the case and hastily tries to wipe the mud off of the case using her dress.)

Peter: You're crying? You're blowing everything way out of proportion, that's what you do. I didn't mean to bump you. That's your problem you think things are happening that aren't happening. Now stop complaining.

(Peter returns to his cases, picks them up.)

Peter: Stop feeling sorry for yourself. You can't stand it that people are feeling sorry for your sister and you're just acting out for attention. It's selfish. And you better stop playing these games with your mother. Stop wiping that, it's fine. We found your little relic. You're just lucky she didn't think anything of it.

(Roberta stops crying and hardens. She is deeply saddened, but trying not to show it.)

Peter: You know the first thing out of her mouth? What should she do with her hair. You see how all this acting out gets you nowhere? Now come on, you should be happy.

Roberta: I have to tell my mom about the washing machine guy. He needs his check.

(Peter violently approaches Roberta, but is also trying to control his annoyance. He quickly wraps an arm around her shoulder / neck and pushes her and walks across the lawn and down the sidewalk offstage. A moment passes. Zhana enters through the screen door. Her hair is wrapped in her handkerchief. She descends the porch steps and looks at all the mud. She stands in thought, looks at the plants. Roberta enters walking quickly up the sidewalk, then up the walkway. Her head is down to cover her face from anyone's eyes.)

Zhana: What's wrong?

(Roberta tries to quickly walk past her mother. Zhana grabs Roberta.)

Zhana: Roberta?

Roberta: (shouts) THE WASHING MACHINE GUY NEEDS HIS CHECK.

Zhana: I took care of that. You never talk to me when it's important.

Roberta: I DON'T WANT TO LIVE HERE ANYMORE.

(Zhana is silent for a long moment.)

Roberta: Aren't you going to say anything?

(A little silent moment.)

Zhana: Roberta, listen to me carefully. You're all I have left.

Roberta: I can't stay here. Everything's dying here.

Zhana: The strong don't die.

Roberta: It doesn't matter how strong you are if you're being killed.

Zhana: Where are you going to go? You have no skills. You aren't even gorgeous like I was. (gravely) Roberta, whatever is bothering you, whatever that is, will not happen anymore. We are going to be fine.

(Roberta goes inside the house. Zhana remains standing on the porch.)

LIGHTS DIM FURTHER TO THE DEEP DARKNESS OF MIDNIGHT.

(Zhana drinks with the passage of time all the vodka that Peter left her. She looks despairingly out at the street and all the houses. Zhana descends the porch and uproots the plants one by one. She has become desperate and cries to herself. Quinton enters from the sidewalk. He carries a baby in a car seat. He looks up from the baby and sees Zhana. Zhana, having lost her mind a bit goes to Quinton and shows him her scalp.)

Zhana: There are bald spots now. Do you see? It's falling out! (waits for a response) Do you have a heart?

Quinton: (moves baby away from Zhana's advances) Careful.

Zhana: A baby. (smiles)

Quinton: Yes, she's a baby. (calls) ROBERTA!

Zhana: She can't help me. Can I hold her?

Quinton: (calls louder) ROBERTA!

Zhana: I wouldn't hurt her. I'm good with babies!

(Zhana goes to the plants and continues to uproot them.)

(Roberta enters through the screen door. She notice her mother uprooting the plants. Roberta surges towards Zhana. Roberta forcefully pulls her mother away from the plants.)

Roberta: NO!

Zhana: There all dead Roberta!

Roberta: No they aren't!

Zhana: We have to get them out of here.

(Roberta takes a plant and looks around the lawn for a second. She then takes the plant to the far end of the lawn away from the house and digs a hole. She places the plant in the hole and pats the soil so the plant stands secure.)

Roberta: The soil's better over here.

Zhana: The lawn looks like shit!

(Zhana exits up the porch steps and into the house. Quinton stands looking at Roberta while she replants the plants at the far end of the lawn.)

Roberta: Why are you just standing there? Help me!

Quinton: I brought my niece, Aidan. I thought you might like to meet her.

Roberta: I have to deal with these plants first. (stops)
I should take them with me. (thinks) Not if I go on an
airplane. (continues planting.)

