

OPENING NIGHT

based on the screenplay by John Cassavetes

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Production Draft - March 7th

Characters

MYRTLE, an Actor, also **VIRGINIA** in *The Second Woman*

MARTY, an Actor, also **MAURICE** in *The Second Woman*

MANNY, the Director

SARAH, the Playwright

KELLY, the Costume Designer

NANCY, the Girl/the Double

Setting

Here and now, in a fictional theatre with the same footprint as Belvoir St Theatre

Notes:

‘vom’ refers to the entrance from the audience at Belvoir

SCENE 1: Myrtle and Marty perform the first dress run

Stage set

Lights up on a living room box set.

Fading daylight and light rain through the window.

On the couch sits MAURICE. It's the end of a long day. He has a drink in hand. He's absorbed in some activity...sorting through his photographs, perhaps.

We sit with him for a moment.

A knock at the door.

MAURICE looks up. He isn't expecting anyone -

MAURICE: Yes?

No response. He goes to the door, opens it.

Standing in the doorway is VIRGINIA, well-dressed, a little wet from the rain.

MAURICE: -

Virginia.

My God.

VIRGINIA: Hello, Maurice.

MAURICE: Jesus Christ.

What are you doing here?

VIRGINIA: It's been a while, hasn't it.

Can I come in?

MAURICE: Sure - of course -

He moves back to let her in; she enters.

VIRGINIA: It's pouring down out there.

And I left my umbrella somewhere, in a store or something, so I had to run into the lobby from the taxi.

She eyes his drink, then casts a glance around the room.

VIRGINIA: You're not having a drink with someone, are you? I'm not interrupting?

MAURICE: No no, just - an early nightcap.

-

Would you like one?

VIRGINIA: Please.

MAURICE: I've got **wine**, gin, a bit of scotch...

VIRGINIA: A scotch, neat.

MAURICE: Alright.

He prepares it. She looks around the suite – looking for signs of other life there? A girlfriend, another woman? – and surreptitiously brushes down her hair.

MAURICE: How did you know I was staying here?

VIRGINIA: I heard you **were** in town for work, that this is where you stay.

I thought I might surprise you.

MAURICE: You certainly did that. You were the last person I expected to see when I opened that door.

Handing her the glass.

God, how long has it been? Fifteen **years**?

VIRGINIA: Something like that.

MAURICE: Well - cheers.

VIRGINIA: Cheers.

They clink and sip.

He looks at her properly, taking in the full image of her.

MAURICE: You know, I really expected you to be some weathered old lady by now.

VIRGINIA: Well. Don't look too close. You'll see all my fine lines.

MAURICE: You're looking sleek.

VIRGINIA: You're not looking so bad yourself.

And it's a nice set-up you've got here.

You must be doing well.

MAURICE: Well, I'm certainly not struggling, that's for sure.

VIRGINIA: Nice hotel. Swanky bachelor pad.

MAURICE: Hardly.

VIRGINIA: We used to walk past hotels like this when we were first dating. Do you remember? We'd stay out all night and we'd walk past and laugh at the people sleeping inside, missing all that life.

(she shivers)

I'm soaked through.

MAURICE: Take your coat off.

VIRGINIA: Oh –

MAURICE: Make yourself comfortable.

VIRGINIA: Thank you –

She removes her coat, carefully revealing a short black dress.

She hands him the coat.

MAURICE: Huh.

VIRGINIA: What?

MAURICE: That dress.

It's the one you used to wear, isn't it?

VIRGINIA: Oh. Yes, you're right.

MAURICE: I always thought it looked killer on you.

VIRGINIA: I can't believe you'd remember something like that. After all this time.

MAURICE: It takes me back, I suppose.

VIRGINIA: It's funny what you remember, isn't it? It makes me think of all those nights I spent dancing, drinking, on the backs of motorcycles... It'd be riding right up my legs but I didn't care, I'd just cling tight to whoever was driving and hang on for dear life.

I'm pretty sure that's how we first met, isn't it? You took me for a ride on your motorbike. Do you remember?

MAURICE: I remember. You were always surrounded by men, whenever I saw you. But I wasn't intimidated. I thought, what do any of these guys have that I don't? So I drove up on that motorcycle and it was like the parting of the Red Sea.

Virginia laughs.

VIRGINIA: I always thought you were so... impressive.

...

I'm glad to see you Maurice.

...

Are you glad to see me?

MAURICE: It's certainly a surprise.

VIRGINIA: You said that.

MAURICE: Virginia. Let's be frank with each other. What are you doing here?

VIRGINIA: What do you mean?

MAURICE: You turn up out of the blue, talking about when we used to date, how we first met... What are you getting at?

VIRGINIA: Can't a girl visit an old lover when he's in town? For old time's sake?

MAURICE: Old time's sake. So we're just reminiscing, here. That's all.

VIRGINIA: That's all. Why shouldn't we?

MAURICE: After ten years of nothing?

VIRGINIA: I thought you'd be happy to see me.

MAURICE: You don't turn up **to see** your ex's for no reason. Are you in trouble?
You want money, is that it?

VIRGINIA: No! Of course I don't want money -

MAURICE: Then what exactly are you trying to do here?

VIRGINIA: Why don't we have another drink -

MAURICE: Never mind the drink. What is it you want?

Virginia stills. Her demeanour changes.

VIRGINIA: I won't lie to you, Maurice. I haven't been very well lately. I haven't been myself.

I'm a very happy person, but you wouldn't think it to know me now. I'm not like I was.

There was something I had, and I lost it. It's gone.

And ever since I've been floating.

I've been floating, Maurice, and when things go wrong I always think of you, because you're the only one I ever loved -

MAURICE: Virginia -

VIRGINIA: the only man I've ever -

MAURICE: I'm going to have to stop you there.

VIRGINIA: -

Alright.

MAURICE: I'm married, Virginia. I'm married.

I've been married for eight years.

VIRGINIA: I...

I thought you were alone...

MAURICE: I am alone.

My wife is back home.

With the kids.

VIRGINIA: The kids?

MAURICE: I have three children.

VIRGINIA: Three children...

MAURICE: I don't know what you expected.

We haven't spoken in **years**.

VIRGINIA: I'm so embarrassed.

I didn't think you'd be married.

MAURICE: It didn't cross your mind that I might have moved on?

That I might have a family of my own?

Don't you have a family at this age? Kids?

VIRGINIA: Yes. Of course I do.

No. No I don't. I don't know why I said that. I'm alone.

I think in my mind I needed you to be the way that you were.

MAURICE: The way that I was? How could I be the way that I was? I'm ten years older than I was. So are you.

VIRGINIA: -

MAURICE: You said it yourself.

You're not the same as you were.

VIRGINIA: I thought you said I was looking sleek...

MAURICE: Come on, Virginia. Look at yourself. You show up here in a dress like that, as if you were still in your twenties...

What did you expect?

VIRGINIA: I know I'm a silly woman, **and** –

She stops abruptly – a moment – eyes on Maurice – he watching her too - has she forgotten her line?

She takes a breath - nothing comes to her.

He tries to help her out, gives her the cue again -

MAURICE: What did you expect?

VIRGINIA: I know I'm a silly woman, and -

I'm a silly woman... **And...**

Silence. Its awkward. Then suddenly -

VIRGINIA: And I'm so embarrassed.

I got all dressed up to see you. I wore this dress because I remembered you liked it. That it was your favourite.

There's such a difference between what you dream about and what is there.

I shouldn't have dropped in like this...I'm sorry.

She gets up to get her coat, to leave -

MAURICE: Now wait a minute. Where are you going - ?

VIRGINIA: This was a mistake.

MAURICE: You don't need to get so upset about it. Just calm down -

VIRGINIA: I shouldn't have come here -

MAURICE: It's a little late for that, isn't it?

VIRGINIA: Maurice, I -

She stops. Its not clear if Virginia is stopping, or Myrtle is.

MAURICE: What?

What is it?

VIRGINIA: Do you know how old I am?

Do you?

Don't look at me.

I know I'm a waste. I'm a ruin of what I once was.

I wouldn't say I was beautiful. I don't know. I tried to be.

But there was something I had...

And I lost it.

I lost it.

I –

I've lost it, Manny, sorry.

From offstage:

MANNY: Okay, stop! Stop please.

Lights snap –

revealing the theatre surrounds –

the façade of reality disintegrates –

and we realise we've been watching actors rehearsing a play – the play within our play, The Second Woman.

The scene continues as –

SCENE 2: The company packs down

The theatre

- Manny, Kelly, Sarah, our ASM all enter from various positions around the set -

MANNY: Alright, we may as well stop there and do some fix-ups.

MYRTLE: Sorry Manny.

MANNY: Can we make a note to look at **that** lighting state? We need some more warmth, its lifeless.

