

AND SO IT GOES

By:

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Toronto, Ontario
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Revised FEB/10

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PEOPLE:

Karen... 25, a daughter

Ned... a father, a husband.

Gwen... a mother, a wife

Vonnegut... a writer

SETTING:

Various places. No doors, walls or windows. Just lighting. Some furniture.
And a soundscape.

REVISED FEB /10

SCENE

Night in the living room. Karen is looking out the window. Ned is reading a newspaper.

KAREN

I'm scared.

Ned flips a page.

KAREN

Did you hear me? I'm scared.

NED

(looking up)

Get away from the window.

KAREN

I wanna watch. I can watch if I want.

NED

(shrugs)

You said you were scared.

KAREN

Lots of things scare me, I still watch them. You scare me, I watch you all the time.

NED

I don't scare you.

KAREN

Sure you do. You scare the shit out of me. You always have.

NED

You know, you hurt my feelings when you say things like that, Karen.

KAREN

Like that's the issue. Your feelings. I'm talking about being scared, and you-- oh look, he's rocking.

NED

What?

KAREN

He's rocking on his heels. That's so fucking cocky. Why doesn't he just steal the car? If he's going to do it, you know... just do it. Don't stand there rocking on your heels like you're some super cool big fucking shit.

Ned stands. Moves to her side, looks out the window.

NED

What is it about that man that makes you think he's going to steal our car?

KAREN

Okay I don't like your tone of voice. Did I ask you to come over here and get involved? "What is it about that man" etcetera...

NED

You said you were scared... then you started talking about him stealing our car...

KAREN

Which is what I think. You think something different just state your opinion. I'm open to another point of view on the subject..

NED

He's just standing there. Why can't he just stand there.

KAREN

So that's all you have to say about it? If he steals our car, what will you say then? "We don't have a car now."

NED

Karen...

KAREN

"We don't have a car now. I can't drive you back home."

NED

Look let's just move away from the window. Let's do the crossword.

KAREN

I don't want to do the crossword, Dad. I want to keep watching that arrogant prick out there to make sure he doesn't steal our car so you won't have a fucking excuse not to come get me and drive me home from where I'll be.

Ned starts off.

KAREN

Where are you going?

NED

Just stay put. I'm going to go talk to him.

KAREN

No don't do that...

NED

It's okay. I'll just find out what he's doing out there.. Then you won't have to be scared ... I'll be right back.

Ned goes outside.

KAREN

Yeah you'll be right back unless he slits your fucking throat!

(watching)

Okay... walking, walking, walking... that's okay... a little talking, that's fine... just... not so close... You're too close! What's he-- okay he's mad so just... No don't push him! What is wrong with you!? Jesus!! Enough fucking pushing, okay!? You're gonna get...Jesus!

(backs away and cups her hands)

Fight! Fight!!

(suddenly still)

Okay I wash my hands of the whole thing.

(sits in Ned's chair, picks up the newspaper)

Just forget about it. It's got nothing to do with me.

Cover makes in doing up her bathrobe

GWEN

What's going on?

KAREN

(coldly)

Well where would you like me to start?

Gwen just looks at her.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 2

Two comfortable chairs. Gwen sits across from Vonnegut.

GWEN

It was the repo man. Guy came to repossess our car, Ned got all worked up and pretty much attacked him.

VONNEGUT

And the police came?

GWEN

Yeah. Apparently he might get charged with assault.

VONNEGUT

Apparently?

GWEN

Well I had other things on my mind. I mean I knew things were tight, but all of a sudden our vehicle was being taken away...

VONNEGUT

So it was a shock...

GWEN

Well the neighbours were out on their lawns by then, so it was also pretty embarrassing. Not that I care about what they all think.

VONNEGUT

Except we've already established that you do. You wouldn't let Ned tell them he lost his job...

GWEN

Not because I care about what they-- Can you cut me a little slack here. Throwing things I might have said or done in my face doesn't really-- And fuck them anyway. They'll probably all be in the same boat pretty soon.

VONNEGUT

Does it make you feel better to think that?

GWEN

Yeah. It does.

VONNEGUT

Well I think that's probably natural. Misery loves company, right.

GWEN

Except I'm not miserable, I'm mad.

VONNEGUT

I know. I was just--

GWEN

Ned's miserable.

VONNEGUT

Is he?

GWEN

You can't tell that from how I've described him and some of his ...actions? He comes across all sunshine and happiness to you, does he?

VONNEGUT

Well it sounds like he's coping.

GWEN

It does? Maybe you should start paying closer attention. You know, actually listen to what I'm saying.

VONNEGUT

I'm sorry. I sometimes get distracted.

GWEN

By what?

VONNEGUT

The state of the world usually.

GWEN

Yeah but this is my time. So try to pay attention. When we're not together you can fret as much as you want about all that stuff

VONNEGUT

I'm sorry...

GWEN

Where were we.

VONNEGUT

You're mad...

GWEN

Yes I am.

VONNEGUT

At everything, everyone? At Ned, Karen...Barnie?

GWEN

Barnie's our dog. Why would I be mad at our dog? What are you, an idiot.

VONNEGUT

Sorry... not Barnie. I meant your son... what's his--

GWEN

Alex. His name's Alex. And I'm not mad at him. It's been so long since I've seen him I don't have any feelings about him at all.

VONNEGUT

There's no way that can be true.

GWEN

You don't think? Well how about this then? I'm not mad at *anyone*. Mad is what I get before I get...busy. I get mad at the dirt in the house and then I eradicate it. Right now I'm mad at how bad things are going for us and soon I intend to fix it.

VONNEGUT

How?

GWEN

I'm working on that.

VONNEGUT

Working on a plan?

GWEN

A plan, an approach, whatever...

VONNEGUT

A plan to get your husband's job back, to cure your schizophrenic daughter...to reconnect to your long lost son.

GWEN

Well someone has to do it. What's your suggestion. I just give up?

VONNEGUT

No. I don't believe in giving up, you know that. But I don't think you should take it on all by yourself because-

GWEN

How about you just give me some practical advice here?

(off his look)

You know, some kind of hint on how to make any of it a little better. I know that's not your preferred way of operating but just this once... can you offer up something I can actually...use?

Vonnegut thinks awhile then shrugs.

GWEN

Well no harm asking...

(stands)

Are you going to be writing about me? My story?

VONNEGUT

I doubt it. I'm working on a collection of short stories. And of course, I'm dead so I'm not sure how that will affect my output.

GWEN

You had to throw that in, eh. That part about you being dead. Like I didn't know that. Like I'm deluded or something and I don't really understand the nature of this relationship here. You know what, sometimes I wonder why I even bother.

She leaves.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 3

Ned is standing near a bathroom door. Gwen approaches.

GWEN

How long has she been in there now?

NED

An hour?

GWEN

Doing what?

NED

Well she started the shower... then she turned it off. Then she turned it on again. On, off... on, off... five, six times. And then silence.

GWEN

Complete silence?

NED

Yeah.

GWEN

And what about you? Were you silent too? You didn't feel you should be trying to make contact?

NED

She doesn't like that.

GWEN

I know but--

NED

I'll do it if I have to, but I think we should wait a little longer.

GWEN

An hour, Ned. That's a long time. She's got her medication in there, I don't know what else. We can't just--

NED

I don't think she's going to all of a sudden start hurting herself.

GWEN

Why not? Look at all the other things she's done in the last two years "all of a sudden."

NED

I still think we should wait.

GWEN

Yeah well...that's you, isn't it.

KAREN

(from inside bathroom)

You should listen to him. I don't like people talking to me when I'm in the bathroom.

GWEN

I know that. But you've been in there a long time, Honey.

KAREN

I'll be out soon enough. An hour or two at the most. Try to be patient okay.

GWEN

Okay sure...but what are you doing in there?

KAREN

Well right now I'm talking to you.

GWEN

Your dad heard the shower start running a few times. Is there a problem?

KAREN

What kind of problem?

GWEN

With the shower...

KAREN

Well if he heard it running what could the problem be?

GWEN

Well it stopped ...so we were just wondering--

KAREN

Is there a point to this conversation? Because I've told you a hundred times I don't like talking to you unless there's a specific issue to be discussed.

GWEN

Well the ...issue is that you're due to make an appearance in court this afternoon and--

NED

(taking her away a bit)

No. Don't.

GWEN

Don't what?

NED

Don't... harass her.

GWEN

I'm sorry... harass her?

NED

Okay I didn't mean...

(whisper)

Look just leave her alone. She sounds fine. And you heard her, she'll be out in an hour or two.

GWEN

So we should just wait...

KAREN

Sounds like a good idea to me.

GWEN

Suppose she wants an hour or two more after that. Then maybe a few days or a couple of weeks....

NED

Come on, Gwen...

GWEN

No I'm just wondering... at what point would you be willing to intervene?

NED

Look don't make this harder than it already is, okay.

GWEN

Sure... as long as you stop trying to make it *easier* than it is. We have to get her into that courtroom this afternoon. If we don't take her there, they'll come and get her.

NED

No way...

GWEN

They told me.

NED

You mean arrest her?