Quinton: I'm not even supposed to be here with her, but my
sister fell asleep and I came right over, because I really
wanted you to meet her. She's sleepy. (picks up the baby
from its seat) See?

Roberta: They might die over here as well, but, I have to
try.

Quinton: (approaches Roberta, sits beside her still holding
the baby.) Do you want to hold her?

Roberta: No.

Quinton: You'll do great. Here

(Quinton passes her the baby carefully, she is resistant to
take the baby at first, but then she holds her. Quinton
puts his arms around Roberta. They sit near the Hungarian
Brome that Roberta just planted. When Quinton passes her
the baby a bud on the Brome cracks open.)

Quinton: She's amazing. She has a whole personality.
Sometimes she cries for no reason and I say she's having
greater sympathies for the state of the world. But on the
whole she's so good. She's very polite and respectful.

(Quinton wraps his arms around Roberta sexually. He moves
his face towards hers to kiss her. Roberta looks at him
fearfully. He stops.)

Quinton: I can take her if you don't want to hold her
anymore.

Roberta: No, I'm okay.

Quinton: You're really normal for someone with a crazy
mother.

Roberta: I'm going to leave here soon.

Quinton: Where are you going?

Roberta: Someplace where the flowers grow.

Quinton: An adventure.

Roberta: Yeah, but I'm really going to go.

Quinton: I have one more year of high school.

(Roberta passes the baby back, as she does Quinton kisses her on the mouth. It is unexpected and vague, because it was sort of like bumping into one another. The bud begins to open on the Hungarian Brome.)

Roberta: Um, excuse you.

Quinton: Don't be a jerk.

(Quinton places the baby back in the car seat with his back to Roberta.)

Quinton: (as he adjusts the straps around the baby) I like you. I don't see how I could be more obvious with myself. I've been to your house about seven times today. (faces Roberta and approaches) I want to kiss you.

Roberta: Aah, too bad, freak.

(Quinton grabs Roberta and kisses her for a long moment. When he finally lets her go, she turns away from him and keeps her head lowered to hid her face.)

(Roberta unexpectedly shoves Quinton.)

Quinton: What are you doing?

(Roberta pushes him hard.)

Quinton: What's wrong with you?

Roberta: Don't!

(Roberta shoves him again and hits him, and pushes him, he pushes her back.)

Quinton: You're crazy!

(Roberta shoves him extremely hard and Quinton falls back dangerously close to the baby seat. Quinton looks back at

the baby in the car seat that he barely missed stepping on.)

Roberta: Don't touch me!

Quinton: Why not?

Roberta: You shouldn't have done that.

Quinton: I didn't know that, I won't do it again.

Roberta: You shouldn't do that.

Quinton: I'm sorry.

Roberta: I'm not going to be her.

Quinton: Who? Candice?

Roberta: If I'm not my mother, then I'm Candice.

Quinton: No-

Roberta: And if I'm not Candice, I'm my mother. And I can't be her, I don't want to be.

Quinton: You're not. You're you.

Roberta: I don't want you and that baby! One or the other. Both don't work.

Quinton: What are you talking about? Roberta, you're still drunk!

Roberta: I'm drunk! I'm turning into her!

Quinton: You're not, you're you. You're not Candice and you're not any of the other people in that house. You're the one who cares about the plants. You're the one who cares about more than yourself. That's why I care about you. You're great.

Roberta: And I'm all she has left.

Quinton: Look, you saved this plant. (refers to Hungarian Brome)

Roberta: I'm her bridge. She's not mine, I'm hers.

Quinton: Did you see this? Come look at this.

(The Hungarian Brome bloomed a flower. Quinton smells it.)

Quinton: Come over here and smell this.

(Roberta smells the flower.)

Quinton: You made that.

Roberta: It smells good. It smells so good. (smells the flower, then quickly decides) We have to go. We need a pot for the plant.

Quinton: What?

Roberta: We need a pot. I'm not going to leave this here to die.

Quinton: I might have a pot.

Roberta: You have to get it. We have to do this now. I can't stay here any longer. I'm not leaving this plant. She'll kill it. Go and get the pot, Quinton!

Quinton: Alright. You'll be here?

Roberta: Yes.

Quinton: Then where will we go?

Roberta: On an adventure.

Quinton: Can it be one in my house until I graduate?

