

THE NITTY-GRITTY

by

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FADE IN:

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

A typical Coffee Bean-type joint. College-aged EMPLOYEES serve up versions of the last legal drug. The mood is light and fun. Nobody seems to notice JUDITH CRANSTON waiting to order.

Judith is 50, well-dressed, pursed-lipped and perpetually uptight. At her feet sits her overgrown cat, BUSTER. Buster stares glumly at the desserts in the deli case.

Judith taps the glass to get the baristas' attention. They exchange morbid looks. The newest hire, a PRETTY FEMALE, gets pushed towards Judith.

BARISTA

Um, good afternoon, um, Mrs. Cranston?

JUDITH

Is it? My watch has 11:30. We're not on Mexico time, my child. Bring it back north of the border. And it's "miz" Cranston.

Judith speaks with a vague accent - from her travels abroad, and general pretentiousness.

BARISTA

I'm sorry. What can I get you for, er, for you today?

JUDITH

Yes, well. I'd like an herbal tea.

Judith reaches into her purse and extracts her wallet.

BARISTA

Would you like your usual?

Judith opens the loose change area. Except for a few crumpled receipts it is empty.

JUDITH

I beg your pardon?

BARISTA

You normally get a chamomile tea.

JUDITH

The question isn't what type of tea I prefer, young lady. The question is what kind do you have? Recite your flavor options.

As the barista lists the herbal teas, Judith rifles her purse for spare change and tries to look dignified.

BARISTA

We have chamomile and lavender. Ginger. Licorice, lemon grass, marjoram, mint, ginger... I said ginger already. Rose hips, sage and stevia. Did I mention sarsaparilla? It's kinda like licorice.

JUDITH

(stalling)
Are there any specials?

BARISTA

You mean special teas?

JUDITH

Forget it I'll have chamomile.

BARISTA

One chamomile coming right up.

JUDITH

With stevia and a splash of nonfat soy, if you please.

BARISTA

One chamomile tea with soy and stevia. That's two seventy-five.

The barista hands Judith her tea.

JUDITH

This, what is this. Chamomile did you say? I ordered stevia tea. Read my lips. I'm deathly allergic to chamomile. I erupt in all sorts of...weals and whathaveyous.

BARISTA

But you said--

JUDITH

Forget what I said. Fetch your manager.

But the girl is frozen in her place. Judith's change search has produced a single nickel.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

You know, when I was your age I was interning at one of London's most prestigious literary agencies. By twenty-five I had published my first novel to critical and commercial acclaim. At thirty I was on the cover of *Vanity Fair*. I have over one dozen literary novels to my credit, many of them best-sellers. I have sold more books than you have brain cells.

(pause)

And then there's you.

The barista cowering.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Do you major in inanity or idiocy... Or are you just plain stupid?

BARISTA

(crushed)

I'll be back with your order, Ms. Cranston.

We watch as the barista, now in tears, heads back over to her sympathetic coworkers.

JUDITH

You little cry baby. Wa wa wa wa wa wa wa. Is that what this world's come to, has it? Fine. Forget it. How much did you say it was? Come on, I've got to run.

The MANAGER comes over. We get the feeling he's witnessed this scene before.

MANAGER

(handing tea)

Here you are, Ms. Cranston, it's on the house. Apologies.

JUDITH

Yes, well, you should be. You're lucky I don't phone the better business bureau. I would if I had the time.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I'm late for an appointment as it is, and you've just made me later.
Thank you for my tea.

She takes her complimentary tea and heads towards the exit. There is a glimmer of sadistic pleasure in her eyes.

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

As Judith exits she passes a HOMELESS MAN (Bart). Bart has watched the exchange from his perch by the door.

BART

(sotto voce)
All that promise, ancient history.

JUDITH

Pardon me?

BART

What have you done for me lately,
baby?

JUDITH

The best is yet to come.

Judith trips on the wet doormat, spilling tea on her blouse. Bart keeps a straight face. She drops the nickel in his can, puts her sunglasses on and marches off.

BART

(calling after her)
No dogs allowed.

JUDITH

He's a feline, you cretin.

BART

I wasn't talking about him...

INT. AGENT'S OFFICE - DAY

Judith sits in her agent's office stroking her cat. Across from her sits her AGENT, Harvey. On the wall behind Harvey we see plaques of Judith's many novels, all of them with the word "zombie" in the title - *Zombie Hijinks* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Zombies* and *Zombie 4 Hire*, etc.

