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SF PERUSALS

Evelyn in Purgatory

Topher Payne

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830

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EVELYN IN PURGATORY was originally produced by The Essential Theatre Company (Peter Hardy, Artistic Director) on July 5, 2012 at Actor's Express in Atlanta, Georgia. It was directed by Betty Hart, with sets was by Reed Higgins, costumes by Jane Kroessig, sound by Jon Summers; lights by Harley Gould, and props by Kathy Manning. The Stage Manager was Anna Pages, with production management by Jennifer Kimball. The cast was as follows:

CANDACE METZGER. . . . . Megan Hayes
LILA WADKINS . . . . . Jo Howarth
EVELYN REID . . . . . Amanda Cucher
TOBY FLEMING . . . . . Jonathan Wierenga
FRED DISALVO. . . . . .Rial Elsworth
ROBERTA BURKE . . . . . Betty Mitchell
ATWOOD . . . . . .Josie Burgin-Lawson

CHARACTERS

CANDACE METZGER – 30s. The person with the most power in the room, and the least qualifications for it. From New Jersey, tries to hide the accent but fails when she gets emotional.

EVELYN REID – 30s. Likeable and resourceful. A careful mix of guarded pleasantry – she has a stellar game face. New England native.

LILA WADKINS – 50s. Calm, maternal, thoughtful, witty. The voice of reason. The art teacher everyone wishes they had. Upstate New York native, some residual hippie around the edges.

TOBY FLEMING – 20s. A bit of a geek. Quiet, passive-aggressive, perpetually uncertain. Brooklyn native.

FRED DISALVO – 50s. Bombastic, funny, a bit of a bully. A gym teacher from Hell's Kitchen, back when that still meant something.

ROBERTA BURKE – 60s. The self-appointed queen of all she surveys. Razor-sharp wit, no patience, and an uncanny ability to spot the weaknesses in those around her. Very Bronx.

ATWOOD – *(unseen)* The head of the disciplinary panel. The invisible voice of absolute authority. Written as "Ms. Atwood," but can be changed to "Mr. Atwood" to accommodate a gender swap.

SETTING

A windowless, forgotten office deep in the Department of Education building, New York City.

TIME

Autumn 2008 through Spring 2009.

In memory of Jo Howarth, who always knew
we'd get this play published.
Look at that, Jo. We did it.

ACT ONE

Scene One

*(**SETTING:** A windowless, forgotten office in the Department of Education building in Manhattan. The carpet is stained, and the room could use a fresh coat of paint. There is a desk and filing cabinet by the room's single door, which leads to the hall. A telephone and a late model desktop computer are on the desk. There are four chairs and an artificial plant nearby, a coat rack, and absolutely nothing else. The time is Autumn, 2008.)*

*(**DISCOVERED AT RISE:* **CANDACE METZGER** *is seated at the desk, sorting a large stack of papers. She is in her early thirties, dressed in comfortable office attire.* **LILA WADKINS** *enters, carrying a large canvas tote bag. She is in her fifties, with a cheerful disposition and natural warmth. She wears a peasant blouse and skirt, crafty jewelry. She signs her name on a clipboard at the desk, prompting a nod of acknowledgement from* **CANDACE**. **LILA** *sits in one of the chairs, pulls a small knitting project from her bag, and commences knitting. The phone rings.* **CANDACE** *answers.)*

CANDACE. Metzger, 704. *(She jots a quick note.)* Thank you.

(She hangs up and continues sorting papers. **EVELYN REID** *enters. She is a well-dressed woman in her thirties, wearing a suit and heels, carrying a briefcase. She takes in the room a moment, then approaches the desk.)*

EVELYN. Excuse me.

CANDACE. Yes.

EVELYN. Evelyn Reid, James Madison High School.

CANDACE. Yes.

EVELYN. I was told to find a room to wait in…will any room do?

CANDACE. Yes.

EVELYN. Could I wait here?

CANDACE. Sign in, please.

EVELYN. Alright. *(She does.)* Will I be reassigned to another classroom today, or tomorrow?

CANDACE. It's different for everyone.

*(***LILA** *chuckles.)*

EVELYN. I'm sorry, it's just, I'm not really clear on how this works. All they told me was to come here instead of my school. Do you know what time my hearing will be?

CANDACE. Miss Reid –

EVELYN. Mrs.

CANDACE. *Mrs.* Reid, I am just the proctor for the room, I have no information on individual cases. The way this works is, you sign in and take a seat. When it is time for your hearing, they will call. Until it is time for your hearing, you wait. You will do this every day. Have a seat, please.