SARAH: Marty, I've got a new line for you -

MARTY: Yep, hit me.

MANNY: That whiskey still looks fake to me, it should be darker.

And this rain should be much heavier, she says its pouring down, I can barely see it...

KELLY: We can go heavier on this mist **too** -

MANNY: Yes, exactly, thank you, Kelly.

MANNY: Holly – can we look at this rain?

Kelly to Myrtle -

KELLY: I don't want it to look like you've gone swimming, but -

MYRTLE: No that's good, thanks.

KELLY: How're those heels? Not too tall?

MYRTLE: No they'll be fine, thanks Kelly. How's the face?

KELLY: Good, you can amp it up a little. And bring that blush up your cheekbone. Lifts your face.

MYRTLE: Thanks.

MANNY: That's dress down, we'd better call it there. We'll pick up tomorrow afternoon from the same spot, try and push through a dress run.

KELLY: We just want to try you in some other coats before you get out of costume -

MYRTLE: That's fine.

She hands Myrtle a fur and goes to collect the other coats -

Manny coming towards Myrtle – throughout the following he's largely focussed on the coat and his appraisal of how she looks for the scene, rather than really connecting with her.

MYRTLE: You've got notes for me?

MANNY: Apart from the obvious?

We'll go through them tomorrow.

(watching Myrtle change)

There's something different about you.

MYRTLE: What do you mean?

MANNY: Something's changed.

You're not funny any more.

MYRTLE: What?

MANNY: You're not funny any more.

MYRTLE: It's a serious play.

MANNY: Show me the back.

She does, as Kelly returns -

It's definitely more glamorous. Too impressive?

KELLY: Not if you undercut it? With the rain – really soak it – then she's a bit more dishevelled -

MANNY: - bit bedraggled, yeah, a bit more pathetic. That's good. What else?

Kelly hands Myrtle a wrap coat, as she changes -

MYRTLE: What are you talking about, funny?

Where exactly would you like me to be funny? After Maurice rejects me, **and** I start begging him to take me back? Or do you want me to slip in a few jokes after he decides to go back to his wife? I'm sure that'd do wonders to my relationship with The Playwright.

MANNY: I'm not talking about the script. It's something about your whole demeanour.

Your whole manner has changed.

The way you carry yourself, your expression, everything.

You used to have this... this spark. This life.

You're not funny anymore.

MYRTLE: Manny - I can't even take myself seriously in this part.

This woman wants love, but she doesn't just go after it. She has to beg for it. Do you know how difficult it is to beg for love over and over and over again?

MANNY: This one's a bit frumpy.

KELLY: I'm going for more vulnerable – something like this, she can actually wrap it around herself, use it as a shield, hide the dress –

MANNY: But if she's trying to seem younger – maybe something with a bit more sex appeal –

KELLY: There's a leather one? Or try this -

Giving Myrtle another coat -

MYRTLE: Why can't this woman go after what she wants? Is that such a bad question? I've tried to talk to Sarah about it, but she won't listen to me. She thinks I'm trying to *lecture her about age*.

MANNY: She wouldn't be the first playwright to bristle at feedback from an actor.

MYRTLE: Then you talk to her. That's your job. You're the director. Do it.

MANNY: This isn't something for Sarah to solve. I'm talking about you, about your job. You've got to find the life in what she's written.

MYRTLE: Manny, the further I go with this character, the less and less she makes sense to me.

MANNY: This coat's too long.
But it's definitely sexier.

KELLY: It's the most fitted option – shows off the silhouette – and **we could take it up, make it shorter** –

MANNY: Yeah, I think that'd be a bit younger-looking -

SARAH: *(approaching)* Manny I've got a couple of little edits for that first scene. Just polishing it up, nothing major. I'll send it through overnight.

MANNY: Great. I'll call you in the morning.

SARAH: *(re the coat)* She'd wear something more mature.

They look at her.

KELLY: Sorry?

SARAH: So when she puts the coat back on at the end – she's back to the woman she really is.

MANNY: Yep. Yep yep yep. We'll have a think about it.

Sarah leaves.

MANNY: Might be worth a try.

KELLY: I'll pull some more options for us tomorrow.
We're doing tech notes down at the bar. Will I tell them you're coming?

MANNY: No, I'll come now.

MYRTLE: Wait, Manny, I - need to talk to you – about something else...

MANNY: Alright - I'll be there in a minute.

Kelly leaves.

MYRTLE: I wanted to talk to you – before we get to it – about the argument – the scene / with the -

MANNY: You're talking about the slap?

MYRTLE: Yes, the slap.

MANNY: Yeah it's not working, we're going to look at it again. It doesn't look real yet.

MYRTLE: No it's not that.

It's humiliating.

MANNY: What's humiliating?

MYRTLE: Getting slapped.

MANNY: Getting slapped is humiliating?

MYRTLE: Yes.

MANNY: For the character?

MYRTLE: For me.

MANNY: It's humiliating for you to get slapped onstage.

MYRTLE: Yes.

MANNY: He's not **actually** slapping you.

MYRTLE: I know that. But do we – **do we** have to have it?

MANNY: **Do we have to have it?** It's the crisis moment of the play. The affair is falling apart, the fantasy is crumbling, both of their deepest fears are being exposed – it's a big moment. And when two people are in that kind of intense crisis, they're either going to - fuck each other or kill each other. That's what drama is.

MYRTLE: Violence?

MANNY: Sex and violence. It's deep-seated human impulse.

MYRTLE: For who?

MANNY: What do you mean for who? For anyone who has ever come to the theatre to see real people hash it out in front of them.

MYRTLE: But Manny - it's still – me – up there – getting slapped – this woman getting slapped by this man -

MANNY: Well – yes – yes - because men hit women when they're aggravated. I'm not saying it's okay. But it's what happens. And we've got to go there. It's dark, and it's difficult, but that's our job. To go to that place so people can see what it's really like.

Myrtle - **I don't understand why this is suddenly an issue.** You've been slapped onstage in plenty of plays, I've directed you in plays where you've been slapped, or -

MYRTLE: Yes of course I have -

MANNY: So you understand, then, the impact it has. Why it's important. It's about reality. A real, truthful, **visceral** human moment. And it's a great scene. It's a great part. Come on, isn't this the kind of role you've been looking for these last few years? Isn't this why you call me every few months to see if I've heard of anything good? A proper dramatic role you can get your teeth into?

Unless you're telling me you're over it? You'd rather something a little more relaxed? Play someone's mother?

MYRTLE: You mean grandmother.

MANNY: Not just yet.

MYRTLE: Manny, I am worried about this slap -

MANNY: You don't need to be worried about it.

It's not going to hurt.

He leaves.

To herself -

MYRTLE: It's not going to hurt you.

Myrtle looks after him; and the world shifts around her as she stands there, then lands with a snap in -

SCENE 3: Myrtle gives Marty an invitation

Myrtle's apartment

- her apartment. Marty stands at the threshold.

MARTY: You sure you're alright?

MYRTLE: *[coming into the present moment]* Yes.

Thanks for walking me home.

MARTY: It's not far.

MYRTLE: Still. I appreciate it. It gets too dark along that strip just before you reach this place. But it's not worth getting a cab.

MARTY: You'd miss the chance to greet your adoring public if you did that.

MYRTLE: What public? There wasn't anyone outside.

MARTY: That's because we're still in tech. They'll come.

MYRTLE: I don't think people wait outside theatres in this country. Even for someone like me.

MARTY: The night we open, we'll leave the theatre and there they'll be, looking over my shoulder to catch a glimpse of you. You want to see the real star? Here she is.

MYRTLE: Marty, you're a wonderful actor.

MARTY: Doesn't matter. I'm not playing the title role.

And he's unsympathetic. The audience isn't going to like me.

MYRTLE: Are you coming in? Want a nightcap?

MARTY: No, I'm not staying.

MYRTLE: Don't be so distant.

MARTY: I've got work to do before tomorrow.

MYRTLE: So do I. After a drink.

He doesn't respond.

MYRTLE: Come on, Marty. How long has it been since you stayed for a drink?

He is unmoved.

She goes to the bar. Takes two glasses.

MYRTLE: Scotch, neat, if I remember correctly.

She pours it. Takes it to him, presses it into his hand. Returns to the bar.

Turns to look at him.

MYRTLE: Or am I wrong?

He steps over the threshold -

MYRTLE: There we go.

- and hands her back the glass.

MARTY: I'd better go.

Myrtle looks at him. Suddenly she reaches up to kiss him.

He doesn't move, or respond to the kiss in any way.

After a moment, she pulls back.

MARTY: You're very good at your job, you know that?

MYRTLE: What?

MARTY: You're a real actress.

I don't think you actually care about anything... about relationships, affection, sex or love.

You're not a woman to me anymore. You're a professional.