GWEN

Yes.

NED

No. She won't be able to-- I can't handle that.

GWEN

I'm sorry? You can't handle it?

NED

No I don't think so.

GWEN

Jesus...

NED

What?

GWEN

Jesus!

NED

I have to be able to tell you when I can't handle things, Gwen.

GWEN

Really?

NED

Yeah... especially the things I *really* can't handle like seeing my daughter dragged off to--

GWEN

Why not Vonnegut?

NED

What? Who?

GWEN

Vonnegut. Why not tell him what you really can't handle, and just spare me, okay. He seems to think you're doing fine.

NED

I'm sorry. I don't know who you're--

GWEN

The point is, you don't want anyone to think you're as messed up as you actually are.

NED

And how messed up is that, Gwen?

GWEN

I just think you better find your own Vonnegut and you'd better do it pretty damn soon.

NED

Is Vonnegut a doctor, Gwen. Are you seeing a... therapist?

GWEN

I don't need a therapist.

NED

Neither do I.

KAREN

I think you should both reconsider that position.

GWEN

(to Ned)

Okay...sure keep thinking you don't need an outlet for all that anger you've got bottled up...at least until you get enraged and beat the crap out of the next poor bastard who annoys you. Then maybe we can address the issue again. In the meantime I need you to help me get our daughter out of the bathroom... So...

Gwen pushes Ned towards the door.

NED

Karen? I think you should do what your mother--

KAREN

Okay, Dad. Good try. But you both have to leave now.

GWEN

We can't do that.

KAREN

Sure you can. Just turn around and walk away.

GWEN

We have to get ready to go to court ... Did you hear me? We have to--

KAREN

I told you, we'll talk in a couple of hours. Three max.

GWEN

If we don't go there voluntarily, they'll come here and--

NED

Gwen...

GWEN

They'll come here and make you--

KAREN

Okay I need you to go. Just go away. Go!

GWEN

Karen--

KAREN

You fucking stupid woman! I need you to go away! Go go go go go!

Gwen throws up her arms and walks away.

NED

(to Karen)

Sorry.

Ned follows.

KAREN

(listens)

Okay thanks... I appreciate that. Honest.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 4

Karen is in the prisoner's dock.

KAREN

Well first of all I don't think I really have this disease you keep referring to. I have something else. I don't have a name for it yet, but it's different from the one you're talking about. So I think we should stop using the one which refers to something I don't have until we know a little more about what I actually *do*. That's the first thing. The second thing is I keep meeting up with people who have things wrong with them way worse than what I've got, but they never wind up in here with me. I'd like that to change. I'd like you to arrest them, put them in a cell, take them out of a cell to meet a doctor, put them back in a cell, take them out to meet another doctor and a lawyer and then put them back in a cell again until the judge has time to see them...

(a little curtsy)

Thank you, your Honour.... then put them back in a cell until it's time to go to the hospital and get needles. I want these people to be treated exactly the same way I'm treated or I can't hold on to any respect for your justice system. I have a list of these people. Up here.

(points to her head)

This is it. The social worker I was supposed to have assaulted for no reason, but who asked me the same question at least eight times even though I told her that doing so was a form of aggressive threatening behaviour. The other social worker who got involved supposedly to help the first social worker, but who took the opportunity to hold me against a wall without my permission and ask me more questions as well as just *saying* things in an aggressive threatening manner... The receptionist who called the police and wrongly described my behaviour to them on the phone, the police themselves --more questions I didn't like... The people in the waiting room who looked at me with aggressive pity... the people on the sidewalk who did the same, obviously I don't have their names, I'm just making a point by adding them.

(thinks)

My mom and dad of course, for letting this happen to me...

KAREN (CONT'D)

Several of my father's business associates who always talked too loud when they came over and leered at my breasts, two teachers who leered at my breasts, the driving instructor who leered at my breasts, the guy who sold me my computer who leered at my breasts, the guy who bought my computer who leered at my breasts, and-- This is a longer list than I first thought. I need to rest awhile...

(hangs her head)

BLACK OUT

SCENE 5

Ned, Gwen and Vonnegut in the three comfortable chairs.

GWEN
(points to Ned)

What's he doing here?

VONNEGUT
You brought him.

NED
She thinks I need help coping.

VONNEGUT
I thought you were coping fine.

GWEN
Right, yeah. I remember now. I wanted to straighten you out about that. Ask him why he couldn't even stay in the courtroom with Karen yesterday. Stay with his daughter while she--

NED
I was afraid...

GWEN
Who wasn't. It was not a nice experience. She looked very alone in that place...

VONNEGUT
How'd she do?

NED
She had a few issues with how she was being treated...

GWEN
She kinda went over the top.

NED

(to Vonnegut)

Listen before we go any further I'd just like to say how much I admire your work.

KAREN

He doesn't care. He's dead.

VONNEGUT

Even so, it was a nice thing to say. Where's Karen now?

NED

They put her in the hospital for another assessment.

GWEN

I should have given her a tranquilizer.

VONNEGUT

You do that sometimes?

GWEN

Yeah I put it in her coffee or something.

VONNEGUT

Do you think that's wise?

GWEN

Is that a judgment?

VONNEGUT

No. A question.

NED

He just means it might not be good for her.

GWEN

I don't do it for her. I do it for me.

VONNEGUT

Nevertheless--

GWEN

Is this going to be a lecture? Because as a lecturer you were a better writer.

VONNEGUT

I always thought they were more or less the same thing...just talking to people about the horrible mess we're leaving for future generations.

GWEN

Yeah yeah sure but I really need to talk about the horrible mess *I'm* in right now.

NED

I think that's a bit of an overstatement.

GWEN

I'm starting to regret bringing you.

(to Vonnegut)

I feel like it's a horrible mess. And I feel like I'm entitled to express that. My life...my life with Karen can get pretty--

NED

You mean when I'm at work?

GWEN

You don't go to work anymore, remember.

NED

I mean when I'm not here...

GWEN

Well since you lost your job you're always here...

(looks at him suspiciously)

Unless you're not...

(to Vonnegut)

I think he just... goes away a lot of the time. Just drifts off on us. I mean he's here, he can answer questions by rote, "did you buy bread, where's the paper?" ...but really...

VONNEGUT

(to Ned)

That true?

NED

What?

GWEN

What I just said... You drift off.

NED

Well... I wouldn't call it drifting off. I've got a lot to think about.

VONNEGUT

You mean things you'd *prefer* to think about?

NED

I'm sorry?

VONNEGUT

Besides your daughter and her--

NED

I need to think about how I'm going to restart my career.

VONNEGUT

Really. Is that even possible?

GWEN

That's not a question he likes very much.

NED

I still have contacts.

VONNEGUT

But aren't most of them out of work too.

GWEN

Doesn't like to hear that either.

NED

Because it's not true. Not entirely. There are still a few--

GWEN

It's just all too weird anyway. We're almost broke, and he thinks he can restart a career as a financial adviser.

GWEN (CONTD)
(to Ned)

What are you going to tell your clients? “Just don’t do it the way I did it, and you’ll be fine”?

VONNEGUT

What do you want him to do?

GWEN

Carpentry. He can start small, replace our kitchen cabinets.

NED

She wants me to stay home with Karen.

GWEN
(to Vonnegut)

It’s time...

NED

She’s pretty burned out. I understand that, but--

GWEN

We don’t need to go into all the whys and everything else. It’s just time. I’m ready to go back to work.

NED

Which is also something I understand--

GWEN

He’s very understanding. He just doesn’t want it to happen.

NED

I’m pretty sure we can’t live on a teacher’s salary.

GWEN

Well right now we’re living on just about nothing.

NED

Which of course is just temporary.

GWEN

Just like it’s been for a year and a half

VONNEGUT

Okay this is something--

GWEN

We need to talk about? Sure... But I've pretty much made up my mind this is how it has to be.

VONNEGUT

Because of money?

GWEN

Money. Sure.

VONNEGUT

Not just Karen? Even if Ned got something say tomorrow, you'd still-

NED

She'd still want out.

(to Gwen)

Wouldn't you?

GWEN

And you will too, pal. There will come a time when even your bottomless well of love and concern for her will get sucked dry.

Ned and Gwen just look at each other.

VONNEGUT

Is that what's happened to you, Gwen?

GWEN

(shrugs)

I don't know. Yes.

NED

What?

GWEN

Yes. That's what's happened to me.

(to Vonnegut)

I'm afraid

VONNEGUT

Of?

GWEN

All the things I don't know about her, which is really ...everything. I mean she was twenty-three and normal and then she was twenty-four and ...not. She was someone else. Who? And who was she when she was gone all that time, what did she do? Sometimes the things she says to me...the way she looks at me--

VONNEGUT

Just you?

NED

No, me too.

GWEN

No no, not like that. The way she looks at me is...

(to Vonnegut)

Anyway I'm afraid of other things too. Losing the house, living on the street, starving to death...so going back to work is the best thing, really...

(to Ned)

And as soon as possible...

NED

Well...I guess that's it then.