EVELYN. Alright. *(starts for a chair, stops)* What do you mean every day?

CANDACE. Mrs. Reid. Please just take a seat.

*(***EVELYN** *walks to a chair and sits.)*

LILA. You don't want to sit there.

EVELYN. I'm sorry?

LILA. That's Fred's chair.

EVELYN. Is Fred here?

LILA. No, but he will be soon. And that's his chair. He's very protective of his chair.

EVELYN. Alright.

(She gets up and moves to the next seat.)

LILA. That one's taken as well, I'm afraid.

EVELYN. You're joking.

LILA. That would be Roberta's chair. You do not want to take Roberta's chair.

EVELYN. You are aware that none of these people are in the room?

LILA. Please do not sit there. If Roberta comes in and finds you in her chair we will all suffer. She's worse than Fred.

EVELYN. I suppose the chair next to you is –

LILA. Toby's. We lost a teacher last Thursday. Since then everyone's had a chair. If you insist on sitting, take Toby's. He won't put up a fight.

EVELYN. I'll stand.

LILA. Oh, it's fine, people always take Toby's chair. He just stakes out a spot over in the corner. He's young, his joints can take it. Come sit.

EVELYN. *(standing)* I'm fine, really. I'm sure it won't be that long.

LILA. Dear. We've been here long enough to claim chairs. Long enough to have a very intricate hierarchy of chair ownership. Trust me, it will be that long.

EVELYN. Are you all awaiting reassignment?

LILA. We are waiting for our hearings. No one is reassigned. Not ever. You will have a hearing, eventually, where they present and discuss the charge against you. From there you either return to your classroom, or you're sent packing.

EVELYN. How long does it take to get a hearing?

LILA. It's different for everyone. Toby's been waiting about three weeks now.

EVELYN. He's come here every day for three weeks? My god.

LILA. Yes. Fred calls him "Rookie." But perhaps that auspicious title will go to you now. Roberta has been here since just after Labor Day, so that's roughly, what? Seven weeks? Fred and I are both holdovers from last school year. I got here in March, Fred was…January? January.

EVELYN. January? He's been waiting for a hearing for ten months?

LILA. Roughly.

EVELYN. But that's insane! Why on earth would they keep anyone waiting that long?

LILA. Mrs. Reid, is it?

EVELYN. Yes. Evelyn.

LILA. Lila Wadkins. Art teacher at Joseph P. Benson. Formerly. Now I'm just the occupant of this chair. Evelyn, there are over a million students served by New York public schools. Seventy thousand teachers. If any of those teachers are accused of impropriety, they are sent here until the case can be reviewed in a hearing. That process takes time. It's a measure put in place to protect the students, and also to allow the teacher due process.

EVELYN. You're defending this?

LILA. The concept, yes. If the teacher is guilty, it protects the students from being placed in a potentially toxic environment. And the innocent teachers are given the opportunity to defend themselves. So much time is wasted, however. But you'll still collect your paycheck, so there's no need to worry.

EVELYN. But I didn't do anything wrong! I'm innocent!

LILA. The claim of every man in prison. Nothing can be done, Evelyn. Might as well stake out this chair now or try to find a room with an unclaimed seat. But brace yourself. At any given time there's several hundred teachers in this building, and every room is its own little fiefdom. I've seen fist fights. So unless you've

got a good right hook, I'd grab Toby's chair and take advantage of his lack of backbone.

*(***EVELYN** *hesitates, then sits.)*

EVELYN. Isn't there anyone you can talk to, at least to get an update?

LILA. Of course. Candace? Do you have an update on when my hearing might be?

CANDACE. I'm just the proctor, Mrs. Wadkins. I have no information on individual cases.

LILA. Thank you dear.

CANDACE. Sure thing.

LILA. And there you have it.

EVELYN. That's it?

LILA. Yes. That would be it. Everything I've shared with you came from other teachers. There's no official communication whatsoever.

EVELYN. But my students –

LILA. Are in the care of a marginally qualified substitute. Do not go back to your campus. Do not communicate with other instructors or students at your school. Both are grounds for immediate termination and loss of your teaching certificate.

EVELYN. It's like prison for teachers.

LILA. No. It's like purgatory for teachers. Welcome to the rubber room, Evelyn.

*(***LILA** *returns to her knitting.* **EVELYN** *pulls her cell phone from her purse and holds it up, trying to get a signal.)*

EVELYN. Damn it.

LILA. You won't get a signal in here. I think it's all the lead paint.

*(***EVELYN** *stands.)*

I wouldn't get out of that chair.

*(***EVELYN** *sits.)*

EVELYN. *(To* **CANDACE**.*)* Excuse me. May I use your phone?