Harvey has in front of him the manuscript of Judith's latest novel. Over his shoulder we read: *Z is for Zombies, 3* - or something like it, a la Sue Grafton.

The mood is tense. Harvey thumbs through the manuscript's pages, nervously taps his fingers on the table. He's building up the nerve to break the bad news. Judith can't stand the suspense.

JUDITH

For God's sake, quit stalling and deliver it to me straight.

Harvey exhales.

HARVEY

What can I say, Judith. This is not your best work. I think we both can agree on that?

She gives him a withering look.

JUDITH

(calmly)

What about the publisher, Herb?

HARVEY

(correcting)

Harv. Harvey.

JUDITH

Harper Collins. What did they say?

HARVEY

(bracing for a beating)

They, uh, called it formulaic and derivative. And it wasn't just Harper. All the major houses said the same thing. Minor ones too.

JUDITH

Minor ones?! My God, has it really come to that?

Judith digests the news. This is a big blow. How to salvage some precious dignity?

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Formulaic and derivative... Of course it's formulaic. I invented the zombie formula. *Zombie Nation*, *Zombie Apocalypse*, *Queen of the Zombies*. I mothered them all. *World War Zombie*, okay not that one. That one was derivative. Derived from me! Who I should remind you am the Anne Rice of zombie literature.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I'm not even sure that's proper grammar, Hal!

HARVEY

First off, Judith. I am so grateful for having had you as a client ...

JUDITH

You are using the past perfect tense. I don't like where this is going.

HARVEY

... Sales from your books alone put my eldest through college.

JUDITH

I feel a but coming.

HARVEY

But you haven't had a hit in...

(thinks)

....well in the entire 21st century. What do they call it, the aughts? They've been exactly aught for us. Or naught. Or nothing. And I think it's time to part ways. I have a reputation to uphold, and it's not this.

Harvey pushes the manuscript over to Judith's side.

JUDITH

Now Henry...

HARVEY

Harvey.

JUDITH

I ask for your patience. I don't have to tell you that I'm getting back into the swing after a long lay-off. The bereavement and all.

HARVEY

And I'm truly sorry for your loss. Your mother was a wonderful woman.

JUDITH

My mum, I'll have you know, is unburied and still on ice.

Harvey sits back, shocked.

HARVEY

She died over six months ago,
didn't she?

JUDITH

Indeed. I can tell you this because
you and I have a history. As we
speak Hedda Cranston's corpse
awaits the funeral that I haven't
been able to afford. I did have the
ten grand necessary to lay her
remains to rest when she died, of
course. But I chose instead to
finance the writing of the book you
have in front of you!

(pushes the manuscript
back over to Harvey)

This book was supposed to make me
major moolah.

HARVEY

Moolah?

JUDITH

More money, much more, ten times as
much, one hundred times as much
even, judging by my prior paydays.
So that not only might I put my...
honor mum's memory but also pay off
rather sizeable debts and even
retire to a Caribbean island and I
dunno, write a sequel to the movie
before the screenplay's even
written!

Harvey glances at his phone, pushes a button. A SECRETARY
appears at the door.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

(to secretary)

Get out!

(back to Harvey)

But now I'm washed up, tapped out,
maxed out. And you, small,
unscrupulous, insufferable man that
you are, say there is nothing you
can do for me. Can you in good
conscience leave me at my most
destitute? Isn't there someone else
you can try? Have you really
knocked on all doors?

HARVEY

If you were somebody else I'd try and get you a writing assignment, but you've burned too many bridges with your 101 proof wit.

JUDITH

You know I no longer drink. It's pharmaceuticals only for me these days, thanks much. And you also know that I don't do writing assignments. I simply cannot compose on demand.

HARVEY

You gave up drinking but you're still mean and impossible to collaborate with.

JUDITH

I don't do writing partners either.
(Harvey starts to speak)
Or memoirs. I'm much too private.

HARVEY

What you need is a real job.

JUDITH

What? You can't be serious...

HARVEY

Why not? You have a college degree and a lengthy list of credentials. Something outside literature, just until the creative slump wears off. It might inspire you.

JUDITH

Preposterous. I haven't worked in all my life.

Harvey shakes his head. He's as amused as he is irritated. He pushes the manuscript back over to Judith's side of the table. But Judith hasn't given up.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I came to you as an unknown, Henry. Do you remember? You were the unknown. I took a chance on you, and it paid off. Please, Al. Take a chance on me.

She pushes the manuscript back to Harvey.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

(begging now)

How about you give me ten thousand dollars. It certainly is worth at least that? I'll even throw in a rewrite.