(extending a hand to Vonnegut)

It's been an unbelievable thrill to meet you. Slaughterhouse Five was one of the most memorable things I've ever read. Read twice, in fact. And Cat's Cradle, Breakfast of Champions...

(Gwen grabs Ned's hand)

GWEN

(to Vonnegut)

He won't be coming with me anymore.

NED

Why not?

(Gwen is pushing him oou)

Why not?

BLACK OUT

SCENE 6

Gwen on the living room couch brushing Karen's hair. Karen is on the floor in front of her.

GWEN

This is nice...just sitting here like this together...calmly.

KAREN

(has been thinking)

Can I ask you a question... why do you think I became a prostitute?

GWEN

What?

KAREN

No I can't remember exactly what it was that made me decide to--

GWEN

You're not a prostitute.

KAREN

Not now. But I was.

GWEN

When? When were you a prostitute?

KAREN

Back when men were fucking me for money...

GWEN

And when was that, Karen?

KAREN

Back when I was a *prostitute*, Mom. You know, when I was on the street, outside your jurisdiction.

GWEN

There was never any discussion of...none of your social workers ever said anything about you being--

KAREN

Well I didn't use my real name.

GWEN

What name did you use?

KAREN

Yours.

GWEN

Karen--

KAREN

I used your name. I thought it sounded more like a prostitute's name. Gwen ... I was a crack-whore who sucked cocks in parked cars...and my name was... Gwen.

GWEN

Is this about hurting me? Because that's how it feels.

KAREN

Why do you want to make it about you? Why is everything about you?

GWEN

Actually most things are about you, Honey.

KAREN

(turns and slides away a bit)

Well if that was true, and remembering that I began this conversation with a question, why didn't you just fucking answer it, and not get into all that denial bullshit and how it "feels" like I'm hurting you.

GWEN

Can I smoke?

KAREN

If you stand at the door.

GWEN

Thanks...

Gwen takes out cigarette and heads off stage to the door.

KAREN

You know, I'm sick of telling you how much damage you're doing to yourself with those things.

GWEN

Does that mean you're going to stop telling me?

KAREN

Yes. Maybe it does...

GWEN

Okay... I've appreciated the concern though.

KAREN

I don't really understand anything you say, you know that? Not on any deep level. It's all just words...and attitude. Try to remember I'm doing this without medication. I've taken a very difficult road here, and it takes a toll.

GWEN

It certainly does.

KAREN

I meant on *me*!

GWEN

Well to be honest, Honey--

KAREN

Yes yes yes, I know it'd be easier for you if I used drugs. Much easier.

GWEN

(back on)

And is that why you won't?

KAREN

Okay that's an example of something I can't really understand the entire meaning of. It sounds aggressive and a little mean. But maybe that's just the way it sounds.

GWEN

I'm sorry. I just meant...well why does it have to be so difficult... for you. If the pills made it even a little easier to...take a rest from everything. The voices...

KAREN

What voices?

GWEN

...and the fears...

KAREN

What fears?

GWEN

(moving closer)

You have to be back in court tomorrow.

KAREN

Why was I a prostitute?

GWEN

I want you to take something that will help it go a little easier...

KAREN

Were you ever a prostitute? Is it something in my blood?

GWEN

I was never a prostitute. I was a teacher, then a wife, then a mother. Those are the only things I've ever been. So if you really were a prostitute, I'm pretty sure it had nothing to do with me.

KAREN

I'm not saying it's anything you did intentionally. I'm just not ready to totally absolve you of responsibility.

GWEN

For anything?

KAREN
(thinking)

Money or love. It was either about money or love that made me do it.

GWEN

Well before you ran away from home you had plenty of both.

KAREN

Hmm. And you had parties, didn't you. Lots of parties, with lots of friends...

GWEN

Yes we did...

KAREN

Where are they now? The friends? I scared them all away?

GWEN

Not the ones that mattered.

KAREN

And where are they, the ones that mattered?

GWEN

Busy. They're all very busy.

Karen just looks at her.

KAREN

Just warning you, I'm going to have to cause a fuss if that judge wants to send me to jail for something I didn't do.

GWEN
(sitting closer to her)

Several people in that shelter saw you attack that woman and those social workers.

KAREN

That woman was poisoning my food. Things were being put in my food and I had convincing evidence she was behind it.

GWEN

You put her in the hospital.

KAREN

I don't think so. Which hospital? Is she still there?

GWEN

Yes she is. She's been there for several months now...

KAREN

Because of something I did? No no...
(standing)

Let's go...

GWEN

Where?

KAREN

To the hospital. I want to look at her charts. I bet it has nothing to do with me. She was an alcoholic, you know. It's probably the bitch's liver. Let's go.

GWEN

We can't...

KAREN

Why not. I just want confirmation. Because if I get unjustly put in jail when all I was doing was confronting someone who was trying to kill me, I'm going to have to cause a huge motherfucking fuss.

GWEN

Well first of all they can't put you in jail.

KAREN

No? Well what was that place with all the bars on it then?

GWEN

That's before you were assessed. They know now that you're too sick for jail. But if you get all worked up ... then they're going to want to medicate you.

KAREN

They can't--

GWEN

Yes they can. The law says if you present a danger to yourself or anyone else they can--

KAREN

Okay I'm outta here.

She starts out.

GWEN
(grabbing her)

No you can't--

KAREN

Sorry. Gotta go.

GWEN

Karen if you don't show up--

KAREN

Not showing up is the best choice. If I don't show up nothing happens. I'll just get on with my life.

GWEN

How?

KAREN

Well I'm a prostitute so money won't be an issue. Now let go.

GWEN

No...

KAREN

Let go!

I can't.

GWEN

Sure you can!

KAREN
(angry)

She gives Gwen a mighty push, sending her flying.

See? I'm strong. I'll be fine!

KAREN

Karen hurries out.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 7

Gwen and Ned on the couch. Gwen cradled in Ned's arms. A drink in her hand.

NED

She'd never intentionally hurt you. You know that.

GWEN

No. I don't.

(drinks)

And neither do you.

NED

(flicks the glass)

Is that your first?

GWEN

She told me she was a prostitute.

NED

That's what made you want to drink? She's not a prostitute.

GWEN

Not now. Before.

(looks at him)

Was she?

(drinks)

Did you know?

(sits up)

Did you? You did, didn't you? ...for Chrissake, Ned... did you or didn't you?

NED

It came up a few times...

GWEN

What the hell does that mean? It "came up."

NED

At that first hearing you weren't at

GWEN

You mean the one you didn't tell me about.

NED

Yeah that one. It came up that she'd been picked up a few times--

GWEN

For soliciting...

NED

Yeah...

GWEN

And why would you think I wouldn't want to know that?

NED

Why would I think you *would*? I mean you never asked... Me, her social workers, anyone. So I figured you didn't want to know.

GWEN

Maybe I just didn't want to ask ... She also told me she was a crack addict.

NED

For someone in her condition that's called self-medicating.

GWEN

Really. You hear that at the hearing too?

NED

No that's common knowledge.

GWEN

Common knowledge...

NED

For anyone who wants to know...

GWEN

Know what?

NED

Know what their runaway mentally ill daughter might be up to.

GWEN

Okay that's not fair!

NED

Yes it is. You didn't want to know! So until just now when it was thrown in your face you *didn't* fucking know!

GWEN

You don't think so? You really think I didn't have any idea about all the bad rotten things that might be happening to her out there.

NED

So why not talk about it?

GWEN

I did.

NED

Not with me.

GWEN

No..with...someone else.

NED

Who?

GWEN

What's it matter?

NED

Who?!

GWEN

...Vonnegut.

NED

Who.

GWEN

You know... Kurt... Vonnegut.

NED

The writer? The *dead* writer?

GWEN

Yeah well, you know how much I liked him, how much of him I used to read...

NED

Yeah me too, but--

GWEN

Yeah it was one of our shared interests...one of the things we--

NED

You *talk* to him?!

GWEN

Yeah... so do you.

NED

What?

GWEN

Well just once ... I took you last time, but it didn't work out. You were kind of sycophantic.

NED

Oh...

(remembering)

So that's what you meant... when you said I should get my own... You were telling me to get my own imaginary Vonnegut.

GWEN

Yeah or... you know... someone.

She takes a drink. He just looks at her. He stands and starts out, stopping to look at her again before he leaves

BLACK OUT

SCENE 8

Vonnegut on a park bench. Ned comes on wearing a pastry chef's uniform. Vonnegut is in a suit.

NED

(looking around)

If this isn't nice, I don't know what is.

(smiles at Vonnegut)

Who said that?

VONNEGUT

I did?

NED

(nodding)

A Man Without a Country... I think there's more to it though.

VONNEGUT

Probably. I wasn't exactly pithy.

NED

Who needs pith when you have poetry. Who said that?

VONNEGUT

You did. Just now.

NED

It's being with you, I think. Makes me want to say things that are quotable.

VONNEGUT

Then I think you should try a little harder.

NED

Yeah. Try a little harder. That's probably something I need to keep in mind... just about things in general.

VONNEGUT

You don't think you try hard enough about things in general

NED

No I'm just saying you can always try a little harder.