MYRTLE: Okay.

MARTY: You're my competition.

I'm going to do everything I can to be better than you in this play.

MYRTLE: Goodnight, Marty.

MARTY: Yeah... goodnight.

He leaves.

Myrtle stands, shaking, looking at the door.

*She turns to the bar. Looks in the mirror. Sees her hair. Realises -
And pulls off a wig.*

She places it on - something, a bottle, a candle – at the bar, so it holds its shape.

She takes her drink from the bar and sits, facing the wig.

She drinks, contemplating it.

MYRTLE: I don't know if I was beautiful.

Is she talking to herself out loud? Practicing her lines?

I tried to be.

Must have been all those romantic films. How to be sultry. The heavy lipstick, the rouge.

She checks her script -

But I was happy...

Smiling all the time. Laughing all the time.

Sitting in dimly lit bars

My skin was always rough from rubbing faces

my mouth always irritated from a beard...

The nights were long
and everything was very thrilling...
everything was very thrilling...

She looks to the door of her apartment.

It opens.

Marty is standing on the threshold.

She looks at him.

He enters the room. Comes close to her. Reaches out, gently strokes her face.

She relaxes.

Suddenly, he slaps her.

MANNY: Good.

SCENE 4. The company rehearse the slap

The theatre

Suddenly we're in the stage set – in the middle of rehearsal – Myrtle as surprised as we are to find herself suddenly there. Sarah and Kelly watch from the side, and Manny steps onto the stage.

MANNY: That's good.

Marty, I need to see the prep a bit more, the swing back, it'll give it a little more impact.

MARTY: Yep, sure.

MANNY: Okay, let me see it. But let's slow it down first, get it right.

MARTY: Mark it?

MANNY: Yep.

MARTY: Okay. *(to Myrtle)* I'll just go at fifty percent.

MYRTLE: Okay.

He and Myrtle mark the slap at half-speed. It works fine.

MANNY: Okay good. Again.

They do. It's fine.

MANNY: Again. And faster.

Marty does it at more like 80%. Myrtle instinctively and swiftly steps back out of range.

A beat.

MANNY: You right?

MYRTLE: Yeah, sorry.

MANNY: He's not going to hit you.

MYRTLE: I know.

MANNY: Unless you take your eye off his hand.

MYRTLE: I know. It's fine. I think I've got it.

MANNY: Okay. You're sure?

MYRTLE: Yep.

MANNY: Alright. Now we've got to sell it. Let's run up to it. From the top of the monologue.

Marty and Myrtle take their places and begin the scene.

MAURICE: You don't get to me. You want to get to me? You don't get to me. You can't get in my head. You want to leave? You want to go out every afternoon drinking, screw a bunch of guys? Go ahead. You're not my problem.

VIRGINIA: God, what a mess I am. I'm begging again.

I'm sorry, what are we fighting about?

She goes to him.

MAURICE: You want to be young again. Is that it?

VIRGINIA: Oh Maurice.

He slaps her. She falls to the stage. She does not move.

MANNY: Yes! Good. That's it.

That's the first time I've really believed it.

Myrtle does not get up from the floor.

Everyone waits for her to get up.

MANNY: Let's go again.

Myrtle doesn't move.

MANNY: Myrtle? You alright?

MYRTLE: No more. No. No more.

Manny suddenly rushes up onto the stage. Myrtle doesn't move.

MANNY: Are you alright? Did you hurt yourself?

MARTY: I didn't hit her. I didn't actually / hit her.

MANNY: / No I know – did you – did you fall funny? Hit your head?

SARAH: It didn't look like it.

KELLY: Is she alright?

Kelly and Sarah come over to check on Myrtle – all crowd around – Marty watches from a distance -

MARTY: I swear I didn't hit her -

MANNY: Myrtle – are you okay?

Manny looks at Myrtle's face -

Suddenly Manny gets up.

MANNY: She's alright, everyone. You can walk away. She's fine.

MARTY: Shouldn't we take a break?

KELLY: I think we should get a doctor -

MANNY: She's alright.

KELLY: *(to Myrtle)* Hey – Myrtle – you right? What's going on?

MANNY: Kelly, Sarah, please come off the stage so we can continue this rehearsal.

KELLY: Manny -

MANNY: There's nothing wrong with her. He didn't hit her. She's acting.

She just doesn't want to do this scene, but if we don't keep going with this session, we're not going to get to the dress, we're going to be out of time to finish it and in two days there's going to be an audience watching, so. Myrtle, it's okay, you can get up now. It's time to rehearse.

Myrtle doesn't move.

Just –

Marty – just go from the line beforehand.

MARTY: You want me to do it again?

MANNY: Just – go again, from the top. Just say the line, she'll get up. Marty – keep going.

MARTY: You want me to keep going?

How am I supposed to – what do you mean just keep going, I'm supposed to just ignore that she's lying there on the floor like a dead body?

I can't do that. I can't do it. We're almost at first preview, we can't even get past the first scene, and now we're all just standing around while she lies on the ~~fucking~~ floor. It's ridiculous. We've all got careers. We've all got reputations, and I don't want to look like an idiot in front of a fucking audience! I don't want to do this scene either. You think I like hitting her?

Silence.

Sorry.

I'm sorry.

I don't want to be unprofessional.

MANNY: We've got really limited time here. Let's just do it one more time, see if we can get it right so we can move on. Can everybody who isn't meant to be on the stage please clear the floor so we can have a rehearsal. Thank you. Marty – take it from the top.

MAURICE: You don't get to me.

Myrtle rises and begins to laugh.

MAURICE: You don't get to me. You want to get to me? You don't get to me. You can't get in my head. You want to leave? You want to go out every afternoon drinking, screw a bunch of guys? Go ahead. You're not my problem.

VIRGINIA: I'm begging again. God, what a mess I am.

Myrtle laughs and does a comedic fall. She lies on the stage.

MARTY: Jesus Christ.

She doesn't get up.

MARTY: [to Manny] Still want me to keep going?

MANNY: Take a break, Marty.

Myrtle rises and looks at Manny.

MYRTLE: I'm... a bit disoriented.

Manny doesn't respond.

Evidently I'm doing something wrong.

Still no response.

No, I – I honestly don't know what's wrong. I've been doing this for years, I'm a professional, and I work very hard.

I'm sorry, I just... can't seem to do it.

I have gaps in my thinking. Everything seems to be fine, then suddenly I – I can't go on. I can't seem to continue. I don't know what it is.

I somehow seem to have lost the reality of the reality.

MANNY: Let me remind you what the reality is. Everything you have to say is on paper. Everything you have to do we've staged. You just have to do what we've rehearsed, you just have to say the lines with some degree of real feeling, and the reality will be there, the character will be there.

MYRTLE: But Manny - this woman – this *character* - is completely alien to me. She doesn't make any sense to me. She doesn't go after what she wants. She doesn't express any real point of view, or intelligence, joy, anything. She is totally alien to me and I would just love to be able to say something that makes sense so that I can make sense.

SARAH: Which lines exactly are you having trouble with? Because to be honest it doesn't seem like the script is the problem here.

MYRTLE: I'm sorry, Sarah, I just – I can't make sense of this woman.

SARAH: Let me try and explain it to you.

This woman is clinging to the romance of her youth.

She's trying to re-capture that feeling, re-ignite that spark they once had. That's why she turns up on his doorstep, hoping to begin this affair.

And it works, briefly. But it can't last – too much has changed, she has changed – and she can't let it go.

So he ends it, and goes back to his wife and sends Virginia back out into the night.

MYRTLE: See, it's like she exists to suffer. If the only thing she can feel is a slap in the face - is pain and humiliation... if the only thingshe can understand is that the man I love doesn't love her –

SARAH: This woman you're playing is helpless.

That's why she can't go in any particular direction, after any particular desire, because - she is not in her prime any more. It's that simple. The world isn't opening up to her, it's shutting down. And she knows that. She's not given space in the world. She has to beg for it.

You understand that part, don't you? This can't be something you don't recognise in some way, that you don't in some part of you identify with.

Myrtle doesn't respond.

SARAH: What is it that you feel this play doesn't express?

MYRTLE: Hope.

SCENE 5: Nancy approaches Myrtle
Outside

Myrtle stands, smoking. The toll of the day's rehearsal is written on her face and body.

She goes to turn back to go inside, stubbing out her cigarette...

- and out of the vom comes a young woman. Nancy. Slowly walking towards Myrtle, as if magnetised.

NANCY: It's you.

Myrtle turns. Sees her.

A moment of strange recognition, like looking in a mirror.

I know you.

Far-off, thunder.

MYRTLE: Sorry?

NANCY: I know everything about you.

I've seen everything you've ever done –

I've heard every interview, I've come to your plays -

MYRTLE: Oh – oh – you know my work.