CANDACE. No personal calls, Mrs. Reid.

*(***TOBY FLEMING** *enters, carrying a backpack. He's in his late twenties, youthful and a bit socially awkward. He wears jeans, a polo shirt, and a jacket. He's listening to an iPod Shuffle, clipped to his shirt. He signs in and heads for the chair occupied by* **EVELYN**. *He stops and stares.)*

EVELYN. I'm sorry, I –

*(***LILA** *puts a hand on* **EVELYN***'s shoulder.)*

LILA. Good morning, Toby. This is Evelyn. It's her first day.

*(***TOBY** *lets out a disgusted sigh, then looks at the other two empty chairs. He heads for the corner and begins setting up his laptop computer.)*

EVELYN. Oh, he looks mad.

LILA. He's fine. Really. He's used to it. Did you say you teach at Madison High?

EVELYN. Yes. American history.

LILA. Is Elena Vargas still your guidance counselor?

EVELYN. Yeah. You know Mrs. Vargas?

LILA. She was at Benson, before they laid her off and gave us one counselor for five schools. Now our kids are only allowed to have problems on Thursdays. I was a reference when she interviewed at Madison. I haven't spoken with Elena in years.

TOBY. You know, we agreed on Thursday we weren't going to take on anyone new. I'm just saying.

LILA. Toby, this is not a clubhouse. People can come and go as they wish.

EVELYN. I'm sorry. You can have the chair. I'll take the floor.

TOBY. No no no, it's fine. I'm fine. I'm just saying we agreed after Harold left, is all. There was an agreement.

LILA. I agreed to nothing, Toby dear. I sat here knitting.

CANDACE. The time is now eight a.m.

*(***CANDACE** *takes the clipboard off her desk and replaces it with another holding a red piece of paper. She picks up the phone and dials.)*

EVELYN. She doesn't do that every hour, does she?

LILA. It means the day has begun.

EVELYN. What do we…do?

LILA. Exactly what we were doing. Nothing. But Fred and Roberta are now officially late to do nothing. I have a trashy magazine if you'd like.

*(***LILA** *pulls a tabloid from her tote bag and hands it to* **EVELYN**.*)*

CANDACE. Metzger. 704. Wadkins, Lila. Reid, Evelyn. Fleming, Toby.

FRED. *(Offstage.)* Don't hang up! Don't hang up!

(She hangs up. **FRED DISALVO** *rushes in. He's a paunchy man in his 50s, wearing a sweatshirt, khakis, and sneakers. He looks at the red sheet on the desk.)*

Oh come on, lady, gimme a freakin' break! One minute late! I was waiting for the elevator! Call me in! Tell 'em you missed my name!

CANDACE. I can't do that. I don't make the rules, Mr. Disalvo.

FRED. Yeah, so what do you care if we bend 'em a little? One minute! Come on!

CANDACE. Sign in, please.

*(***ROBERTA BURKE** *enters. She's in her 60s, dressed very conservatively. A bit of a spinster, but intentionally so. She glowers at the clipboard.)*

ROBERTA. You've already called in, haven't you?

CANDACE. As my job requires me to do every day at eight, Mrs. Burke.

FRED. One freakin' stupid minute. Come on!

ROBERTA. Ya get a sick little thrill out of having them dock our checks, don't ya? You sadist.

FRED. The buses go as fast as they go, lady. We don't control it.

ROBERTA. I am an old woman. What, I run up the stairs, I slip, I break a hip? Is that what you want? A poor defenseless old woman lying at the bottom of the stairs, moaning in agony.

CANDACE. I'm just doing my job, Mrs. Burke.

ROBERTA. Look, O'Brien –

CANDACE. My name is Metzger. Candace Metzger.

ROBERTA. Read *1984*. You're O'Brien in the flesh. Now break free of Big Brother and give me the damn white clipboard, you fascist.

*(***CANDACE** *does not move.)*

FRED. Oh, come on! We don't do anything here! Why the hell does it matter? I'm not signing it.

ROBERTA. We refuse. We protest.

CANDACE. If you don't sign in on the tardy sheet, you will be marked as absent from the reassignment center for the day. Three unapproved absences will result in immediate termination.

FRED. Oh for god's sake…

*(***FRED** *signs in.* **ROBERTA** *signs in. They both turn to face the room, focusing on* **EVELYN**.*)*

ROBERTA. I thought we had an agreement.

TOBY. Thank you.

LILA. Roberta, honestly.

FRED. We said after the black guy left we weren't taking on any more strays.