VONNEGUT

Or maybe you can't.

NED

Yeah that's true too. Sometimes you just have to say the hell with it, I've done my best. Wow. This is great. This exchange we're having of...

VONNEGUT

Contradictory thoughts?

NED

Yeah whatever. It's gonna really help me work things out. I mean I know it's not what Gwen wanted...

VONNEGUT

She probably wanted you to find someone of your own.

NED

Yeah and I thought about that. I went through a few of the more obvious choices.

VONNEGUT

God?

NED

Yeah but that's never been a very satisfying relationship. I usually just started begging

VONNEGUT

Most people call it praying.

NED

It felt like begging ... Anyway then I thought about my mother.

VONNEGUT

You were right to leave her out of it. She's done enough for you.

NED

I know... So I moved on to a few other writers I'd enjoyed... that had made me laugh, cry.

VONNEGUT

Mostly laugh though, right?

NED

Something wrong with that?

VONNEGUT

Not unless you need a good cry as well.

NED

Which I think I might.

VONNEGUT

And that's what brought you back to me.

NED

Exactly. Laughter and tears... the "emotional cocktail of life..."
(looks at Vonnegut expectantly)

Better?

VONNEGUT

A little.

NED

And anyway, who is Gwen to claim ownership of you. I'm the one who found you first. She's always done that, by the way... claimed things that actually belonged to me.

VONNEGUT

What things?

NED

Not... things really. Feelings, thoughts, points of view even. I always figured it was her way of getting close to me. Now I think she just wants to absorb whatever's valuable about me... so that I can just disappear without being missed.

VONNEGUT

Wow.

NED

Yeah...

(a thought)

You mean “wow” that she’s doing something like that, or wow that I think she is?

VONNEGUT

“When you find yourself feeling even a little happy, don’t be afraid to look around and say, if this isn’t nice I don’t know what the hell is.” That’s the whole quote, I think.

NED

Yeah... I guess I should be getting back.

VONNEGUT

You should have eaten something.

NED

I was just thinking that.

VONNEGUT

I know...

(smiles)

That uniform has a long and glorious tradition, by the way... I mean just in case you’re feeling silly about wearing it.

NED

Just a little...

VONNEGUT

Part function, the reversible double-breast to hide stains, part image... the white denoting kitchen cleanliness...

NED

And the checkered pants?

VONNEGUT

Just for fun? Are you having fun, by the way?

NED

Good question. Thanks. Maybe. I mean Pastry Chef wasn't my first choice, but the general culinary arts course seemed too ...intense. And I've come to like making cakes quite a lot.

VONNEGUT

Enough to make a career of it?

NED

Another good question. Boy, you're really tuned in ... A career? Well I have to do something, don't I. I mean losing the house was bad enough but now even coming up with rent on that pissy little apartment is getting tough ... And Gwen hasn't been able to find anything. Apparently there's a glut of Latin teachers out there. Go figure.

(stands)

I really have to get going. We're doing creme caramel this afternoon, and I hear it's a bitch.

VONNEGUT

We haven't talked about Karen.

NED

Karen's lost. The police have given up on finding her. She's lost for good this time, I think.

VONNEGUT

That's what you're afraid of, not what you believe.

NED

Fears are much more powerful than beliefs.

VONNEGUT

(nods)

That one's worth remembering.

NED

You mean you think it's true.

VONNEGUT

I don't know what's true... just what's worth remembering.

NED

I like that too.

Ned starts off. Stops. Looks back to Vonnegut.

NED

My daughter's lost. That's what I'm afraid of *and* what I believe. I fear and believe my wife is somewhere between where she was and where she'll wind up. I only have fears and beliefs in those fears. I *know* nothing... except that I know nothing. Nothing that can help either of them...

(starting off)

Nothing to make it look like I'm even trying.

He is gone.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 9

Karen in a park, looking pretty rough. And she is high on crack, talking to people we can't see.

KAREN

(to herself, quietly)

What's she...what's she... looking at...what's the fuck...

(more aggressive)

What the fuck you looking at? Filthy little cunt! Yeah you, bitch!! That's right!

(to someone else)

Greasy skank better stop looking at me like that or I'll go over there and make her bleed. Yeah, hammer her 'til she bleeds.

(to Skank)

That's right, bitch. Get your bony legs moving on outta my sight or you are gonna start to fucking bleed ...You hear me, you worthless little cunt!?

(smiles, to some one else)

She heard me...she's moving. She heard me really clear ...

(to Skank)

Hey! Don't fucking stop! Who told you that you could stop. Just keep moving!

(to Others)

She heard me.

(moving around)

This is my place! My place!! ... This is where I make my stand, and wait... wait till it all gets to be what it's meant to be. Any of you want me for any purpose, this is where I am gonna be. You wanna sell me shit, I'm here. You wanna talk some shit, I'm here. You wanna fuck me I'm here ... I'm here to be used, loved, and even fucking ignored if that's the way it's meant to be. I just gotta know... That's all. I just gotta know...

(she sits on a bench, looks around)

Okay, Shhh... I think something's gonna happen now... I think I can hear it about to happen.

(gets a little smaller)

It's dark and I'm afraid ... I just remembered to be afraid... I just remembered how bad it is out here. I don't want to be here alone. I just remembered I really don't want to be here.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 10

Ned in a light, alone

NED

I didn't make her sick. I never told her that her sickness was too much to deal with. I never thought it would be better without her and her sickness around us. Okay I did think that. But I never let her know I was thinking it. Except I think she did. Actually, I'm absolutely sure she did.

Pull out to reveal Ned watching Gwen stand over Karen's covered corpse on a gurney.

NED

I want to say something to her.

(moving in closer)

Is that okay? ...If I just talk to her--

GWEN

She's not here.

NED

Okay but I have to-

GWEN

If you want to say something to her, say it silently. I don't want to hear you talking to that beaten up bloodied corpse like you think it's our daughter. She's gone.

NED

But I need to let something out of me or I might--

GWEN

I can't hear it! I can't hear you say anything, all right. No one can say anything about this to me ever!

(leaving)

Do you understand!? Ever!

Ned watches her then slowly takes the sheet away down from Karen's face.

NED

(inhales sharply)

... oh god... who did this to you.

(tries to control himself)

...I'm... I need to talk to you. Just to say... I'm sorry. I'm so... sorry this happened to you... all of it. I would have done anything to stop what you've had to go through. I would have died to stop it from happening to you... even the smallest least harmful part and I know... I know there were many many horrible terrifying parts for you... I'm ashamed I couldn't do anything to help you...and I'm worried you stopped knowing how much I cared for you and ...was proud of you ...for everything you did before this came on you but mostly after...how you fought and tried to...make some sense of it...when there was no sense to be made...it was just some awful goddamn thing that happened the way all the other goddamn awful things happen...And ...I'm sorry but I *am* glad it's over. For you, not me. If it was always going to be like that for you... then...at least that's... over.

He just ...lets go.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 11

Gwen and Vonnegut are at the wake. They are both dressed in black. There are two photos of a younger healthier Karen around. Gwen is holding a drink. Vonnegut is holding a drink and moving around looking at the photos of Karen.

GWEN

I never understood.

VONNEGUT

Understood what?

GWEN

She didn't like the way her meds made her feel...like "someone she didn't know." But without them she was someone no one knew... including her. I mean I never knew what was going on in her head. Never...

VONNEGUT

Do you want me to tell you?

GWEN

Obviously.

VONNEGUT

This is, of course, just ... speculation. But since that's all fiction really is--

GWEN

It makes you an expert.

VONNEGUT

I tried to kill myself once. So I also have that as a reference point. My state of mind at that time... but what was going on in Karen's ravaged brain? A lot obviously. Fractured pictures and sounds and fragments and sometimes wholly formed ideas and arguments that passed like sandstorms through her head and then sometimes returned and played out in reverse. Things that were understood from her past were involuntarily replayed in revision while almost simultaneously the world around her screamed for her very critical attention. And she felt things, did she ever.

VONNEGUT (CONT'D)

Everything was important, potentially dangerous for sure, but also intensely ironic and inevitable... everything and everyone... you and Ned, for example.

GWEN

When she knew who we were.

VONNEGUT

You were whoever she thought you were at the time...

GWEN

I just wanted to be her mother.

VONNEGUT

Whatever that means... even to people who aren't schizophrenics.

GWEN

"Hi, Honey... how you feeling today?" "Anything interesting happen at school?" "Don't worry about what you're going to do with your life, just try to enjoy each day, be with your friends, try to make the best out of whatever comes your way."

(shrugs)

That's what it means. Being her mother...

Ned has wandered over. He is a little drunk.

NED

Who are you talking to?

Vonnegut wanders away.

GWEN

Guess...

NED

He's here?

GWEN

Well he was until you staggered over. I think you annoy him.

NED

Bullshit. He thinks I'm great.

GWEN

You been talking to him too?

NED

Yeah. And he says I'm the real deal.

GWEN

That doesn't sound like the Vonnegut I know.

NED

That's because it's the Vonnegut *I* know.