Harvey pushes the manuscript back over to Judith's side, stands up and buttons his jacket. He's had enough. She takes the manuscript and collects her things.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Goodbye Harvey.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Judith exits the office building and marches briskly down the sidewalk. She stops at an ATM machine.

Judith inserts her card in the machine. She presses the view balance button. The screen reads: "Overdrawn" in big red flashing letters.

She continues walking, stops in front of a sandwich place. From outside she eyes the sandwiches in the window. Buster eyes them too. We can almost hear their empty stomachs crumble in unison.

From inside the establishment we can see a TV. On it airs a CNN-type show about a celebrity, whose face is on the TV. It could be "poker princess" Molly Bloom or some other fallen star. But it may as well be about Judith because the shoe fits. Judith listens:

NEWSCASTER (ON TV)

She flew first class, dined at the finest restaurants, rubbed elbows with the heads of Hollywood studios, ran with handsome leading men, and often stood at the center of the world's most delicious gossip. Until it all came crashing down. The question is, why? The answer is the subject of her new book out in stores today.

Judith's POV turns from the TV screen to the reflection in the window of her watching the TV. She looks tired and worn. She brushes back her hair and mutters to herself.

JUDITH

Why indeed...

She continues along the sidewalk. Without breaking stride she deposits her manuscript in a trash bin.

EXT. PSYCHIC - DAY

We are outside a small residence slash business. On the front porch reads a sign that says "Psychic." And below this, "Free birthday readings."

Judith stops in front of the sign.

JUDITH
(to herself)
What nonsense.

But she approaches the front door anyway.

INT. PSYCHIC - DAY

Judith stands at the screen door. She peers inside the kitchen area to see the lady in question, OLGA. Olga is a sensuous Latin woman in her 40s. She stands at the stove in an apron over a lovely dress, stirring a pot of stew. Salsa music plays in the background.

Judith rings the bell. Olga licks her finger and opens the door for Judith to enter.

OLGA
Sit, please. You look hungry.

Judith sits at the kitchen table. Olga scoops up a spoon of her soup and holds it under Judith's chin.

JUDITH
Thanks. No.

OLGA
My mother's frijoles. Say ah.

Judith takes a reluctant slurp. As she swallows her grimace relaxes. She likes it.

Satisfied, Olga takes a seat across from Judith. She bends and strokes the cat.

JUDITH
Don't do that. He doesn't like people.

But Buster doesn't seem to mind the attention.

OLGA
Eeez ok, animals love me.
(takes deep breath;
studies Judith)
Have we met before?

JUDITH
I get that a lot.

OLGA
The laundry mat on Westwood. You
hem skirts, no?

JUDITH
Sorry, no. I'm a writer. Quite
famous, actually.

OLGA
Ah yes. A writer. Your aura...

JUDITH
My wha? Did you say my aura?

OLGA
Eeez black.

JUDITH
Well, black is my favorite color.
It's slimming--

OLGA
It's slimming and goes with
everything. Yes of course. But you
are sad and dreary.

JUDITH
(glib)
I'm sorry you feel that way.

OLGA
A dark cloud. A curse, perhaps. Can
you think of anybody out to get
you? Someone whose name begins with
A, maybe.

JUDITH
No.

OLGA
B, then. I meant B.

JUDITH
No.

OLGA
 Maybe C, si?

JUDITH
 Look, if you're planning on going through the entire alphabet, I haven't the time.

OLGA
 You must cleanse your aura. You need... a peak experience.

JUDITH
 If you mean climax, I'm afraid I'm passed that, girlfriend. Change of life you know how it goes, or maybe you don't. But you'll find out. The word is parched.

OLGA
 Orgasm is not the only way to experience climax, although it's a really good way. Music also. Do you listen to music? Do you dance?

JUDITH
 No and no.

OLGA
 Get up and dance.

Olga goes to the radio and increases the volume. Salsa music floods the room. She starts to dance, beckons to Judith to join her.

OLGA (CONT'D)
 Dancing is a shortcut to the cognition of being, to the awareness of the platonic essences, truth, goodness, beauty.

Judith watches Olga glumly, without moving. So does Buster. Olga sits back down.

OLGA (CONT'D)
 You could try psychotherapy.

JUDITH
 Thanks for reminding me. I should go.

Judith stands to leave. Olga grasps her wrist.

OLGA
 You must develop spontaneity,
 courage, Olympian humor.

JUDITH
 I haven't the time.