TOBY. His name was Harold, Coach. Not "The Black Guy." Why would you even point that out?

FRED. I was just describing the guy.

ROBERTA. There are other rooms. Many other rooms. This place is a hive.

EVELYN. Perhaps I should go.

(She takes her briefcase and stands. **TOBY** *jumps up.)*

LILA. If you go to another room you have to sign in as tardy. They cut your pay when you're tardy. Toby, sit.

*(***TOBY** *sits.)*

Evelyn can stay with us for the morning, and find another room after lunch if she wishes. And as for you two, nobody took your chairs, so I fail to see how it's of any real concern to either of you. Everyone, just take your seats.

*(***FRED** *and* **ROBERTA** *sit.* **FRED** *takes a folded piece of cardboard taped under his chair, produces a deck of cards, and begins playing Solitaire. Meanwhile,* **ROBERTA** *digs through her tote bag and pulls a plastic sign reading "JANITORIAL." She goes to the door.)*

CANDACE. What are you doing?

ROBERTA. I pulled it off a door downstairs. This way nobody else will come in.

CANDACE. Mrs. Burke, you cannot do that.

ROBERTA. What's the problem here? The janitor already knows where his closet is. He doesn't need signage.

CANDACE. Mrs. Burke, if you put the sign up, I will remove it.

ROBERTA. And then I will put it back up again. We could fill the whole morning with that little game.

CANDACE. No.

FRED. Oh, come on!

ROBERTA. Show me, in writing, the rule against labeling rooms as janitor's supply closets, and I will put this away.

CANDACE. I am certain there is a rule against it.

ROBERTA. Well. You let me know when you find it. *(She attaches the sign and slams the door.)* Sure wish I'd thought of this yesterday.

TOBY. So. Evelyn. What're you in for?

LILA. You don't have to answer that.

ROBERTA. Yes she does.

EVELYN. It's all a horrible mistake. I'd prefer not discussing it, if it's alright.

ROBERTA. If you don't tell us, I will make something up and report it as fact. I don't get a lot of entertainment around here.

TOBY. She will. She'll make something up. None of the Puerto Rican teachers will talk to me. They won't say why, but I know it was her.

FRED. I'll tell ya why I'm here. Because the whole school system's gone straight to hell.

TOBY. Really, Fred? I thought it was because you broke a kid's wrist.

FRED. Shut up. See, these two Hell's Kitchen punks gang up on a sissy kid in the hall –

TOBY. Hell's Kitchen punks? When does this story take place, 1960?

FRED. Shut up, you'll get your turn.

TOBY. It's not exactly "West Side Story" over there anymore. Most of it's gone condo. I'm just sayin'.

FRED. There's still people there from the old neighborhood. And their kids are punks. So they grab this scrawny kid, start beatin' the crap outta him. I step in, try to stop it. They fight me, I fight back. What, I'm supposed to take that? Let some little jackass take a swing at me? So I knock his ass on the ground, he breaks his wrist. Here I am. Almost a year now. The kid's still in school. Not even freakin' detention for him. Twenty years ago, hell, ten years ago, I woulda been doin' my job. Now I'm some kinda criminal. The whole system's gone straight to hell.

*(***CANDACE** *rises quickly and exits. They all watch, and* **EVELYN** *looks back for explanation.)*

TOBY. We don't know where she goes. She just does that sometimes.

LILA. They want to cut art classes at my school. Something must be eliminated, and somehow we have reached a point where fostering creative expression is no longer a necessity. But my students are artists. They win awards. National. They go on to Pratt, DePaul, Parsons. You can't cut funding from a program producing those kinds of results.

EVELYN. That's wonderful.

LILA. The principal, a former football coach with whom I have exchanged no end of unpleasantries, claimed I was being insubordinate. Hostile. Which is absurd. In the seventies I lived in a communal household with fourteen people, I know how to be a team player. But the accusation was all it took. I was sent here, and now my program is dying.

ROBERTA. It's a holocaust.

LILA. I will remain here until I have no job to go back to, and then I will be dismissed.

EVELYN. I'm so sorry.

LILA. I just ache for my students. They won't all be athletes or math scholars. Some of them are meant to be artists. They just need an instructor who trusts them, believes in them. And we're taking that chance away. It breaks my heart.

ROBERTA. It didn't used to be such a gee dee battle. You're on your own out there. Not worth it.

TOBY. Roberta is here by choice.

EVELYN. Beg your pardon?

ROBERTA. I kept seeing teachers being sent here for months on end, collecting a check, not having to put up with the hoochie coochie show we now laughingly call public schools. And there I was, retirement just

within reach, trying to sell Shakespeare to gang bangers when I could be sitting on my duff with a good book. Sign me up, sounds like a sweet deal to me.