GWEN

More like some guy you'd meet in a bar. "You sound like the real deal to me, pal. Kind of guy a man wants to take a piss with in an alley. A good long piss."

NED

(looks at her)

Jesus...

GWEN

What the hell does that mean anyway, "the real deal"?

NED

A simple honest man with a pretty good brain who always tried his best even under the worst of circumstances...

GWEN

Sounds like something you want on your headstone.

NED

You think you can remember it?

GWEN

Probably not. Doesn't matter though, you're not going to have a headstone. You're gonna get burned up just like our daughter.

NED

Hey!

GWEN

What?

NED

Don't *ever* say that again, okay! You talk about burning her up ever again and I'll punch you in your goddamn throat!

(getting closer)

Okay?

GWEN

(smiles)

Yeah, Tough Guy. You made your point.

NED

Good...

GWEN

You're okay with the word cremate though, right? You just don't like the word burn. The image of her bursting into flames is just too--

NED

What the fuck is your problem?

GWEN

(looks around)

Oh...look at all the people who showed up. So many of your former colleagues... Well they have a lot of time on their hands..

Ned moves away.

GWEN

What are you doing?

NED

I can't listen to you talk about her that way.

GWEN

(approaching him)

I'm not talking about Karen. Just the way her body was... disposed of.

NED

And that makes you feel better for some reason?

GWEN

No it makes me feel much worse. Not as bad as I'd like to feel, but at least it's a start.

(looking again)

How about that. Some your little friends from the kitchen came along as well.

NED

"Little friends from the kitchen" ... They're not elves. They're sous chefs.

GWEN

They cut up onions.

NED

Well in a few months they'll be cooking those onions in very inventive ways, and then they won't be giving you the time of day.

GWEN

Go away.

NED

Why?

GWEN

Because I want my writer friend back. He'll let me say whatever the hell I need to say on the day of my daughter's funeral. He'll let me use the words burn and body and flesh and any other goddamn thing I want or *need* to say to make me feel whatever it is I need to feel.

NED

You know, I might be your writer friend one day soon.

(leaving)

I think I've got a book in me.

GWEN

(to herself)

It's about his pain and disappointment.

Her Vonnegut returns, with a larger drink.

GWEN

He's going to write a book about her... and it'll just be all be about his pain and disappointment.

VONNEGUT

I'll give you a hand if you want to beat him to it.

GWEN

Mine wouldn't exploit my daughter's misfortune.

VONNEGUT

Yes you have enough of your own misfortune to exploit, don't you.

GWEN

I also have my own disappointment.

VONNEGUT

I've been thinking a lot about disappointment lately.

GWEN

So have I...

VONNEGUT

Which is more or less what I just said ... Anyway here are my thoughts on the subject. Screw it. We still have to live. As...long as, you know... we're alive.

GWEN

Jesus... you've been drinking...

VONNEGUT

Haven't we all...

(looks around)

Any of these people friends of yours?

GWEN

I don't have any friends. They didn't know how to deal with Karen...or me.

GWEN (CONTD)

They didn't know how to deal with my feelings about Karen, they didn't know how to deal with my feelings, they didn't know how to deal with Ned losing his job--

VONNEGUT

They didn't know how to deal with very much, did they.

GWEN

I can't really blame them.

VONNEGUT

That's a lie. I bet you're looking around right now wanting to set them all on fire.

GWEN

You said it.

VONNEGUT

You thought it.

GWEN

I only thought it so you could say it... you know, so I could hear what it sounds like.

VONNEGUT

And?

GWEN

It's better coming from you.

They both drink.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 12

Ned on the park bench. Vonnegut comes on out of breath, putting on a sweater.

NED

You're late.

VONNEGUT

I wasn't sure if you wanted me to come.

NED

I thought I might need to be alone...then-

VONNEGUT

You changed your mind. I know. Next time I'll need a little more notice.

He sits next to Ned.

VONNEGUT

What's wrong?

Ned takes a gun out of his pocket.

NED

I bought this today. It's untraceable.

VONNEGUT

And the problem?

NED

Well the problem is what I want to do with it.

VONNEGUT

Maybe just having it is the problem. If you got rid of it, then whatever you wanted to do with it would be irrelevant.

NED

I don't think Gwen will ever be at peace until someone is made responsible for what happened to our daughter.

VONNEGUT

It's not the kind of crime police usually solve. A homeless runaway prostitute--

NED

I don't like her called that.

VONNEGUT

I know. But from their point of view that's what she was.

NED

Their point of view means nothing to anyone except them. They know very little about her life or who she was.

VONNEGUT

And that's why they'll never work that hard to find out who killed her.

NED

There are certain people, certain types she associated with--

VONNEGUT

And you think one of them might have killed her?

NED

Yeah well maybe they could be held responsible somehow. Some of them, any of them, all of them...They're just people leading sad useless lives no one really cares about--

VONNEGUT

Unless they have family too.

NED

So maybe their families are also responsible... for what they let their children become.

VONNEGUT

Are you responsible for what Karen became?

NED

Must be...in some way. I'm definitely responsible for not doing enough to help her. Maybe I should just use this on myself. You think that would be enough for Gwen?

VONNEGUT

Why don't you ask her?

NED

(shrugs)

She wouldn't be able to admit it.

VONNEGUT

Yeah well...if you decide to kill yourself, the most important thing is not to botch it. Take my word for it. No matter what else you accomplish in life, you'll always think of yourself as a failure.

NED

I don't see how I could botch it. What's so hard about putting a gun in your mouth and pulling the trigger?

VONNEGUT

Well you'll have to find that out for yourself. But exploring the issue from a moral standpoint, which is how I made my reputation, it would be better to do yourself in than go on a killing rampage of the under-class, which is what you first had in mind.

NED

Although one of them probably did kill her.

VONNEGUT

One of them.

NED

Anyone of them...

(stands)

This is something I need to think more about.

VONNEGUT

I know you're still upset about failing that chef's course.

NED

It was all about the creme caramel. Everything else I could do just fine. My lemon tarts, also very difficult by the way, were actually a hit.

VONNEGUT

And yet you didn't get your certificate.

NED

No... You think that actually has something to do with --

VONNEGUT

There's a hell of a difference between killing someone, even yourself, over your daughter's tragic death and doing it because you couldn't get your creme caramel not to scald.

NED

Yeah. I hear you.

(he looks at the gun)

I better make sure.

BLACK OUT

INTERMISSION

SCENE 13

Gwen and Karen on a high rise balcony in two rattan chairs. Gwen is in a bathrobe, hair not brushed. Karen is nicely, almost demurely, dressed. Karen is drinking tea. Gwen is drinking scotch.

GWEN

I was never one of those people who needed to “understand” things. Things were just like this or just like that. People behaved... the way they behaved. And that’s the way it was. It was all... just...

KAREN

Just the way it was...

GWEN

Yes. But I need to understand this. I need to understand what happened to you.

KAREN

I got sick...

GWEN

That’s it?

KAREN

Pretty much... I got sick. I became mentally ill, Mom. Everything flowed from that.

GWEN

Yeah but what were you thinking?

KAREN

When?

GWEN

All the time... what were you thinking... about me? Did you have feelings for me?

KAREN

Nothing pleasant.

GWEN

Ever?

KAREN

Well I didn't want to harm you or anything. I just...well, you were either too close or too far away... never just the right distance...And your voice...

GWEN

Too loud?

KAREN

Or that tiny trembling voice of concern. It sounded fake, and I hated it.

GWEN

Well... I guess I was just too sick with worry about you to get that just right. You know not too loud, not too trembling...

KAREN

Yeah... and like I said, I was sick. So try not to take it personally. You like this dress?

GWEN

I bought it for you...

KAREN

I never wore it.

GWEN

I know. I wish you had.

KAREN

I know

(points)

That won't help. Drinking won't help.

GWEN

I think we're going to have to disagree about that, Honey.

(smiles)

Remember how we hardly used to disagree about anything.

GWEN (CONTD)

Books, clothes, politics. We liked all the same things. It was like we were the same person.

KAREN

And now we actually are.

(smiles)

That must make you happy on some level ... I'm not saying you don't wish I was still alive.

GWEN

(nods)

But this is better than nothing.

KAREN

How's Dad?

GWEN

He flunked out of cooking school.

KAREN

No fucking way. Unbelievable. What's his fucking problem?

GWEN

Who knows... I'm a little worried that we're going to just ...dissolve pretty soon.

KAREN

Dissolve the marriage?

GWEN

Yeah...and then just dissolve.

KAREN

Marriages often fall apart after the loss of a child. You know that ...so you're probably just anticipating the worst.

GWEN

I've already experienced the worst. The marriage ending would just be...unfortunate. I mean especially for your father. He loves me a lot.

KAREN

And you love him...

GWEN

Yes of course I do. What I meant was-- what did I mean?

KAREN

You think he's weak.

GWEN

No. Not weak. Weaker. Weaker than me.

KAREN

He might not be. He might be okay no matter what.

GWEN

That's an interesting thought. Thank you. We'll do this again okay. I think we'll have to keep doing this for awhile .