OLGA
 You must transcend yourself and
 your obsession with schedules and
 rituals and rules. Think
 symbolically and open our ears to
 that inner voice. Do you hear the
 inner voice?

Judith listens over the din of the music.

JUDITH
 I hear banjos.

OLGA
 Good. The inner voice should sound
 like music.

JUDITH
 Look I don't care about any of
 this. What I want to know is will
 my story be a success.

OLGA
 Your story?

JUDITH
 The one I've just thrown away. Is
 there any chance for me to save it?
 You know, bring it back to life?

OLGA
 Ah, your story. Yes, major success.
 Do not throw away.

Satisfied, Judith rises.

OLGA (CONT'D)
 But... your main character must
 learn certain things.

JUDITH
 (sitting back down)
 Let's have it.

OLGA
 First, you--

JUDITH
My character.

OLGA
If you insist. Your character must learn to treat people as ends, not merely as means. Two, getting along means more than just giving in.

Judith rolls her eyes. Looks as if to say, "Can I go know?"

OLGA (CONT'D)
One more thing. What is your story about?

JUDITH
It's about zombies.

OLGA
Zombies. You mean someone who's been infected with the plague of the 21st century?

JUDITH
No. I mean the undead.

OLGA
The lesson here is not to be so literal.

Judith sees a book on the kitchen counter. It is Abraham Maslow's The Farther Reaches of Human Nature.

JUDITH
This is nonsense! The last thing I need is another bloody shrink!

At the screen door appears a handsome LATIN MAN holding a bouquet of roses.

MAN
Amor! Happy Dia dos Namorados!

OLGA
Felipe!
(translating for Judith)
Dia dos Namorados is Portuguese. It means Valentine's Day.

Olga rises as he enters and jumps into his arms. He sets the flowers down and twirls her in embrace, kissing her neck. The lovers lose themselves in each other until Judith raps on the table. It goes on another moment, then Felipe sets Olga down.

She whispers something to him and he goes inside. She smooths her dress and turns back to Judith.

OLGA (CONT'D)

Time's up. That will be one hundred dollars.

JUDITH

One hundred dollars! That's preposterous. Your sign advertises free birthday readings.

OLGA

The first fifteen minutes are free. After that I charge by the hour. You have been here almost two. Consider that a birthday discount.

(pause)

One hundred dollars please.

Judith thinks about it, takes out her checkbook.

JUDITH

Okay. But only if you throw in some of that soup.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Judith at the trash bin. She reaches inside to retrieve her manuscript, but it is missing. She watches as across the street the homeless guy Bart squats to take a crap. He's got her manuscript in his hands and he's flipping through the pages as he finishes his business. Then, he uses the manuscript as toilet paper.

JUDITH

No! Not my--

Bart sees Judith and waves unself-consciously. Judith turns on her heels and hurries away.

INT. JUDITH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Judith sits in front of her typewriter wearing a bathrobe. The TV is on in front of her. She inserts a blank page into the typewriter. She types:

Z IS FOR ZOMBIES, 3; BY JUDITH CRANSTON; REWRITE.

She pulls out the page and sets it down beside her. She puts in another blank page, poises her fingers above the keys, pauses, waits. But nothing comes. Very carefully she henpecks the word RUBBISH over and over. RUBBISHRUBBISHRUBBISHRUBBISH.

On the TV plays a scene from the movie Leaving Las Vegas. Nicolas Cage's character, having resolved to drink himself to death, throws his possessions into plastic bags and leaves them on his front lawn; then he burns various pictures and letters. This gives Judith an idea.

INT. JUDITH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Judith sits in front of a bookshelf. There is an empty trash can beside her. She grabs her high school yearbook. She opens to the first page to read: "Senior Year, 1989 - Property of Judy Cranston."

Judith opens to earmarked pages. Judith as head of the Debate Club, on the school newspaper and yearbook committee. Her pictures are circled. We get the impression of a socially awkward but ambitious teenage girl. Beneath her yearbook photo reads the caption: "Most likely to succeed." And beneath the caption, her last name has been crossed out to read "Tanner." Judy Tanner.

She continues to flip through the pages, stops at a photo of the varsity football team. A handsome boy, top row, shaggy blonde hair, has been circled. This is Blake Tanner. She flips through other pictures of Blake. As prom king, baseball stud, general heart throb. A heart has been traced around his yearbook photo in glitter.