EVELYN. So what did you do?

FRED. This is great.

ROBERTA. You know the little monsters who wear their pants saggy, underwear on full display?

EVELYN. Yes. Yes I do.

ROBERTA. I had this one in particular. I've intentionally forgotten his name. If it wasn't his pants, he was sleeping in class, backtalk, or texting. One glorious Thursday, I asked him to come to the board and list the major characters in "Pride and Prejudice." In his childlike hand, he scrawled Stewie, Meg, Peter, Quagmire –

TOBY. From *Family Guy*, the cartoon.

EVELYN. Right.

ROBERTA. So I pantsed him.

*(***FRED** *bursts into laughter.)*

EVELYN. What?

ROBERTA. I grabbed his fully-exposed red boxer shorts, and I pantsed the little bastard! Let him display his pockmarked tookus to the whole class. He'd been figuratively showing his ass since September, the literalism was pure heaven. The next day I grabbed a copy of "Mansfield Park" and came here.

EVELYN. My god! Roberta, that's horrible!

ROBERTA. Oh, don't lie. It's fabulous. I had forty years of teaching on my side. It was obviously a momentary lapse brought on by stress. I was contrite in my hearing. They understood.

EVELYN. I'm confused. You've already had your hearing?

FRED. She's had three.

ROBERTA. I haven't spent more than six weeks in a classroom in the last two years. I wasn't nearly as poetic with the other offenses. For the best, really. How could I top the first time?

TOBY. Sequels never live up to the original.

ROBERTA. A few well-chosen profanities in front of the Catholics will get you out of there pretty quick. If my next hearing doesn't happen until spring, I can retire without ever going back.

LILA. You should be in your classroom, Roberta. Your students need you. It's such a waste.

ROBERTA. They don't need me. They need someone who still cares. I keep suffering momentary lapses brought on by stress.

*(***ROBERTA** *pulls a book from her bag.)*

EVELYN. What about you, Toby? Why are you here?

TOBY. I suffered a momentary lapse brought on by stress.

LILA. Toby's lapse was genuine.

TOBY. I just… I thought it would be different.

LILA. First year teaching.

EVELYN. Ohh.

*(***CANDACE** *returns and goes to her desk.)*

FRED. That break wasn't authorized, lady. Didn't ask permission.

ROBERTA. Better sign the red sheet.

CANDACE. *(Fuming.)* I have different rules.

*(***CANDACE** *dials the phone.)*

EVELYN. What do you teach, Toby?

TOBY. Earth Science and Chemistry. I love science. I had terrible teachers when I was a kid, but I still loved it. And I always thought if I could get in a classroom, show them why it's awesome, what makes it spectacular, I could inspire them. But I didn't. I couldn't.

CANDACE. *(Into phone.)* Metzger. 704. Tardy report. Disalvo, Fred. Bite my – *(She stops, glares at* **ROBERTA**.*)* Burke, Roberta. *(She hangs up.)* This is an official document, Mrs. Burke. Your use of profanities will be on the record and could affect the outcome of your hearing.

ROBERTA. You wanna mess with me, missy? Show me what ya got. Let's dance.

*(***CANDACE** *ignores her.)*

EVELYN. You were saying, Toby?

TOBY. It was just this maze of bureaucracy and pointless crap, and the administrators had this hive brain like the Borg, I was always getting stonewalled and shot down, they don't want you to innovate, just get them ready for testing. One day, my kids were supposed to be doing this stupid essential skills test that means absolutely nothing, and they just wouldn't shut up –

FRED. He started crying. Like a girl.

TOBY. Shut up, Fred.

FRED. He cried and threw a globe.

LILA. The first year is hard on every instructor.

FRED. Picked up the whole world and hurled it.

ROBERTA. Very metaphorical. Atlas throws a tantrum.

FRED. How'd you pitch it, Toby? Underhanded or over your head?

TOBY. Fred, I've got a pretty good feeling you're not missed at your school.

FRED. Hey, Rookie. It's coaches like me who kept Hell's Kitchen boys from busting your skull in high school. Now they send us to the rubber room. Who's gonna keep sissies like you alive?

TOBY. I'm not a sissy, Fred. I'm a geek. There is a difference.

FRED. Drama Club, A/V Club, same thing. Not one of you can throw a damn ball.

TOBY. My principal's doing what she can to, you know, speed things along. So we'll see. It'll get better when I go back. You just gotta deal with the disappointment, I guess.

ROBERTA. No, Toby. The situation doesn't change. Your expectations do. Evelyn, your turn.