Roberta: Yes, just go!

(Quinton picks up the baby in the car seat and makes like he's leaving. He then turns back and approaches Roberta.)

Quinton: Can, can I kiss you now?

(Roberta looks at him, then the baby, then him.)

Roberta: No.

(Quinton exits down the sidewalk quickly. Roberta studies the plant trying to figure out what she did. She smells the flower. Zhana enters through the screen door. Zhana sees Roberta smelling the plant. When Roberta sees Zhana has come out, she surreptitiously acts as though nothing special has happened at all.)

Zhana: Where did he go?

Roberta: He's coming right back.

Zhana: Okay, I'm glad we can be alone. (she touches her hair and some of it falls out) My hair has been falling out. I know why. I figured it out. I must be eating something that's causing it to fall out. Or I'm not eating something that would help my hair to stay. I think it's the Vodka. (pause) What do you think?

Roberta: I really want to be alone right now. (tries to hide the plant from Zhana's view with her body.)

Zhana: Do you think it's the Vodka? I think it's the Vodka. And I think it's a punishment for being a bad mother. (little pause) Do you think I'm right?

(long pause. Roberta does not respond.)

Zhana: You aren't still planning on leaving are you? Because, I, I - I thought of things we could do together. I want to get to know you again. I know you really want to leave, so I was thinking we could go on a vacation. Where ever you want. Except the beach. That would make me too nervous. Do you know why I'm saying this? (pause for an answer that Roberta never gives) I'm saying this because I'm sorry. I won't let you out of my sight again. I'm going to keep you from harm.

Roberta: How are you going to do that?

Zhana: Somehow. Roberta, please don't leave me here. There will be only two people living in this house from now on, you and me. Do you understand?

Roberta: (becomes convinced) How come you didn't notice?

Zhana: I was too involved in my own secrets. (pause) I have no excuse. I'm so sorry.

(As Zhana's been speaking, Roberta has let down her guard slowly, and moves towards her mother.)

Zhana: I mean it. And we can go wherever you want even though my hair is falling out, I won't be embarrassed.

Roberta: Your hair doesn't look so bad.

Zhana: It doesn't?

Roberta: No, it doesn't.

Zhana: (approaches Roberta and opens her arms, Roberta steps in and allows herself to be hugged) You're my little girl. (Zhana continues to hug Roberta, then sees the Hungarian Brome the flower.)

Zhana: Nasty thing.

(Zhana approaches the Hungarian Brome, sees the flower, and immediately covers her nose, rips the flower off and stomps on it.)

Roberta: OH MY GOD WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING?!

Zhana: These smell awful. It'll make you nauseous.

Roberta: (calls down the street) QUINTON! QUINTON!
(pulls at her hair) AHHH.

Zhana: You're overreacting! Calm down.

Roberta: You killed it!

Zhana: It's just one flower!

Roberta: QUINTON!

(Roberta goes to the plants near the porch and digs furiously.)

Zhana: I already found the note! That's what I'm trying to tell you. (approaches Roberta, tries to hold her) That's what I'm saying! We're going to be happy!

Roberta: Get away from me! (she doesn't let Zhana touch her) Don't touch me! (she digs more)

Zhana: It's just one flower. I'm sorry Roberta, but I saw three earlier and they smelled terrible. Oh, God, flowers don't matter right now, we do. I'm trying to comfort you.

Roberta: Tell me where you were when he came after me!

Zhana: I don't know. I'm telling you I am infinitely sorry!

Roberta: Tell me why he was doing that to me!

Zhana: I don't know, Roberta! I don't know anything about it!

Roberta: I need to talk about this-

Zhana: Isn't it enough that I believe you? It's terrible, I don't see the point in talking about it.

Roberta: What do you want to talk about? Vacation? Don't you want to try to figure out how something like this could happen to me?

Zhana: I CAN'T HANDLE THIS!

Roberta: I CAN SEE THAT!

Zhana: WE AREN'T GOING TO HEAL BY DOING THIS!

Roberta: NO, LET'S DO THIS! (Roberta goes to the plants near the porch and mocks gardening. She kicks the dirt around.) (sarcastically) LET'S DO THIS! THIS IS BETTER! IT MAKES SENSE TO DO THIS AT A TIME LIKE THIS!