KAREN

No problem... You might want to lay off the booze a little in the meantime.

GWEN

Thank you for your...

KAREN

Concern... It's just concern mum.

GWEN

Yeah...

They drink. Karen winces.

GWEN

Too hot?

KAREN

No... it's fine.

GWEN

You sure?

KAREN

Yeah...

GWEN

You're sure.

KAREN

Yeah!

BLACK OUT

SCENE 14

Ned on a street corner walking back and forth.
Wearing a sandwich board that reads: BIG
BLOWOUT.

NED

Everything priced to sell! No offer rejected! All inventory must go, everything forty, sixty, eighty per cent off. Some things almost free! Big big blow out...everything must be sold. Buy now. Pay later. Much later. Whenever the fuck you want. Zero interest. Nothing down. ...Just buy! Buy something. Buy a house, a car, a tv, a toaster, a wallet. Stop worrying and buy. It's not a bad thing or a good thing. It's just something that has to happen!

He stops pacing. Looks around, smiles.

NED (CONT'D)

Am I happy to see all of you, or is that a gun I've got in my pocket? That's a question you should all be asking yourselves. Here are a few more. Ask yourselves what I'm capable of. How far I've come to get here. What I've left behind, what I've lost... how desperate I am, how completely indifferent to the consequences of my actions I've become. And how little it would take for me to do something to make myself feel a little bit better including blowing some of your stupid useless fucking heads off!!

He starts to pace again

NED (CONT'D)

Big blowout. Big fucking blowout. Biggest motherblowing blow out of all time. Everything must go. And I mean everything!! It's just gotta fucking go!!

He stops pacing.

NED (CONT'D)

I really want you to buy something just to keep things rolling... just to keep it all moving along...like before when everything seemed fine...even when it wasn't... So come on, buy a little something so everything can seem fine again.

NED (CONT'D)

Don't need anything? Buy something for someone you love. Buy something for someone you want to love *you*. Buy something for someone you barely know, for the less fortunate, for the truly fucked up... Buy something just to help out...

He starts to pace.

NED (CONT'D)

Big BLOW OUT!! Liquidation sale! Everything must go! Everything must be liquidated!!

BLACK OUT

SCENE 15

Gwen, still in her bathrobe and drink in hand, is sitting on a small folding chair. So is Karen. Vonnegut is sitting on a small crate. Karen is gesturing to Vonnegut, confused.

GWEN

I don't like to drink alone.

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

I think she means she doesn't like to drink *while* she's alone.

VONNEGUT

Is that why we're here?

GWEN

I knew you'd understand.

(to Karen)

He's smart. *And* compassionate.

KAREN

The two traits you admire most.

GWEN

When his sister died of cancer, he adopted her three children.

VONNEGUT

I'm sure you would have done the same..

KAREN

(to Gwen)

Would you have?

GWEN

Probably not.

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

She doesn't like children that much.

GWEN

They're pretty time consuming.

VONNEGUT

She doesn't mean you. She means your brother...

GWEN

(to Karen)

He's right. You were never a problem.

KAREN

Until I became the biggest problem you ever had.

GWEN

Well that's not something you did by choice though. Or is it? Just checking...

KAREN

No.... it's not.

GWEN

No of course not. Your brother on the other hand--

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

Okay before she gets started, I should tell you she still loves the asshole.

VONNEGUT

Maybe. But love doesn't help you understand someone. And she--

GWEN

I didn't get him. I just didn't get him. I mean I was trying. I was busting my balls-

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

She really does think she has balls, by the way.

GWEN

...trying to figure out what the selfish little prick was all about . And then he was gone.

KAREN

Yeah. He just fucked off. And I needed him.

GWEN

He should have stayed to help.

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

Helped with me. She needed all the help she could get with me.

GWEN

He just pissed off. Coward couldn't take it.

KAREN

He liked things... to be a certain way. He liked to be in control. He probably couldn't stand being around all that...confusion.

GWEN

Who the hell could? Fuck him.

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

She doesn't mean that.

VONNEGUT

I think you should listen to her more closely.

(to Gwen)

Say it again.

GWEN

We needed him, and he didn't give a shit. So yeah, fuck him and anyone else who treats their parents like that...

(drinks)

...treats anyone like that.

VONNEGUT

When's the last time you got dressed? You should ask yourself what's going on with that? It's probably not that you don't like any of your clothes.

GWEN

You think it's time to stop my slide?

KAREN

I do.

GWEN

Don't worry about me, Doll. Your father's in much worse shape than I am. Actually...we were talking about that last time I saw him...kind of speculating about which one of us was taking it all the hardest.

VONNEGUT

(to Karen)

Like it's a competition or something.

GWEN

Well if it is, I'm pretty sure he's winning. He's really messed up. It's kind of embarrassing actually. I mean the things that come out of his mouth...who can listen to that shit?

VONNEGUT

What shit?

GWEN

You know...

VONNEGUT

I mean what shit in particular...

GWEN

Nothing in particular...just the way it comes out. No order to it, no structure...

KAREN

(to Vonnegut)

She likes structure. She taught Latin.

VONNEGUT

No one cares.

GWEN

Is he talking about the economy? The world in general? His own turmoil?
The plight of the homeless? Who the can tell?

(looks around)

And in the meantime, we're living in smaller and smaller places...

VONNEGUT

On much smaller furniture...

GWEN

(acknowledging chair)

Yeah...

(to Karen)

It's like we're...

KAREN

Disappearing...

GWEN

Yeah.

KAREN

Does that worry you?

GWEN

I'm not sure I care...

(looks at them both, smiles)

I'm so glad you two get along.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 16

Gwen and Ned on the street. Gwen is still in her bathrobe but is now also wearing a toque. Ned is wearing a sign around his neck which reads: HOMELESS. OUT OF WORK. AND FUCKED UP. His chef's hat is on the ground in front of them. They are begging for change. Gwen is trying to hide behind something.

GWEN
(quietly)

Ned...

(no response)

Ned!

NED

What?

GWEN

What's happening to us? We seem to be just letting it all--

NED

I feel engaged.

GWEN

You feel what?

NED

Engaged. Fully engaged in the current circumstances.

GWEN

Ours?

NED

Everyone's. I feel completely engaged and in sync with the whole stupid mess which is the world right now. Both internally and externally.

GWEN
(to herself)

Lunatic...

NED

What?

GWEN

(approaching him)

You're talking like a lunatic. It's starting to get me down.

NED

You mean I'm annoying you.

GWEN

That too. But mostly you're depressing me.

NED

I think you're more annoyed than you are depressed. I think you're just generally annoyed. I think you think we didn't deserve any of this and that it's all just so... unfair.

GWEN

If you're going to start ranting, especially if it's about me and what you think I think, all I ask is that you try to remain coherent.

NED

As if coherence is the most important thing about a rant. You should stop trying to control whatever it is you think...you're...losing control of.

GWEN

Which would be just about everything, right.

NED

(to a passing stranger)

Money! The hat is out for money. Nothing else. Not pity, not disdain. I wasn't trying to scare you. I just wanted money because we have to eat, fuck-face.

GWEN

It's not his fault.

NED

I never said it was.

GWEN

It was implied. I think if we're going to do this--

NED

Do what?

GWEN

What we're doing.

NED

Which is what?

GWEN

Hanging on. If we're going to try to hang on until things improve--

NED

Improve? Please.

GWEN

The point is, we can't get bitter. We can't become the kind of people who are bitter about life's disappointments.

NED

Well no offence, but you've seemed pretty bitter to me, darling.

GWEN

Privately. But that's not the face we should be presenting to the public.

NED

Because?

GWEN

It's not who we are. We're just poor people.

NED

Who were once pretty well off. So I think it's fair to expect some prolonged period of adjustment. I think the public will understand

GWEN

Okay but I want to hold on to some of the things I admired about myself.

NED

You mean before you started going everywhere in your bathrobe?

GWEN

Or you began treating yourself like a blackboard? ... Yeah. I never blamed anyone for my disappointments.

NED

Except me.

GWEN

Well you were actually responsible for some of them, so yeah. But mostly-

NED

I never blamed you for anything.

GWEN

Which is probably because you didn't feel as close to me as I did to you.

Ned looks at her then turns and puts his hand out to a passerby.

NED

Hey! Money! Just give us money. Or don't. But make the decision. Don't just walk by like we're not here. It's depressing.

GWEN

(to passersby, suddenly angry too)

He doesn't mean us. He means you . You're the ones who are depressing. Walking by like that... it's not even human!

NED

That's telling them.

GWEN

(starting off)

Let's try a different shelter tonight.

NED

(picking up hat)

Whatever you say I fight of My Life

GWEN

That last one ...I was sure we'd never make it through the night. You still have that gun?

NED

(pats his pocket)

You bet. Right in here.

GWEN

And you're willing to use it to protect our lives.

NED

Damn right I am. I told you, I'm totally engaged and in sync with the way of the world...

He follows her off

BLACK OUT

SCENE 17

Gwen is on a cot in a shelter. Vonnegut is on the next cot.

GWEN

(looking around)

Increasingly uncomfortable. It really feels like... poverty.