LILA. It's not her turn. This isn't group therapy.

EVELYN. No, it's only fair. Um. Well. Natalie Clark, one of my seniors. In my class for the second time. I've tried working with her, but nothing changes. She doesn't care. Six weeks in, she's already failing. I told her last week if she doesn't change course it's likely she won't graduate. Natalie threw a fit. Said I'm against her, have it out for her. Then yesterday she told the principal she saw me in my classroom, kissing the captain of the track team.

TOBY. Oh crap.

ROBERTA. Was it true?

EVELYN. Absolutely not! It's absurd. Anyone who knows me would say so. The girl's a liar.

FRED. Could happen. Athletes mature faster.

TOBY. No they don't.

FRED. How would you know?

EVELYN. I am married. Happily. And I would never – I denied it. Vehemently. And the boy denied it. But my principal says they still have to investigate, hold a hearing. What is there to investigate when everyone involved says it didn't happen?

LILA. They'll talk to your students, your colleagues, see if anyone else saw you behaving inappropriately with the boy.

TOBY. Maybe you'll get to see the shrink. That's a load of laughs.

EVELYN. This is humiliating.

LILA. This is due process.

FRED. This is a load of crap.

LILA. Evelyn, I hope your situation is resolved quickly.

FRED. It won't be, but you go ahead and hope.

ROBERTA. There is nothing more dangerous than a child who lies. Nothing. They can destroy entire institutions. And this generation? god help us. The children feed on this culture of victims like ciphers. Like living in "The Crucible."

TOBY. We did that play. My junior year. First show they did after we put in the new sound system, and then they barely had any cues.

ROBERTA. That's what you remember from "The Crucible." The absence of musical numbers.

TOBY. Not musical numbers. I could've done ambient noise, environmental sounds. Set a mood.

FRED. We were supposed to read that in school. I didn't.

ROBERTA. Then how did you pass English?

FRED. I was the quarterback.

LILA. Not every problem is new.

ROBERTA. You missed out on one of the greatest dramatizations of American hysteria ever written. Back me up on this, Lila.

LILA. Actually I've never read it either.

ROBERTA. Evelyn?

EVELYN. I saw "Death of a Salesman."

ROBERTA. Well that's not the same damn thing, is it?

EVELYN. It's Arthur Miller.

ROBERTA. Oh for god's sake. It should be required reading.

TOBY. It is. We just didn't do it.

(**FRED** *laughs.*)

ROBERTA. Oh, forget it.

EVELYN. We could read it here. I mean, we've got all this time on our hands, why not put it to good use? It'd be like a book club.

FRED. Yeah, ah, I'm not gonna do that.

EVELYN. Well, participation isn't compulsory. But the rest of us, we could meet maybe twice a week. Hopefully we'll all be gone before we're done with the play.

LILA. god bless your sweet naiveté. Oh, why not? We could use an activity. Safeguard our brains against atrophy. Toby, you'll do it too.

TOBY. Why do I have to if Fred doesn't?

LILA. Because there's still hope for you.

ROBERTA. Alright. I'll go to Barnes and Noble tonight. But you should know, I have impossibly high standards.

EVELYN. Don't worry, Roberta. We'll keep our pants up.

(Lights fade.)

Scene Two

(Three weeks later. **ROBERTA, EVELYN,** *and* **LILA** *have pulled their chairs together.* **TOBY** *sits at their feet. Each is holding copies of* The Crucible, *except for* **LILA,** *who is knitting a nearly-completed sweater.* **FRED** *is playing Solitaire.* **CANDACE** *is at the desk, typing.)*

EVELYN. My point is, John still believes that his reputation, and the lack of any evidence, will exonerate him. He believes in the system. All he's asking for is fairness.

LILA. But he shouldn't expect fairness. Not from them. There's a reason they call it a witch hunt.

ROBERTA. The temptation to abuse absolute power is too tasty. Why, just look at Candace.

*(***CANDACE** *shoots her a look.)*

Give her a telephone and a clipboard, she thinks she's Margaret Thatcher. But you never see it as abusive if you agree with them. It's only an abuse of power in the eyes of the dissenter.

TOBY. Okay, okay, I get all that, but at some point you gotta look around and see the world you're living in, and find a way to survive. It's basic human instinct. Survival. Proctor could have just signed the damn paper, said he's a warlock, and skipped town with Liz. Start over.

EVELYN. Because he has no control over what happens after he gives in. If he just tells them what they want to hear, it gives them all the power, because now they're in charge. The mistake he makes is letting them put him on the defensive.