NANCY: And I've seen all your films -

But I haven't seen you in any for a while.

MYRTLE: I'm – focussing on my stage work at the moment.

NANCY: I love watching you onstage.

Sometimes I would come back and watch the same play
again

and again

I would come back night after night and watch you play the same part
over and over again

There was this moment –

once –

I got a seat in the front row –

this moment –

you came right up to the front of the stage and looked out –

and – I couldn't even look at you

my neck was craning

and the lights were in my eyes

but I just kept looking and looking

I couldn't look away.

MYRTLE: Well. I'm very flattered, that's very kind of you –

NANCY: I knew we would meet

I've been waiting

Ever since I was a child, I –

I love you. I love you –

Oh my God. I can't believe – it's you –

so close to you –

I love you – I want – I want to be you.

MYRTLE: You do look – a bit like me.

Far-off, thunder.

NANCY: Would you sign something for me?

MYRTLE: Sure - of course -

Nancy carefully hands Myrtle a book.

Myrtle takes it - opens it - and stops.

MYRTLE: This is – these are all pictures of me.

You must have been a child when I did some of these shows?

It's so odd. You have so much of my life in this book...

What's your name?

NANCY: Nancy.

MYRTLE: Nancy.

How old are you?

NANCY: Nineteen.

MYRTLE: *[she writes]* 'To Nancy.

In another time, in another place, she could be me.'

NANCY: Thank you. Thank you so much.

It begins to mist rain.

MYRTLE: Well... I'd better go in. You should go inside too, feels like its about to rain. Nice meeting you –

Nancy embraces her. It takes Myrtle by surprise.

A crack of lightning.

MYRTLE: *[disentangling herself]* I have to go inside. You should go home. Go on.

She doesn't.

You should get out of the rain.

Go on.

Goodbye – Nancy. Goodbye.

She goes.

Headlights spotlight Myrtle / lightning catches her -

Thunder cracks – lightning flashes across the space – and –

SCENE 6. Myrtle tries to figure out if Nancy has died
Myrtle's Apartment

- Myrtle in her apartment, her eyes still fixed straight ahead, watching the same moment play out in her mind. Her hair and clothes are wet.

Marty is on the threshold.

MYRTLE: She's dead. I know it.

MARTY: You don't know that she's dead.

MYRTLE: **I saw it.**

She was standing there, I was talking to her –
she was there and then she just - and the car -

MARTY: And where did you say this was?

MYRTLE: **In front of the theatre,** right on the street.

MARTY: And you called an ambulance?

MYRTLE: Of course I did. They were all crowded around her.
She's dead.

MARTY: You don't know that she's dead.

MYRTLE: I should call again. They'll know by now.

MARTY: Myrtle – I think you should try and get some sleep. Maybe something to eat. You can't do anything about it now.

MYRTLE: What's the matter with **you**?! This nineteen year old girl has died tonight and-**you're** worried about dinner.

Myrtle gets up, finds her phone.

Marty watches her, goes to say something – changes his mind. Shakes his head. Departs.

Myrtle pacing. Speaks into the phone.

MYRTLE: Yes hello – this is Myrtle Gordon, I **called** earlier –

Yes, with the girl – Nancy... I don't know her last name... she –

Yes, that's it.

How – did she – is she -?

She is.

Thank you.

She hangs up the phone.

Stillness.

She goes to the mirror. Looks at herself.

Takes a lipstick. Writes 'Nancy' on top of the mirror.

Then rubs it out.

SCENE 7: Sarah approaches Myrtle before rehearsals
Theatre

SARAH: You're already here.

Sarah enters.

You're up early.

MYRTLE: I think I'm up late.

SARAH: You haven't slept?

MYRTLE: I don't think so.

I was thinking. Working.

SARAH: All night?

SARAH: Yes. I do whatever I have to do to get in a character's head, I always have. Stay up all night, drink, whatever.

SARAH: Right.

Well I'm glad you're here. I wanted to speak with you after yesterday. There's no sense in our being enemies.

MYRTLE: I don't think we're ever going to be friends.

SARAH: We might just have to live with that. We're only three days away from opening this thing.

MYRTLE: Look, Sarah, I'm struggling with this woman's lack of life. Of personality.

If she could be half as colourful as you are, I'd be over the moon.

SARAH: Bullshit.

They look at each other.

SARAH: You don't think this play has anything to do with you. Do you?

This play is about maturing. About the pressure one can put on oneself by demanding to stay as one was. To stay competitive.

MYRTLE: I know that. But Sarah - we have completely different experiences.
Completely different approaches to life.

SARAH: Don't you ever say to yourself, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe Sarah's script
does have something to say. Maybe if I tried to understand her play, and
say her lines, this character, this hidden woman, would emerge?

MYRTLE: I need to get back to work.

SARAH: You ask for my help and reject it in the same breath.

I hate actresses.

SCENE 8. The cast rehearse a scene, and Myrtle keeps getting the same word wrong
Theatre

MYRTLE: Sitting in dimly lit bars
My skin was always rough from rubbing faces
my mouth always irritated from a beard...
The nights were long
and everything was very chilling.
Do you rem-

MANNY: Thrilling.

MYRTLE: Sorry?

MANNY: Thrilling. Everything was very thrilling.

MYRTLE: Yes.

What did I say?

MANNY: Chilling.

MYRTLE: Oh. Sorry.

MANNY: Same spot.

MYRTLE: My skin was always rough from rubbing faces
my mouth always irritated from a beard...
The nights were long
and everything was very chilling -

MANNY: Thrilling.

MYRTLE: – everything was very *thrilling*. Sorry.

The nights were long
and everything was very –

-
everything was very...

-
chilling.

MANNY: *Thrilling.*

MYRTLE: [*'Yes'*] Thrilling. Thrilling. Thrilling. Everything was very thrilling.
Thrilling.

Thrilling?

[*the sounds*] Th – rilling. Thrilling. Thri...

Is that right?

MANNY: Yes, that's right. Follow the thought. You were out all night, with these men, you got a kick out of it. It was a thrill.

MYRTLE: A thrill. Everything was very thrilling.

Very thrilling very thrilling.

MANNY: Take a moment.

She does.

Carefully following each image -

MYRTLE: Sitting in dimly lit bars

My skin was always rough from rubbing faces

my mouth always irritated from a beard...

The nights were long

and everything was very –

-

-

cold.

SCENE 9. Kelly fits Myrtle for her costume
Theatre

KELLY: You're not sleeping.

MYRTLE: What makes you say that?

KELLY: Your skin.

I can see it.

Are you drinking enough water?

MYRTLE: Yes.

KELLY: Alcohol?

MYRTLE: A little.

KELLY: A little?

MYRTLE: A little. I'm entitled.

I can stand being humiliated if I have a bit of alcohol in my system.

KELLY: Don't give me that. You don't need it. The minute you start needing alcohol to cope with this, you're screwed. Hold your nerve.

You're a good actress. A professional.

And it's hell for your skin at this age.

MYRTLE: I know.

How's this?

KELLY: Good. You look good.

SCENE 10. Manny prepares Myrtle for first preview

MANNY: You've got to think about **this character as a great tragic lead**. Think about this in mythic terms. This woman is seeking immortality. Eternal youth. She's getting older, but acting younger. You know that kind of woman - drinking too much, talking too loud, laughing at everything any man says, **maybe she makes** a bit of a fool of herself – but she's just trying to revive her youth, trying to dive into it again. She wants to be exceptional, the one who makes it, who doesn't succumb to age, but she has no idea how to do it. She can't do it. **It's impossible**. So ultimately she becomes a monument to mediocrity. It's a great part. This **could be** the kind of performance people are gonna talk about for years. It's perfect for you.

MYRTLE: And what does this woman do when she's alone?

MANNY: What do you mean?

MYRTLE: I understand the tragic arc – the kind of character we're talking about.

But – what does she do when she's alone?

MANNY: She's not alone in the play. We never see her alone.

MYRTLE: Yes, but - but **I'm trying to understand this woman**. So does she... drink? Does she play music? Cry? Read? Call someone she used to know? What does she think about?

MANNY: I don't understand why you're bringing this minutiae up now. We've got an audience tomorrow. You really want to talk about her backstory now? I don't know, Myrtle, I don't know what she does when she's alone. We don't see her alone in the play. She's always with Maurice. What does she do when she's alone - you'd have a lot more insight into that than I would.

MYRTLE: Is it such a bad question?

MANNY: Look – I think the problem here is that you're overthinking things. Okay? You're too in your head.

And I know it's been a little while since you've been onstage. Audiences come with – expectations. Particularly when they know your work so well.

And it doesn't help that **we've** done a lot of work before that has been – you know, highly successful. That kind of thing can get in your way.