VONNEGUT

Or old age...

GWEN

Except last night Ned and I had sex for the first time in ...months. We made love here on my cot in this sleeping bag...surrounded by all these ...other people. I wish I'd been able to shower first ...but other than that, it was nice. Ned cried... other than that, it was pretty good... Right afterwards, I thought... "This would be a good time to die... Yeah that would be nice. Let's just die now."

VONNEGUT

Well he still has that gun so it's easy to contemplate.

GWEN

Which is good. I mean to have that option. Especially for him, I think. I mean he's still conscious. He still knows who he is... He *feels* who he is and what's happening to us.

VONNEGUT

And you're not...

GWEN

Well... it's just a little bit like a bad dream for me, you know?. So many things that are just ...

(sees something)

Like for example...

(gestures)

...what the hell is that woman trying to pull over there?

(to Woman across the room)

GWEN (CONT'D)

Hello!?! Don't do that! That's right. I saw you take them now just put them back!

VONNEGUT

Tell her she'll feel immediately better about herself if she does it.

GWEN

Really?

VONNEGUT

Try it.

GWEN

(to Person)

You might not believe this, but if you put those shoes that do not belong to you back you'll feel a hell of a lot better about yourself. Your whole life might turn around.

VONNEGUT

That's probably a bit much...

GWEN

(to Person)

At least you won't have to feel like such a shit when you see that elderly lady struggling around without her shoes ... Oh nice...

(to Vonnegut)

You see that? How did that gesture become so popular. And not just with low-life thieves like that asshole... Everyone flips the bird. "Flips the bird"... Sounds almost as disgusting as it looks... Childish, ugly... stupid. It's all so... nasty. You know what I think may be happening? I think Ned might be right. It could all be falling apart.

VONNEGUT

Because people are giving each other the finger?

GWEN

It's symptomatic... how can it all hold together with people showing so little regard for each other...

(to woman across the room)

Put the freakin' shoes back, and stop staring at me. Or I'll *give* you something to stare at!!

GWEN (CONTD)
(to Vonnegut)

Whatever that means...

VONNEGUT

But she got your point. Look...

GWEN

Yeah...

(to Woman)

Okay... now don't you feel better? Sure you do. Have a nice day. See you at dinner.

(giving her the finger)

Same to you!

Gwen gives a few other people in the shelter the finger, two fingers. She and Vonnegut giggle and give each other the finger repeatedly

BLACK OUT

SCENE 18

Park bench. Ned and Karen. Karen looks great in jogging gear, her hair pulled back. Ned is leaning his chin on a picket sign which reads, "FIGHT THE POWER."

NED

Barnie died.

KAREN

When?

NED

Don't know exactly. He couldn't come with us when we moved into that apartment so we asked the Wheelers to take him. Do you remember them?

KAREN

He leered at my breasts. She asked me how I was feeling a lot. "How are you feeling today? Any better?"

NED

Called them up just to see how he was doing. "Not so good," said Sam. "He's dead." "Not so good... he's dead." Like making a joke about my dog dying was an appropriate thing to do. First thing I thought was "Why Barnie, why not you, Sam?" Truth is I didn't just think it... I actually *said* it. So Sam hung up... Then I thought, "Why Barnie, why not *me*?"

KAREN

It's not your time.

NED

You think there's a time?

KAREN

You don't? Maybe you'd feel comforted if you did.

NED

As long as I can choose it. You going for a run?

KAREN
(looks at her clothing)

I guess.

NED
I wish you'd kept it up. Running. I always thought if you'd kept it up you could've run right past your problems. Just powered through....

KAREN
That's kind of dumb, Dad.

NED
Yeah. But when you were running and playing sports you were so healthy... Then you stopped.

KAREN
Because I got sick.

NED
Yeah. Or... maybe you got sick after you stopped.

KAREN
Except I didn't. I stopped because I got sick.

NED
Are you sure?

KAREN
Yes.

NED
Why aren't *I* sure?

KAREN
Because you're not sure of anything anymore. You've lost your sense of...

NED
My sense of sureness...

KAREN

Yeah. I think maybe that's why you've become a sloganizer. "Fight the Power." What's that mean exactly?

NED

I think it's pretty self-evident.

KAREN

What power? Fight how?

Ned turns the sign around. The other side says, "BE THE POWER."

KAREN

Be the power?

NED

Yes, indeed. Fight the power by becoming the power. You have to admit it's good advice. It's much better than the advice I used to give, "Diversify your portfolio." "Maximize you growth potential." What a bunch of shit... Well are you going to run or not?

KAREN

I will if you want me to.

NED

Don't do it just for me.

KAREN

Why not.

NED

It has to be for you.

KAREN

Since when. Just about everything I ever did I did because you or mom wanted me to.

NED

Is that true?

KAREN

Why would I lie?

NED

So you were always trying to please us.

KAREN

Except for the times I hated both your guts and didn't give a shit what you thought.

NED

You mean when you got sick.

KAREN

No when I turned thirteen.

NED

Yeah those were a rough couple of years...

KAREN

Well not compared to the nightmare that was heading our way.

(points to her head)

The voices... they fucked it all up for us, didn't they?

NED

I'm just wondering--

KAREN

Dozens of them all telling me some crazy shit, making me do some crazy shit.... loud screeching crazy people in my head just not stopping, never stopping unless I got so cranked up I couldn't think straight. Man...

(looks at him)

You're wondering what?

NED

If feeling you always had to please us maybe is one of the reasons you --

KAREN

People usually feel that they have to please someone. Why not you. Or Mom.

KAREN (CONT'D)

If I hadn't become a basket case I probably would have gotten married to some guy I had to please, had kids I had to please, friends, co-workers...

NED

Or maybe you could've just run through all that.

KAREN

That's a nice thought, Dad.

NED

Yeah, well... if I can't keep having nice thoughts about you, Honey.... you know, seeing you in these clothes, looking so healthy... well I might have to just... end it. Because what would be the purpose of going on, you know?

KAREN

(points to sign)

Well there's that sign... I'm sure there are a lot of people you haven't reached yet.

NED

And I've got others. They're at the shelter. I take a new one out everyday. I mean I rotate. There are nine of them. You know, to cover all the days of the week.

KAREN

There are seven days in a week.

NED

Plus the two other ones.

KAREN

Two extra signs?

NED

Two extra days. The ones nobody is doing anything with.

(off her look)

Well... you can't really blame them. They're in another dimension.

Ned gives Karen a look then gestures for her to run. She smiles, jogs off.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 19

Gwen is on her cot in the shelter surrounded by shoes. Vonnegut is on the next cot eating a banana.

GWEN

I've never seen you eat before.

VONNEGUT

In all the photos, they wanted me to either smoke or just sit there looking sad and troubled. It always looked so fake to me. I'd tell them "Let me suck on a milkshake or something. Anything normal."

GWEN

Fakery sells. Fakery sells better than anything really.

VONNEGUT

That's only because honesty isn't marketed very well.
(gestures to shoes)

Good idea you had there.

GWEN

We were supposed to take turns guarding the shoes while everyone else slept. This is my third night in a row. I don't really object... It gives me something to do.

VONNEGUT

Guarding shoes is enough to occupy your mind?

GWEN

Well I can't sleep anyway. Ned is out till all hours dispensing his "advice."

VONNEGUT

Not many people out there at this hour to receive it though...

GWEN

He says the ones who need it the most are. I think he's up to something.

VONNEGUT

Drowling for sex?

GWEN

No he gets enough of that from me now. We just get into a sleeping bag and screw our brains out. Any time at all, no matter who's around...who's watching, who's listening. We don't care.

VONNEGUT

Swell!

GWEN

Except I'm not sure why. You have any thoughts?

VONNEGUT

Well you've lost so many other things... why not a few inhibitions?

GWEN

I suppose we'll be doing it in the park or at a bus stop next. ...I mean if we ever need to take a bus to someplace. Can't imagine where that would beHe's up to something, I can feel it. This isn't the worst it can get, you know. It can get a lot worse.

VONNEGUT

Oh I know that. Things could all get so bad you won't even recognize where you are. It won't seem like the same planet.

GWEN

Really?

VONNEGUT

You won't recognize anyone around you. They won't seem like human beings. They won't behave like human beings or even house pets.

GWEN

Jesus...

VONNEGUT

...and they'll all be ...hungry. Hungry.... undomesticated in any way...

GWEN

Okay that's ---

VONNEGUT

That means they'll eat anything... even each other.

GWEN

Please...

VONNEGUT

That will be the norm, actually. Cannibalism is probably going to be the norm in the era of the worst of things.

GWEN

Please stop...

VONNEGUT

Sure. I just wanted you to know it could be a lot worse than the worst you think it could be.

GWEN

So I could appreciate what I have?

VONNEGUT

Which isn't much, granted.

GWEN

But at least I'm not being eaten.

VONNEGUT

Exactly. Now talk some more about sex.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 20

Ned under a light on a street corner, wearing a sign which reads: "WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?"
He appears to be addressing a small crowd.