LILA. Well, wouldn't you be in his position?

EVELYN. The counsel has no evidence, and John knows it. He doesn't have to prove he isn't a witch. They have to prove that he is.

LILA. Or he could simply remain silent. Why doesn't he refuse to participate in their little game?

FRED. Because it's his name, people! Come on! It's all he has left! You're not testing integrity until you're doing it in hostile territory. Christ, do you people even get this guy at all? Even if he ditches town, he'll always know the name John Proctor is worthless someplace, and he won't sleep at night!

ROBERTA. Go on, Fred.

FRED. I've been listening to you hens cluck about this stupid play for weeks now, and you've been missing the simplest concept. Valuing honor, over saving your own skin. That's what character is, people.

ROBERTA. But when Elizabeth lies to cover for John's adultery, is that a show of strength or weakness in her own character?

FRED. She lies. She loses. Even though she didn't know it, if she'd just told the truth and said he'd banged that cuckoo Abigail chick, they woulda been home in time for supper. You lie, you lose. Every time.

EVELYN. I'm afraid history disagrees with that assessment, Fred.

FRED. History agrees. Watergate. Monica Lewinsky. You lie, you lose.

EVELYN. They didn't lose because they lied, they lost because they got caught. Plenty of people in power have lied to save their own skin. But when it works, nobody ever knows.

LILA. Is that what you tell your students?

EVELYN. I tell them if you want to make history, you need the strength of your convictions. As long as you win, you're celebrated.

LILA. And if you lose?

EVELYN. Then generally you're forgotten entirely. If the Revolutionary War had turned out differently, George Washington would be a historical footnote who was hanged as a traitor, and we'd all have British accents.

TOBY. And better TV shows. BBC America kicks ass.

*(**CANDACE** gets up in a hurry and runs out the door.)*

FRED. And there she goes.

TOBY. Where she stops, nobody knows.

ROBERTA. Fred, you've inspired such lively discussion.

EVELYN. Welcome to the book club.

FRED. I'm not in your damn club.

LILA. Well, you've obviously been paying attention.

FRED. *(Pulling his chair over.)* Bah. Not really. Though I'll tell ya somethin'. I knew a Mary Warren once. Ugly woman. No neck. My wife made our boy take piano from her for about a minute. He couldn't stand her. Said her house smelled like onions.

LILA. I didn't know you had a son.

FRED. Yeah. Freddie Junior. You, ah, you got kids, Lila?

LILA. Oh, yes. Two girls. Lynne works in an accounting office here in the city, and Maureen's a bank teller in Albany.

FRED. Neither of them went artsy-fartsy for ya?

LILA. I think being utterly conventional was their form of rebellion.

EVELYN. Wait. Seriously, you people have been in the same room, all this time, and you never talked about your families?

TOBY. You've been in here like three weeks, and you haven't brought it up either.

EVELYN. Well, yes, but we've talked about plenty of other things. Where we went to school, food allergies. I'm not criticizing, I'm just surprised. How about you, Roberta? Any kids?

ROBERTA. No. Wanted, but it didn't happen for us.

LILA. You could've adopted.

ROBERTA. Oh really, Lila? Adoption, you say? Wow, we never thought of that. Gordon had cancer. Twice. Nobody wanted to give us a baby, because of the risk

of it coming back. As though perfectly healthy people don't get cancer after they have kids, but there you have it. So it was just us, and that was fine. Until the cancer did come back. So maybe those bastards were on to something after all. Someone else talk.

*(***CANDACE** *returns and sits at the desk.)*

LILA. Toby? You don't have children, do you?

TOBY. No, but I want 'em. I mean, one day. Gotta find a wife first, but yeah. I love kids. I'd love a son. Or a daughter. But something about guys and sons, I guess. Be a Boy Scout leader, play catch.

FRED. Gotta learn how to throw a ball.

TOBY. Fred, I know how to throw a ball, I just derive no pleasure from doing it.

FRED. You are such a weirdo.

TOBY. Evelyn? Kids?

EVELYN. No. We want to wait until we're a little more settled. When the timing's right.

FRED. Timing's never right. Just gotta do it and figure it out. Kids are messy and pricey, no way around it. Just jump in.

ROBERTA. I agree. If you both know you want it, just start trying. You never know what's gonna happen.

EVELYN. Hey, Candace, you married?

*(***CANDACE** *doesn't respond.)*

TOBY. Oh come on, Candace, we're having a nice moment here. Don't be a wet blanket.

LILA. Now, now. Candace has work to do.

TOBY. We were trying to include her.

ROBERTA. She's not married. No ring. I've checked.