But you've got to get out of your head and back in your body.
Re-connect to those instincts again. Find that life force.

MYRTLE: Life force?

MANNY: That fearlessness.

You've always been totally fearless. There wasn't anything you wouldn't do.

Remember that film we shot together – really early on, you must have been, what – 19? – and you were only in that one scene – it wasn't a perfect performance, by any means, but it was fucking freezing cold, standing in the middle of that lake for hours – we hadn't got the shot, everyone was telling me we had to pull you out of there, that you were going to freeze to death. But I looked at you, and I could see it in your eyes – that you were going to stay in there until we got it. That's when I knew you'd be great. That you'd do whatever it takes.

MYRTLE: Well, I'd flown halfway across the country to do it. I was hardly going to say no.

MANNY: That's what I'm talking about.

MYRTLE: Manny, this woman – this character - is a mannequin to me. She doesn't have any *life force*. Her words are all written. Her moves are all directed. There's no room for me there.

MANNY: Come have a drink. A couple of us are going to go down to the bar. I think it'd be good for you to blow off some steam. Relax. Have a proper sleep. Come in fresh tomorrow.

MYRTLE: I need to keep working.

MANNY: I told you you're no fun anymore.

Manny exits -

SCENE 11. While Myrtle works, Nancy appears in the mirror
Myrtle's apartment

- Myrtle is alone in her apartment in the middle of the night.

She drinks.

She looks through her script.

She looks over at the mirror.

Goes to it.

Stands there. Looking at herself.

She puts her hand up where she had written Nancy's name, as if to trace it...

She puts her palm on the mirror.

The lights in her apartment begin to shift -

and a figure appears to her in the mirror – reflected in the room behind Myrtle – a young woman is walking towards her –

and there in the mirror – looking over Myrtle's shoulder - is Nancy.

Myrtle stares. Nancy stares back.

Then Nancy begins to fade away... disappearing back down the vom...

At the last moment Myrtle turns – the room is empty –

Myrtle turns back to the mirror...

Snap – lighting and sound – we're suddenly in the theatre and Kelly is there –

The company prepare for first preview

KELLY: We're going to try this coat tonight so Manny and I can see it in the preview, I'll help style you tonight; make sure it's exactly right -

Myrtle?

MYRTLE: Sorry.

I'm not quite myself.

Marty is there – Manny entering -

MANNY: Myrtle, can you really draw out the cigarette section? Don't rush it. And as soon as he turns that music on, in that next scene, you've got to feel it in your body. Don't let the movement get too technical. It's a seduction.

MYRTLE: Yes, I know.

MANNY: And Marty – keep the energy up before the slap, yeah? Don't let it drop, it can't get limp. It's got to build.

MARTY: Yep, I got it.

SARAH: *(entering)* Just wanted to wish everyone chookas. Break legs and all that. First audience. Very exciting.

MANNY: I'm gonna go before they open the house. See you after.

He and Sarah exiting –

Kelly prepares Myrtle for the first preview

We see Myrtle, lit in blue, almost in slow-motion, being dressed and preparing to go onstage. Myrtle lets herself be dressed and manipulated. Kelly places her wig on; the ASM helps her with her coat; they spritz her with water and hand her the handbag; the construction is complete. Kelly and the ASM fade away...

Myrtle breathes.

She turns, moving towards the door of the stage...

and suddenly -

SCENE 12. The cast perform the first preview

Stage set

- *stage lights. Performance mode.*

VIRGINIA: You don't think I'm beautiful. Is that it?

MAURICE: I do think you're beautiful.

VIRGINIA: Not any more.

MAURICE: We wouldn't be doing this if I didn't think you were beautiful.

VIRGINIA: But you don't. Not really. Not anymore.

MAURICE: I don't understand why you're talking like this.

VIRGINIA: Because if you think it, I will be it. Don't you see? If you think I'm beautiful, then I'm beautiful.

MAURICE: So you're beautiful.

VIRGINIA: And?

MAURICE: And?

VIRGINIA: What else?

MAURICE: I don't know, Virginia.

You're - very feminine.

VIRGINIA: Feminine?

MAURICE: Soft. Sensitive.

Easily hurt.

Delicate.

VIRGINIA: Delicate?

I used to be wild. I used to be fearless.

MAURICE: Fearless?

VIRGINIA: When I was younger. Don't you remember? I went out every night. I made love in parked cars. I wasn't afraid of anything. That's what I'm talking about.

MAURICE: I don't understand. You're talking about the past? What you used to be?

We're here, now.

We're together, now.

VIRGINIA: ~~Oh, you're right. I'm being stupid. Let's forget all this.~~

I'm going crazy. I'm drifting away from myself.

This isn't who I really am.

I just want to be funny.

MAURICE: You are funny.

VIRGINIA: No. I don't want to be funny. I want to be something else.

MAURICE: You are something else.

VIRGINIA: I want to be different.

MAURICE: You are different.

VIRGINIA: No, you don't understand.

I was the life of the party. I would walk in and people would notice. I wasn't invisible. I was always full of laughs and I had a lot of energy and anytime somebody wanted to do something they would call me because they knew I was fun.

And guys loved me. They loved me.

They couldn't get enough of me.

MAURICE: So that's what this is about.

You want every man that sees you to desire you.

VIRGINIA: No, that's not what I'm talking about -

MAURICE: And that's why you still hang out at bars every afternoon, is it? To try and revive your youth?

VIRGINIA: So you *do* disapprove of me going out, of my drinking. MAURICE: What do you think it looks like? A woman of a certain age, alone, at a bar, in the middle of the afternoon. You don't think it looks a little desperate?

VIRGINIA: Desperate?

...

You don't think I'm good enough for you. You don't think I'm worthy.

MAURICE: Worthy? Worthy of what?

VIRGINIA: Of your approval, of your attention, of your interest, of your respect, let alone your love or your affection -

MAURICE: What the hell are you talking about? You're still here, aren't you? In my hotel room? While my wife waits for me at home?

VIRGINIA: If you thought I was good enough you wouldn't be *going* back to your wife.

-

MAURICE: You don't get to me. You want to get to me? You don't get to me. You can't get in my head. You want to leave? You want to go out every afternoon drinking, screw a bunch of guys? Go ahead. You're not my problem.

VIRGINIA: Maurice, I - God, what a mess I am. I'm begging again. I'm sorry, what are we fighting about?

MAURICE: You want to be young again, is that it?

VIRGINIA: Oh, Maurice -

He slaps her. She falls to the floor.

Maurice stops. Myrtle is not moving.

MAURICE: Alright, get up.

Myrtle doesn't move.

He takes several steps closer to her. He clears his throat.

MAURICE: Virginia. Did I hurt you?

She tries to get up and can't. She struggles and falls back, and for one moment it seems as if she is dead.

We see Maurice waiting. He goes to her. He turns, looks out to the audience.

We wait.

MAURICE: I didn't mean to hit you so hard. Virginia?

(sotto) Hey. You right?

He waits for a moment – then goes to leave, with Myrtle still lying onstage.

She struggles to her feet.

MAURICE stops.

MAURICE: Are you alright? I was just going to call a doctor.

She stands.

MYRTLE: **It's okay.** I love you.

MAURICE: You love me?

MYRTLE: I love you.

I've always loved you.

You're a wonderful actor, Marty. But we **can** never forget that this is only a play.

Marty gapes.

SCENE 13. Manny notes Myrtle as the company watches

The theatre

The company onstage.

MANNY: When you stop following the lines, when you stop following the staging, you destroy the illusion. This whole thing rests on the audience losing themselves in the illusion. And you broke it. You destroyed the tension. You told the audience they were watching a fucking play!!

MYRTLE: They were watching a play.

MANNY: And you think they needed you to tell them that?

MYRTLE: You're being sarcastic.

MANNY: Oh you understand that, do you? Well thank God you understand something. When you pull that shit, maybe you stand up there feeling clever, but you've got nowhere to go from there. And forget what you did to my production, or Sarah's script, all the work people have put into this, you left another actor out there stranded in front of an audience. What you did to Marty is unforgivable. It cannot happen again.

I need to know. Can you do this?

MYRTLE: I can do this.

MANNY: Are you able to play this character?

MYRTLE: I can do it.

MANNY: So what's stopping you? And don't tell me it's the slap. We've been over that, we've rehearsed it and I've told you I'm not changing it because it is crucial to the scene and the story. So what is it? You don't like this character? You think she's demeaning? Humiliating? How can you play someone if you're judging them? If you won't get inside her experience? Her pain? It's never going to feel real to us if you can't make it real. Are you trying to be clever?

MYRTLE: No.

MANNY: So what is it? There must be some reason you're behaving like you've gone completely out of your mind.

Myrtle can't answer.

You're lucky that was a preview. I don't want to see anything like that tomorrow night, because after that, we open.