NED

I thought I could stop wanting to know there for awhile. But I can't. I need to know. Don't tell my wife. She's the one in the bathrobe. But I need to know, and I need your help. It's probably someone like you. Fucked up like you. Unsure, alone, confused, desperate, sad, angry...hungry ...hungry for love, for a little affection, for the tiniest bit of concernand relief... hungry for relief...

(moves closer to the crowd)

...from knowing what *you* did... which was stab a very sick young woman twenty-six times. Five in the heart, twelve in the torso...and the rest on the face...So just let me know who you are, okay.

(takes out his gun)

And I'll do my part by putting you out of your misery.. help you out of this mistaken life, this failure of a life which I'm sure is not all your fault but still... has to end. End before you cause any more pain... pain so bad it sucked the air out of my lungs, ripped away at my heart, and left me gasping and wanting to die. So if you're out there, and you want relief, you know where to find me. And if there's anyone else who thinks that they should just be... removed from the picture, I'm willing to help. I'm especially interested in people like my former bosses, people who in pursuing their own unbelievably selfish interests have basically ruined the world. I can't get to you, for obvious reasons. I can't penetrate your enclaves or sneak into your boardrooms, but, if by any miracle you develop a conscience and go in search of your just punishment, I'm here. And in the meantime, getting back to you violent fuckups, maybe I should put a few of you out of your misery right away to save us from whatever hell you've got in store for the rest of us... Just please don't tell my wife any of this, except for that one part about helping. She'll put a positive spin of her own on that. She's become strangely upbeat lately... although that's not even slightly reflected in how she dresses.

He puts the gun away. For now.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 21

Gwen and Karen in the shelter. Staring at each other from different cots. Karen is in her dress. Gwen is in karen's track suit

KAREN

You're wearing my track suit.

GWEN

Is that okay?

KAREN

There was a time it would have made me think someone was trying to steal my life... take my clothes and then take my life... use it themselves, give it to someone else... It was just a useless thing anyway, my life... what did it matter what was done with it? That's what I would have thought.

GWEN

I know...

KAREN

No. Don't cry.... It's okay now.

GWEN

No... it's not.

KAREN

I mean you wearing my track suit. I like it now. I mean it's okay now.
(looking around)

You know, you should probably get out of this place. Any plans to do that?

GWEN

Not at the moment.

KAREN

But maybe you should be somewhere better... Maybe even get back to where you were.

GWEN

Back to where we were?

KAREN

I mean your life... the one you had.

GWEN

Without you? Not a chance.

KAREN

You know, most people move on from the bad things that happen to them. They get on with their lives.

GWEN

Really? Why?

KAREN

I don't know. That's just what they say.

GWEN

Who? Who says that?

KAREN

It's just... said.

GWEN

Yeah well...getting on with your life in some fashion and going back to a life that's no longer there, two different things, right.

KAREN

Yeah... but moving out of here is a possibility? Getting some kind of income and--

GWEN

You mean like that coffee cart idea?

KAREN

Coffee cart? If that's enough for you. And then moving to someplace where you could have your own room...

GWEN

Privacy isn't such a big deal for us anymore... But we could look into it, I guess. I mean your father would probably be up for that eventually.

KAREN

Eventually.

GWEN

Right now we're okay where we are, doing what we need to do. Your father's got his sloganizing, and since no one else is committed to keeping these shoes safe... okay?

Gwen reaches out for Karen's hand.

KAREN

Okay.

BLACK OUT

SCENE 22

Ned on the street, on the lookout. Vonnegut just watches.

VONNEGUT

You picked someone out yet?

NED

I'm narrowing it down.

VONNEGUT

There's a fairly good chance you'll choose someone relatively innocent.

NED

That's why I'm taking my time.

VONNEGUT

That won't necessarily help.

NED

I'd really appreciate it if you got on board with this.

VONNEGUT

No... you want me to talk you out of it.

NED

It's not like I need to do it.

VONNEGUT

So don't.

NED

The point I was trying to make is that it's not for me per se. It's for the overall good.

VONNEGUT

Unless you kill some family's sole provider. Not much overall good in that.

NED

They won't have a family.

VONNEGUT

You planning on killing more than one?

NED

Not tonight...

VONNEGUT

Then it's not *they*.. Using *they* just impersonalizes it for you. It's he or she. You going to kill a woman?

NED

I don't kill women.

VONNEGUT

You've killed before?

NED

No I mean when I do it... when I see who it is who has to have it done to them, I know it won't be a woman. There are too many men who deserve it more.

VONNEGUT

What kind of men?

NED

The harmful kind...

VONNEGUT

The harmful kind... without a family?

NED

I'll know if they have a family. I can tell. I had a family. I know what I looked like--

VONNEGUT

When you had a family, an intact family, before your son just pissed off, your daughter got killed. You think you looked the same after all that? You think you might wind up killing a man who looks like you looked then... just haunted, just in pain... alone in his pain.

NED

People need to be removed from our midst. There are some very bad people who need to be taken out of the picture.

VONNEGUT

Maybe you could just send them all to one of those other dimensions you've been thinking so much about.

NED

Don't think I haven't considered it.
(looks at him)

You like that idea?

VONNEGUT

Well I think you got it from me, so yeah. But we're not even close to realizing how to do that so-

NED

No I wouldn't get my hopes up or anything. But just thinking that eventually there's going to be another way to deal with all the selfish deadly crappy people in the world--

VONNEGUT

Might be enough to stop you from going on a killing spree?

NED

I'm just saying I have to believe that something will eventually get done... to stop people from hurting all the people like us who can't stand being hurt much longer. I really need to believe that will happen one day. I'm not kidding. This no fucking joke.

VONNEGUT

Got it.

NED

I mean it.

VONNEGUT

I know. Relax.

NED

Relax...

BLACK OUT

SCENE 23

Ned and Gwen on the street with a stolen hospital cart on which sits a large stolen coffee urn, some stolen cups and a tray of lemon tarts. Vonnegut watches from a distance.

NED

Fresh coffee!

GWEN

Free coffee! Brewed not perked!

NED

As if they care...

GWEN

It's better.

NED

As if they care if it's better.

GWEN

They'll learn to care.

NED

Sorry. It's not a part of their culture. Caring... about anything...

GWEN

I don't think that's true.

NED

Guy in the shelter last night, standing there, arm dangling at his side. Other guy asks him what's wrong, first guy says, "Broke my arm ...spits on the floor, then adds, "Not that I give a fuck"

GWEN

So they'll learn to give a fuck. They'll learn lots of things. I'll teach them Latin.

NED

Latin? Jesus. Why Latin. Why not mountain climbing ... Better you teach them how to sew.

GWEN

Well first someone would have to teach *me* ... You could help them learn to manage their finances.

NED

If they had finances...

GWEN

Well you could teach them how to *get* finances.

NED

They'll never get finances. That's too much of a leap.

GWEN

The future is only possible if we make a leap.

NED

Vonnegut say that?

GWEN

No, me...

NED

Well he probably said something like that.

GWEN

Yeah probably,. But better. More elegant...

NED

I'm just saying... he's Vonnegut.

GWEN

And I'm not.

NED

I'm planning to talk to him about some of these other dimensions I'm on to.

GWEN

When you say on to...?

NED

That I suspect exist.

GWEN

Because?

NED

Because I've had time to consider the prospect. And why wouldn't they?
Why would it just be this?

GWEN

Why wouldn't it just be this?

NED

I'm not actually prepared to debate it yet. That's why I need to talk to
Vonnegut some more. I need more information.

GWEN

You think he has information about other dimensions?

NED

Well I know it's one of the things he's thought about.

Gwen looks at him, smiles, then turns out.

GWEN

Fresh coffee!

NED

And lemon tarts!

GWEN

Lemon tarts made by *him!*

NED

Like they care who made them...

GWEN

I'm sure they will when they find out how hard it was. Steal the flour, steal the sugar, the lemons... steal this cart.

NED

They steal things all the time. That's no big deal.

GWEN

It is for us.

NED

Well actually... no it's not.

GWEN

Yeah...you're right. How about that for a dramatic change...

(looks around)

Why aren't they coming to get any? ...

(appealing to passersby)

Fresh brewed coffee! Tasty lemon tarts!

NED

They're suspicious. They're probably asking themselves what we want in return. Do we want them to volunteer some time, give blood, turn to Jesus...

GWEN

(to anyone)

We don't want anything! Not a thing! Honest!

NED

Well we want to feel good about doing this. We're still middle class at heart.

GWEN

I stopped being middle class when Karen got that disease. From then on I was the mother of a paranoid bipolar, schizophrenic and nothing else... And anyway, even if they don't want anything from us, I feel good just for making the effort.

NED

Well then you're more evolved than I am. Because we put a lot of work into helping those wretched fuckers.

Where's your gun?
GWEN

Sorry?
NED

Your gun. You still have it?
GWEN

No... no I got rid of it.
NED

Really. So you've decided we're going to live then. You're not going to kill us both one night while I'm sleeping.
GWEN

No... not for now, anyway.
NED

I'm okay with that.
GWEN

Good...
NED

BLACK OUT