(Roberta kicks the dirt and uproots a plant. As the plant is uprooted a gun drops to the ground. She picks up the gun and looks at it.)

Roberta: *This* is what I was looking for.

Zhana: Roberta put that down.

Roberta: After a certain point I couldn't bear it. I had to tell someone. I told Candice what happens. I had to warn her, but I also had to have someone listen.

Zhana: You told her?

Roberta: Where were you? I couldn't be alone in it anymore.

Zhana: Why didn't you tell the police?

Roberta: Grandpa is the police! He knows everyone. Dad knows everyone. I'm nothing! And she's my sister! She could have listened. She could have cared. She could have held my hand. She could have done something. I thought she could have, but she couldn't! Then I felt so sorry for her. Because I know it was about to happen to her too. So I killed her. I held her down and pointed this gun at her head. I told her I was saving her.

Zhana: Oh, God, you cold blooded murderer! Candice didn't kill herself. How could you? Oh, God! These are my children!

Roberta: It was hell and you knew! That's why your hair is falling out!

Zhana: I did not know! How could I?

Roberta: Because everyone knew!

Zhana: You are going to turn yourself in for this!

Roberta: To Grandpa's friends? Grandpa knew! And no one did anything! (begins to cry)

Zhana: How could you do that to Candice? She was innocent!

Roberta: So was I!

Zhana: Give me the gun, Roberta.

(Roberta points the gun at Roberta's own head.)

Zhana: Are you crazy? Don't you dare!

Roberta: Why don't you care about me?

Zhana: I do care about you!

Roberta: No you don't!

Zhana: Please don't kill yourself. I can't go on if all my children have been killed! (calls down the street)
QUINTON!

Roberta: Don't call my friend, he's my friend.

Zhana: Don't do anything to yourself, Roberta, please- I won't call the police, just- please, I just want to go on vacation with you! No family is perfect and I JUST WANT TO START OVER!

(Roberta sees Quinton entering with the pot.)

Roberta: I'm not going to start over with you.

Quinton: Roberta?!

Roberta: (lowers gun from her head) I'm taking this plant and then I'm going. You'll never see me again.

Zhana: What?

Roberta: Dead or alive you won't see me ever again.

Zhana: Don't do this to me!

Roberta: Just put the plant in the pot, Quinton.

Zhana: Don't leave me alone.

(Quinton struggles to dig up the plant.)

Roberta: (watches him) Careful of the roots. No-

Quinton: I got it.

Zhana: Please, Roberta, you're all I have left! I forgive you!

Roberta: Let's take that flower too, it's crushed but I won't leave it behind.

Quinton: This one?

Roberta: Yeah.

Zhana: Don't ignore me! You need me. I'm your mother! You always need your mother! I'm your bridge! If you leave your bridge how will you get back to Heaven?

(Quinton loses grip of the plant, Roberta bends to try to catch it.)

Roberta: Got it!

(Roberta gets down to help. She cannot lift the plant with the gun in her hand so she sets it down on the lawn. Zhana watches Roberta and Quinton hoist the plant into the pot. She stares at the gun. The plant is securely in the pot and Roberta and Quinton smiles at each other. Zhana picks up the gun. Roberta throws her arms around Quinton and kisses him for a long moment. Zhana shoots Roberta in the head first and then a couple more shots. At the sound of the first shot BLACKOUT then the other shots in BLACKOUT as well.)

BLACKOUT FOR A LONG MOMENT

LIGHTS UP SLOWLY. IT IS DAWN.

(The bodies of Roberta and Quinton are not on stage. Zhana has been up all night. There are no plants or vegetation of any kind on the stage. Where the plants were is a marble patio that Zhana has been laying down all night. There should be a sense that the bodies are buried under the patio. Her mascara runs down her face. Peter stands at the edge of the lawn watching her. She wears her handkerchief to hide her bald head. Zhana polishes the marble, stands up and looks at Peter.)

Zhana: I think the neighbors will like it. (she picks up a glass of vodka) Oh, I should throw a little party. (she looks out to the audience) Oh, hello Mrs. Sanborn.

LIGHTS GROW TO BE BLINDINGLY BRIGHT THEN
BLACKOUT

END OF PLAY