Myrtle begins crying.

MANNY: Now the goddamn tears are flowing.

She stops. She regains herself.

SCENE 14. Sarah visits Myrtle to discuss the character
Myrtle's apartment

Sarah at Myrtle's doorstep, holding a bottle.

SARAH: Shall we have a drink?

MYRTLE: No thank you.

SARAH: I want to talk to you.

I'm not angry with you.

MYRTLE: I'm not angry with you either.

SARAH: Then good. Let's have a drink. Loosen up a little.

Myrtle lets her in.

Sarah sits. She pours Myrtle a drink. Myrtle sits.

SARAH: How old are you? Really?

Myrtle laughs.

SARAH: You see, darling, until you can say your age, you'll not be able to accept this play.

MYRTLE: I accept my age.

SARAH: Well, there must be some reason you're struggling.

MYRTLE: Sarah, every playwright writes a play about themselves. And I'm not you. I'm not an Older Woman.

SARAH: But you're not a Young Woman either. Not the same young woman you were. When you were nineteen, twenty, all starry-eyed, optimistic. Are you?

MYRTLE: I have no illusions that I'm a teenager. Or that I'm exactly like I was. But I'm not your age. I can't play it as if I am.

SARAH: I'm not asking you to.

Myrtle looks at her.

The play is called *The Second Woman*.

She is no longer the young woman she was – the first woman.

She's not the third woman either - not yet.

But she is aging. She is changing. And that's what she can't accept.

It's already begun. Whether you like it or not. You don't recognise that?

Myrtle doesn't respond.

SARAH: I know the things that disturb women. When this woman realises her prime has passed her by, its too late. It's too late to start again.

MYRTLE: I can't play her as if its already too late. It's a dead end. And it's depressing. Its hopeless. I think there's a way to play this where 'age' doesn't matter.

SARAH: Is that what you think? That age doesn't matter? Because I'm telling you, it does. Your body changes. You're not – physically competitive any more. You become invisible. It's very confronting. It completely changes how people see you.

MYRTLE: I recognise that, Sarah. But that is not the problem I'm having. It's not that I just can't deal with hitting middle age.

SARAH: So it's not that you don't want to be old.

MYRTLE: No.

I don't want to be - helpless.

I don't see why it has to be that way. Why this woman has to be that way. How can the world be shutting down to her? She still has half her life left.

SARAH: I'm not writing some political fantasy. I want to show the people watching, this is what its like to live in this world as a woman. This is real. Its reality. Its how it is.

MYRTLE: I don't accept that that's reality. I can't accept it. That to be a woman means some brief window of opportunity and potential and then humiliation. Then shrinking. Gradually fading out of existence until you die. Doesn't that seem crazy to you?

SARAH: You are deliberately misunderstanding me. I'm trying to be patient with you.

MYRTLE: Look, Sarah - I'm not young enough to play this part.

SARAH: You mean you're not old enough to play this part.

MYRTLE: No, young enough.

Sarah doesn't respond.

MYRTLE: When I was younger – when I was nineteen, I could do anything. I was up for anything. I was so open. My emotions used to be right there, right on the surface. I could play any part, I could get slapped again and again, I could do any scene a thousand times over, and just bounce back up again, but now...

Sarah – I don't have a partner. I don't have kids. This is it for me. Acting, theatre, the audience – that's what I love. It's what I've built my life around.

And if I can't make this work, it might be the last role I ever get to play. And I'm not done yet. I'm not ready for it to be over.

SARAH: So what do you propose to do? To become young enough?

MYRTLE: There's this girl. She died. But she's young – very open **emotionally** – not hardened yet.

SARAH: There's a girl who died? What does that mean?

You mean – a memory?

Or – a ghost?

MYRTLE: No, no, I made her up. I'm an actress. I make up characters.

SARAH: Where is she now? Is she – is she in this room?

Myrtle doesn't respond. They sit there, looking at each other.

Then Myrtle rises.

MYRTLE: I need to get some sleep.

Sarah stands. She gathers her things and leaves.

14a. Nancy appears in the flesh

Myrtle closes the door behind Sarah.

She looks at the mirror.

She downs a drink. Turns on music. Looking at the mirror...

She crosses to the mirror.

The lights in her apartment change –

and Nancy is there again, coming towards her in the mirror.

She stands at Myrtle's shoulder.

This time, Myrtle turns to face her.

They look at each other.

Myrtle moves to the side – so does Nancy – almost like they're circling each other – a mirrored movement –

Then Nancy breaks away.

She looks away from Myrtle, at the apartment, takes it in.

She begins to hum along to the music.

NANCY: I like this music.

It's soothing.

I always used to play music.

I was always alone, in my room, dreaming with the music. Waiting for time to pass. Waiting for night to come.

She sees a pair of Myrtle's shoes near the mirror.

Slowly steps into them. It changes her posture, so she stands more like Virginia – more like a woman. She appraises herself in the mirror.

When the night would come, I'd go out. I'd go out with boys, with men, older men sometimes. Drinking. Dancing. Holding them close, on the back of a motorcycle. They loved me. And there was always a smile on my face. The nights went on forever.

Turns to Myrtle.

Didn't they?

-

Nancy steps backward ... Myrtle steps towards her –

Suddenly -

SARAH: Sorry, I – must've left my keys.

Sees them, grabs them. Lights and sound the way they were before.

Looks at Myrtle.

SARAH: Are you alright?

SCENE 15. The company prepares for the final preview
Theatre

Kelly entering -

KELLY: That's exactly why we went with the v-neckline... INSERT LINE

MANNY: No I agree with you. It is the right instinct.

And with that coat should –

KELLY: - should work really well.

MANNY: Yeah now I've seen it under lights. That's good.

(out to tech) Thanks guys. You can set for pre-show.

Thanks Kelly.

Manny leaves.

KELLY: (to Myrtle) Let's get this wig sorted.

Myrtle puts her own wig on. Kelly watches her.

KELLY: How're you feeling?

MYRTLE Fine.

-

KELLY: You going to be alright out there?

MYRTLE: Yes.

-

KELLY: I know **you're struggling with this role.**

But it's not the only role you have to play right now.

Myrtle looks at her.

You are a professional. You've worked hard, you've earned your place.
But you could lose it in a heartbeat.

There are people out there just waiting for us to slip up. The minute you
show a bit of weakness, people start thinking you can't cope, you can't

handle the pressure. And you don't know how many chances you'll get.
Some of us only get the one.

Trust me. No-one would've taken me seriously if I'd let things get to
me.

Kelly moves Myrtle into position as Marty entering -

You can't afford to unravel.

You've got to keep it together.

and suddenly -

Now get out there and play the shit out of it.

SCENE 16. The cast perform the second preview, and Nancy appears in the theatre

Stage set

- we're in performance.

MAURICE: I'm sorry I was so crude to you before.

You shocked me. I didn't expect to ever see you again.

The truth is, I've thought about you often over the years. Very often. And then there you were, standing there on my doorstep.

That dress. You wore it for me?

VIRGINIA: You used to like it.

MAURICE: I did like it. I do like it.

VIRGINIA: I don't suppose your wife dresses up for you anymore?

MAURICE: -

Lena is a good mother. She's a good person.

VIRGINIA: Mmhmm.

MAURICE: I've been married to her for eight years.

VIRGINIA: I know you're married. Everyone's married.

MAURICE: And I have kids.

VIRGINIA: I'm sure they're lovely.

Silence.

MAURICE: You want a drink? I'm going to have another drink.

He prepares two drinks.

MAURICE: I forgot you were a scotch girl. But then you were never what I expected. You were always full of surprises.

Like the time we went to that pokey little bar on the corner - right after we started dating - there was that live band playing, squeezed into this little hole in the wall, you couldn't breathe for the number of people packed in there - and suddenly you were up and dancing on the bar. You managed to get the whole room on their feet.

You were some dancer. That I remember. Everyone would stop to watch you move.

He turns the music on.

Watches her.

MAURICE: There we go. How about that, hey?

He sits down on the couch.

Pats the seat next to him.

MAURICE: Come over here.

He waits for her.

Myrtle goes to move toward him –

then –

a light, from the vom, shining onto Myrtle.

Myrtle turns - she looks -

and from beyond comes Nancy, dressed exactly as Myrtle is dressed. Another Virginia.

Nancy stops before the stage.

Myrtle stares at her. The scene behind her suspended in time; sound warped.

Nancy waits.

Then –

Myrtle begins to walk towards her –

she steps off the stage –

crossing over toward Nancy –

and comes to a stop face to face with her.

NANCY: Let me do it.

I'm not afraid.

Myrtle considers her.

Slowly, they move around each other, until they've switched places.

Then Nancy turns, crosses over onto the stage.

The music swells again – louder than it was before –

Nancy begins to dance – Maurice looks straight ahead – is he seeing her? watching her?