FRED. Well, that answers the kid question.

*(***CANDACE** *begins to sob.)*

LILA. *(rushing over)* Oh, no, now you've done it.

FRED. Done what? What'd I do?

LILA. Nothing. Just, nothing. Talk to each other.

ROBERTA. Why on Earth would we talk to each other when this is so much more compelling?

LILA. You hurt her feelings.

FRED. Oh, come on. Candace doesn't have feelings. Or she didn't until now, and who coulda planned for that?

LILA. Just hush, you Neanderthal. She's pregnant.

*(***CANDACE** *looks up, stunned.)*

ROBERTA. You are not!

CANDACE. I – But what makes you think –

LILA. My dear. You stopped drinking coffee two months ago. And lately you've had worse morning sickness than I had with Maureen. You're what, second trimester?

CANDACE. Sixteen weeks.

LILA. Come over here, dear.

(She pushes **CANDACE** *in the rolling desk chair over to the group.)*

EVELYN. Well, congratulations, Candace. That's wonderful.

CANDACE. No, it isn't!

ROBERTA. Who's the father? Do you know the father?

LILA. Roberta, of course she knows the father.

CANDACE. Sort of.

FRED. What the hell does that mean?

ROBERTA. Were you drugged at a party?

EVELYN. Roberta.

ROBERTA. They call them roofies.

CANDACE. It was just this guy from my building, Noah? We got to talking at the mailboxes one day, and he mentioned he had the complete series of *Lost* on DVD, I'd never seen it because I don't have cable and I get bad reception on ABC, so he started bringing the DVDs over and we'd watch an episode or two and then we'd talk about it and then we'd have sex. I really got into it, *Lost* I mean, the sex was just okay, but it became like a

little routine and I find routines very comforting, you know?

LILA. Yes. Routines are comforting.

CANDACE. Noah didn't use condoms because he said he had this latex allergy, which I never really believed but I was on the pill and I knew he was safe. He was one of those guys Jewish people hire to sit with their dead people, and he had cauliflower ears from wrestling in high school, it's not like he was some stud, who would sleep with that?

ROBERTA. Depends on what's on television, apparently.

CANDACE. I was on antibiotics because I'd had strep and I didn't know that made my pills stop working, and then he moved out a few weeks before I found out, and I didn't even know his last name, he was just Noah the dead people sitter who I slept with through six seasons of *Lost*, and then maybe four episodes of *Breaking Bad* but I just couldn't get into it, and oh my god why in the name of Christ am I still talking?!

(She breaks away, rolling her chair back to the desk. Everyone is without words.)

TOBY. You should really give *Breaking Bad* another chance, it gets pretty awesome later on. *(Stares from the group.)* Well, fine. Someone else say something.

EVELYN. It's okay, Candace. Really. You know, Nelson Mandela was an unplanned pregnancy.

ROBERTA. Edgar Allen Poe.

LILA. So was Oprah, look how she turned out.

FRED. Jesus.

EVELYN. Thank you, Fred. Also Jesus. You're going to be just fine.

CANDACE. Of course. Thank you all for your concern. I apologize. I need to get back to work now.

LILA. Now, Candace, sweetheart –

CANDACE. I am still the proctor in this room, Mrs. Wadkins. I need to get back to work.

LILA. Of course.

*(***LILA** *walks back over to the group.* **CANDACE** *rises and starts to leave.)*

EVELYN. Oh, Candace, don't leave!

CANDACE. I have no choice! I gotta pee! Again!

(She exits. **EVELYN** *goes to her briefcase and removes a folder. She sits and begins filling out forms.)*

FRED. Wow. If only she'd had cable.

LILA. Fred.

FRED. I'm sorry, but not even knowing the guy's last name?

TOBY. That is kinda sad. Not as sad as the poor S.O.B. having cauliflower ears. But it's sad.

FRED. A wrestler. At least he was an athlete.

TOBY. If rolling around with another guy in spandex makes you an athlete, there's some undiscovered talent in the West Village.

LILA. The father's out of the picture anyway, his extracurriculars are irrelevant.

ROBERTA. Well. It's done now. We have to help her.

LILA. Really?

ROBERTA. She's a gee dee wreck. The child won't survive its first night alone with her. So we will help. If there's anything public schoolteachers know how to deal with, it's unplanned pregnancies.

(Everyone concurs.)

FRED. She needs to watch her diet. Exercise. There's vitamins she's gotta take.

ROBERTA. There you are, Fred. Make a plan for her. We should be writing this down.

*(***ROBERTA** *goes for her purse.)*

EVELYN. We could have P.E., every afternoon. Do it together.

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