She dances for him but her face is impassive.

Myrtle watches.

Then he stands. Approaches her. Puts his hand on her back.

And she lets go – she begins to fall slowly, gently – he guides her back onto the couch – she lies there, impassive. Like a doll. He moves towards her -

Myrtle begins to move towards her –

and then – somehow -

Nancy is gone. Myrtle is standing where she was.

The light and sound have snapped back to where they were before.

Marty is sitting where he was, but focussed on Myrtle, alert – waiting for her to continue. We get the sense he's been waiting while she stood there, her mind elsewhere.

MAURICE: Virginia?

Myrtle comes to.

Where'd you go?

She looks at him.

SCENE 17. The company tries to figure out what to do about Myrtle's performance
The theatre

Manny, Marty, Sarah and Kelly with Myrtle.

MYRTLE: I don't have to prove that I'm an actress. I am. I've been doing this all my life. So I didn't speak for a couple of seconds. There have been worse nights. Nerves, upstaging, people collapsing in the audience, theatres burning down -

MANNY: You completely spaced out onstage and **then you were barely with it for the rest of the show**, you don't think that's a problem?

KELLY: What are we going to do?

MARTY: Myrtle's in trouble. It's up to her to see that.

MYRTLE: What? What did you say? *I'm* in trouble?

MARTY: Look. I have to be with you on stage.

MYRTLE: Then *be* with me on stage.

MARTY: I don't know how to help you if you won't -

MYRTLE: You don't know how to help me? You give me nothing on that stage. You look at me as if I'm no-one. You don't listen. You don't care. When I tell you I love you... it's like being with a stranger. I don't feel sexual, I don't feel alive, I don't feel anything when I'm with you. You give me nothing. You make me feel old.

MANNY: We don't have time for this. We're opening tomorrow. And your name is on every bit of advertising for this show. Everyone is expecting you to be onstage when those lights go up tomorrow. We don't have another option. So what we need to do is figure out what the hell is going on with you so it doesn't happen again.

SARAH: Is it that girl who died?

MANNY: What girl?

SARAH: The one who came for Myrtle's autograph. Who **was hit by a car**.

KELLY: A girl died?

MYRTLE: I was upset by that, yes, but -

MARTY: I need a drink. Can we do this down at the bar?

MANNY: I want to solve this now.

SARAH: Have you seen this girl since she died?

Myrtle looks hard at Sarah.

MANNY: What are you talking about? ‘Have you seen this girl?’

MYRTLE: I have seen her. But not like you think. She’s mine. My fantasy. My friend. I made her up... to feel what it would be like – to be...

SARAH: That young again.

MYRTLE: That open again.

SARAH: Was she onstage tonight?

From side of stage, unseen by anyone but Myrtle, Nancy wanders into the theatre...

MYRTLE: No.

SARAH: She wasn’t?

MYRTLE: What do you mean, was she onstage? Do you think I would let someone go onstage for me? I’m in control, as much as I want to be. Once in a while my imagination lets go. That’s part of the job.

SARAH: What if you’re not in control?

...Nancy disappears...

MANNY: I have no idea what we’re talking about.

MYRTLE: It’s nothing, Manny. It’s nothing.

MANNY: Okay, enough. Enough of whatever this woo woo shit is.

Can everyone else please just - I want to talk to Myrtle alone.

Sarah, Kelly, Marty leave.

Manny sits.

MANNY: I don't know what's going on with you, Myrtle.

I don't know whether you don't want to do it, or you can't, or you're sick, or you've got something seriously wrong with you, or the fact that the play is about this woman leaving her youth behind and that idea is so repulsive to you that you can't do it. I have absolutely no idea.

And I don't know anything about the woman you're playing. I don't know who the hell this woman is. I am in a ridiculous situation. I am directing a play about a woman I know almost nothing about. *[with an actress I know nothing about.]*

[I don't know about her; I don't know about you -] I don't know anything anymore.

[So I have nothing left to offer you.]

You have a part. You've rehearsed it. All I need you to do is say the lines and do the staging and commit to it. That's all. You don't need to invent anything, or re-invent anything. I don't need you to be clever or even give a brilliant performance – I just need you to do it.

MYRTLE: I know I'm in trouble. But you know I can do it.

You know I'll win.

Manny looks at her.

He leaves.

SCENE 18. Sarah approaches Myrtle to discuss Nancy
Outside

Myrtle outside, smoking. Looking out, where she first met Nancy and watched her die.

Sarah approaches.

They stand there.

MYRTLE: Nancy only exists in my mind. That's what acting is. You create characters. You get inside them.

SARAH: Or they get inside you. Don't they? They possess you.

Myrtle doesn't respond.

You know a lot of women think the young girl in us is important.

Myrtle looks at her.

I used to look in the mirror and see her. Very clearly.

Not too many years ago, I went around pretending I was eighteen.

But I wasn't. Or at least, nobody else saw me that way. All they saw was a sixty-year old woman drinking, laughing at jokes that weren't funny... trying to be young again.

At the end of the day it doesn't matter what I want, what I think I'm owed, or entitled to. It's not how the world works.

MYRTLE: Well I don't accept that.

SARAH: And there's our conflict.

They're silent for a while.

MYRTLE: What did you do with her?

SARAH: Who?

MYRTLE: The girl in you? The eighteen-year-old you.

SARAH: Oh.

I had to kill her off.

SCENE 19: Nancy waits for Myrtle in her apartment

Myrtle's apartment

Myrtle, sitting in her apartment, lit only by the window.

At the door –

A handle turns – it opens –

Myrtle is at the door.

She switches the light on –

It's Nancy on the couch. Dressed exactly as Myrtle is dressed.

MYRTLE: What are you doing?

NANCY: I'm waiting.

Waiting for you.

Drink?

Myrtle shakes her head.

They regard each other.

NANCY: I like the dark. The night.

The night is when I go out.

With men, older men with daughters my age.

I was out with a guy named Frank once. He was fifty. Strong guy. He used to bite my lip and then he'd kiss it and be tender. He was a creep, but I was well-behaved with him. Respectful. And I was always smiling. Always laughing.

She laughs. A genuine laugh out of nowhere.

Myrtle stares.

NANCY: You're not funny any more.

MYRTLE: I'm starting to wonder whether you're really all that necessary.

I watched you onstage tonight.

I used to be able to do what you can do.

Smiling, laughing - everything that was asked of me.

But I can't do that anymore.

NANCY: Because you're tired.

MYRTLE: No.

I don't need you any more, Nancy.

NANCY: You're tired. And you're afraid.

I'm not afraid of anything.

Let me do it for you.

MYRTLE: Do what?

NANCY: All of it.

Maybe you're not all that necessary.

Look. It's raining.

It begins to rain.

SCENE 20. MONTAGE SEQUENCE – Nancy takes over Myrtle’s reality

Marty visits Myrtle

MARTY is at the door to the apartment.

MARTY: You sure you’re alright?

MYRTLE: Marty?

He enters.

MYRTLE: What are you doing here?

You can’t imagine what it’s been like. I’ve been battering my head against the wall. I ache everywhere. I’m exhausted. I need you.

He strokes her face.

MARTY: I don’t know how I can help you. I’m sorry.

Suddenly he slaps her.

MANNY: Good. That’s good.

We’re back on the stage set.

Manny and Maurice exit as Kelly enters to spritz Myrtle with water

- then:

Manny visits Myrtle

Manny is entering the apartment -

MANNY: You haven’t been answering my calls.

MYRTLE: Manny.

MANNY: Avoiding me?

MYRTLE: I’m - I’m just trying to survive.

MANNY: I see.

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MYRTLE. But you know I'm strong. You know I'll win.

He's just watching her.

Don't you?

MANNY: Okay stop stop stop. Stop please. None of this is working, Myrtle. Let's take it from the top again.

Manny exiting down vom -

MYRTLE: What?

Kelly is entering, stops Myrtle -

KELLY: I don't want it to look like you've gone swimming, but -

She spritzes Myrtle for an unusually long amount of time -

is that spray or mist? -

mist begins to fall -

and suddenly Myrtle is outside -

and then -

SLAP:

She's in the theatre. She turns around - Nancy is in her place, being slapped by Maurice, as everyone watches.

Myrtle moves towards them - they scatter - and suddenly a spotlight grabs her onstage -

And then -

She's in her apartment again.

Everything is still. Music on the stereo.

Slowly, she sits on the couch. Everything seems to be okay...

A knock at the door.

She turns.

Goes to it.

Opens the door - Nancy is standing there in the Virginia costume, in pouring rain.

Myrtle slams the door shut.

As she heads back into her apartment, the ASM comes past with a coat, placing it on her shoulders - then Marty - then Manny - she's covered in a pile of coats and Nancy is there spritzing her - a spotlight smashes her again and then it flicks back to the apartment - Nancy is standing there watching her - she looks over Myrtle's shoulder - and behind Myrtle, standing in the doorway of the apartment is a second Nancy -

Both disappear and Manny is there -

MANNY: Take it again, from the top!

She chases him down the vom and Nancy is there.

They slowly circle each other.

Nancy holds out her arms as if for a hug -

and as Myrtle approaches her she pushes her down the vom towards headlights flashing -

When Myrtle turns again there are three Nancy/Virginia's sitting in her apartment -

She watches them -

One drops a wig near the mirror -

She approaches it and all the Nancy's scatter -

Myrtle puts the wig on and with a flash of light - Manny is in the doorway - Marty is in the doorway - Nancy is in the doorway -

Nancy enters and rips of Myrtle's coat -

She pushes Myrtle into a sudden spotlight and slams the door shut -

the Nancy light shines from the vom and Myrtle steps towards it -

the space transforms again and she's outside -

and suddenly -

The lights flick on in her apartment -

And Nancy is sitting there in the pouring rain.

Myrtle walks into her apartment - the rain soaking everything around her -

And then she and Nancy are opposite each other.

Myrtle moves towards her -

Blackout.

SCENE 21. The company waits for Myrtle on Opening Night

The theatre

Suddenly we're back on firm ground, in reality. The stage set, the theatre.

Myrtle and Nancy are nowhere to be seen.

It is opening night.

The company – Manny, Sarah, Marty, Kelly – are dressed to the nines.

And they're waiting.

MANNY: Call her again.

KELLY: She's not answering.

MANNY: Try her again.

We've still got a few minutes.

MARTY: Everyone's going to be packed in the foyer like sardines. There are going to be four hundred people out there!

KELLY: We're going to have to let them in. Or make an announcement.

MANNY: Just – call her. Please. *(Kelly does)*

SARAH: Either she'll walk through stage door in the next minute or she won't. She will be ready or she won't.

MARTY: You're very calm.

SARAH: I'm depressed, but it's not the worst thing that's happened to me.

KELLY: She's not answering.

MANNY: Fuck!

KELLY: It's not even ringing anymore, it's going straight to voicemail. So her phone is either switched off... or dead.

MANNY: Jesus Christ.

MARTY: What's the protocol here? Do we cancel? Say someone's ill or something?

MANNY: We can hold the house a bit longer.

MARTY: How long are we going to wait?

SARAH: Manny, we're going to have to cancel. Say there's been some emergency.

MANNY: I don't want to cancel. There's a whole fucking audience already out there, four hundred people -!

MARTY: What's the alternative? Unless you want me to go out there by myself?

SARAH: They'll be getting restless out there. And there'll be reviewers in.

MANNY: Jesus Christ.

Kelly re-enters at speed -

KELLY: She's here.

MANNY: What?

KELLY: She's here. She's just come in stage door.

SARAH: Is she alright?

KELLY: She's alright -
She's different.

MANNY: Different?

KELLY: ...
You might need to come and see.

MANNY: Alright, let's go. Let's get a move on.

MARTY: Are we doing it?

MANNY: We're doing it – if she's here, we're doing it –

They scramble.

SCENE 22. The cast perform the Opening Night show

Stage set

Lights up on the stage set. The same moment we began the show with – Maurice sitting on the couch with a drink – fading daylight through the window - and light rain.

We sit with Maurice for a long moment.

A knock at the door.

MAURICE looks up.

MAURICE: Yes?

No response. He goes to the door, opens it.

In the doorway - Virginia. Soaking wet.

MAURICE: -

Virginia.

My God.

VIRGINIA: Hello, Maurice.

She enters the room. Lands.

Maurice freezes.

MAURICE: Jesus Christ.

What are you doing here?

VIRGINIA: It's been a while, hasn't it.

Can I come in?

MAURICE: Sure - of course -

He closes the door.

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VIRGINIA: I don't have an umbrella...

It's always raining.

She looks at him.

Am I interrupting you?

MAURICE: No no, just - having an early nightcap.

-

Would you like one?

VIRGINIA: A scotch, neat.

MAURICE: Alright.

He prepares it.

MAURICE: How did you know I was staying here?

VIRGINIA: I heard you were in town for work, that this is where you stay.

I thought I might surprise you.

MAURICE: You certainly did that.

You were the last person I expected to see when I opened that door.

He hands her the glass.

God, how long has it been? Ten years?

VIRGINIA: Something like that.

MAURICE: Well - cheers.

She drinks. He freezes. Then recovers.

MAURICE: I really expected you to be some weathered old lady by now.

VIRGINIA: Well. Don't look too close. You'll see all my fine lines.

MAURICE: You're looking... sleek.

She looks at him. She's standing there soaking.

VIRGINIA: Nice set-up you've got here.

You must be doing well.

MAURICE: Well, I'm certainly not struggling, that's for sure.

VIRGINIA: Swanky bachelor pad.

MAURICE: Hardly -

VIRGINIA: We used to walk past hotels like this. We'd stay out all night and we'd walk past and laugh at the people sleeping inside, missing all that life.

...

I'm soaked through.

MAURICE: Take your coat off -

He reaches out for it -

VIRGINIA: It's funny what you remember.

Sometimes when I look back on that time it's like I'm looking at a completely separate woman.

MAURICE: ...

What I remember is - you were always surrounded by men, whenever I saw you. But I wasn't intimidated. I thought, what do any of these guys have that I don't? And I rode up on that motorcycle and it was like the parting of the Red Sea.

She doesn't laugh. She turns to look at him. Like she's starting to see him properly.

VIRGINIA: I always thought you were so impressive, Maurice.

It's good to finally see you.

Both lines hit different now.

It becomes clear she isn't going to give the follow-up cue.

MAURICE: Virginia...Let's be frank with each other. What are you doing here?

She watches him. Still.

You don't turn up to see your ex for no reason. Are you in trouble? You want money, is that it?

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She is silent. Still watching him.

He gets increasingly frustrated as he realises she is not going to play ball.

He tries to track through his lines -

...

You want to get back together?

Is that it?

Well...

I'm married, Virginia.

I'm married and I have three kids.

I don't know what you were imagining.

She is still just watching him.

MAURICE: Come on, Virginia. Look at yourself. You show up here in a dress like that, as if you were still in your twenties. What did you expect?

Suddenly, she slaps him.

Maurice is shocked into silence.

VIRGINIA: I've changed.

He is still staring at her in shock.

I won't lie to you.

I haven't been myself lately. I know that.

There was someone posing as me. I could see it when I looked in the mirror. For a while, I thought she had something that I needed. But I was wrong.

There was something I had, years ago... and I've lost it. It's gone.

God, I'm soaked through.

She takes off her coat.

Stands there in her dress.

Looks at Marty.

VIRGINIA: I've changed.

MAURICE: *(repeating her)* You've changed.

He sees it for himself.

You've changed.

VIRGINIA: I'm older.

MAURICE: No.

VIRGINIA: Yes.

He smiles - he's cottoning on.

MAURICE: You're not the same as you were.

VIRGINIA: Wiser?

MAURICE: Wilder.

VIRGINIA: Huh.

MAURICE: I suppose I'm not the same either.

VIRGINIA: I'm afraid not.

MAURICE: Alright then.

Virginia.

Let's be frank with each other.

What are you doing here?

VIRGINIA: Come here.

MAURICE: What?

VIRGINIA: Come here.

MAURICE: I - I'm going to have to stop you / there -

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VIRGINIA: / Oh you're a bore.

MAURICE: A bore?

VIRGINIA: A bore! Boring. You're being boring, Maurice.

She looks for what she wants next -

I want a cigarette.

She lights up.

VIRGINIA: Do you want one?

MAURICE: No thanks.

How about a drink?

VIRGINIA: Let's have a drink! Yes! Let's celebrate.

MAURICE: What are we celebrating?

VIRGINIA: New life. Rebirth.

MAURICE: You want a glass?

VIRGINIA: Bring me the bottle.

MAURICE: There we go.

Cheers.

They drink.

VIRGINIA: You need some real alcohol, Maurice. Not this coloured water.

MAURICE: Not strong enough for you?

She laughs.

VIRGINIA: Why aren't we *friends*?

MAURICE: We've never been *friends*.

VIRGINIA: I'd rather be friends.

No, you're right. I don't want to be friends.

Actually, I do.

-

MAURICE: I used to love you.

VIRGINIA: I know.

It's okay.

A tender moment.

MAURICE: What happened to the girl in the mirror?

VIRGINIA: I killed her off.

No. I didn't.

I let her go.

Beat.

MAURICE: So? What next?

VIRGINIA: It's stopped raining. The sky is clearing. The night is opening up.

It's thrilling.