Her finger tenderly traces his photo's outline. She hasn't lost that lovin' feeling. She turns to the back of the book reserved for messages from friends. There is a lot of empty space in this part of Judith's yearbook. The last page, which she entitled "Reserved for Blake Tanner," is also blank.

She replaces the book on the shelf, grabs the yearbook beside it and repeats the process. She opens to the first page. It reads "2004 - Property of Mia Marlowe." She opens to earmarked pages, sees photos of Mia as prom queen, cheerleader, athlete. The female counterpart to Blake Tanner. Beneath Mia's senior photo we read: "Most likely to help those in need."

Judith turns to the back of Mia's yearbook and it's filled with upbeat messages. "You rock! Gorgeous. Adore you. Etc." What you'd expect to see written about the most beloved girl in school.

Judith tosses the yearbook in the trash.

INT. STUDY/GUEST ROOM - NIGHT

Now we are in a room which looks to have once been an office which got converted into a guest room. A writing desk is pushed off to the side to make room for a bed and night stand. But the bed is a hospital bed. On the night stand sits a stack of unopened hospital bills addressed to Hedda Cranston. Beside the bed is an empty IV bag on a stand. This is the room in which Judith's mother passed away.

On the wall we see framed pictures and plaques. Judith opens the door and quietly enters. We get the feeling she doesn't come in here much. She touches the bed, goes to the wall and stops before the memorabilia. We get a feel of Hedda's personal history. She was a famous actress in her day. A picture of the young Hedda in "Dancin' with the Stars." On the shelf by the plaques is a Tony award.

Judith stops to look at the picture, sees her reflection in the glass. She looks supremely depressed and alone. She brushes hair off her brow and brushes the emotion away.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Judith opens her medicine cabinet. It is full of prescriptive medication. She grabs the bottle labeled Xanax. Shakes it. It is empty. She picks up one labeled Trazodone. Also empty. The bottle of Lithium goes untouched. She closes the cabinet.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Judith opens the fridge. Inside it is empty but for a bottle of champagne. There is also a birthday cake. The song "Last Christmas" by George Michael plays softly in the background.

Judith sits at the kitchen table with the bottle of champagne and the cake. On the cake sit five candles. She lights the candles.

JUDITH
(to herself)
Happy birthday to me...

She closes her eyes as if to make a wish and blows out the candles. She cuts a slice of cake and places it on a paper plate. Without taking a bite she throws the slice of cake in the trash, then the rest of the cake. She takes a long pull from the bottle.

Judith opens the fridge to put back the champagne, now half-consumed. In the butter tray she sees a vial of liquid morphine. On it we read the name Hedda Cranston.

Judith pulls the morphine out and squirts a generous dose into her bottle of champagne. She holds the bottle to her lips. The George Michael song ends. We can hear the DJ on the radio.

DJ (ON RADIO)

That was George Michael. Re-entering the Top 10 for the first time in 17 years and still going strong. We miss you, George. So much here's one more."

The next song is "One More Try."

Judith remains standing in front of the open fridge with her bottle of suicide brew. She starts to sway to the song as if dancing with herself.

JUDITH

(singing along)

"I've had enough of danger, and people on the streets. I'm looking out for angels, just trying to find some peace. Now I think it's time, that you let me know. So if you love me, say you love me, but if you don't just let me go."

She is embracing herself. A tear streams down her eye and drops into the champagne bottle hugged to her chest. She looks down at the glass. The DJ interrupts the song, breaking the mood.

DJ

All those royalty checks poor
Georgie Porgie will never even
see...

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Judith stands at the wall-mounted kitchen telephone, her mother's address book in hand - it says "property of HC." She opens to the letter M. Scans the page for Mia's name. Beside it is listed a series of phone numbers dating back almost a decade. The numbers are crossed out except for the last one.

Judith dials the number beginning with the 206 area code (Seattle).

PHONE RECORDING

This number has been disconnected
or is no longer in service...

Judith hangs up, slumps down on the table as George Michael finishes up:

GEORGE MICHAEL (ON RADIO)
 "I'm so cold inside. Maybe just one
 more try..."

Outside, the sound of thunder clap. Then it begins to rain.

INT. HIGH RISE CONDOMINIUM - NIGHT

Later that night. The door opens to reveal Judith. She is soaked from the rain. Across from her stands Miles Braxmann, MD. He is Judith's psychiatrist. In the BG we can hear the SOUNDS of a cocktail party in full swing.

MILES
 Judith.

JUDITH
 Hello, Miles. I need to see you.

MILES
 It's ten o'clock on Friday night,
 Judith.

JUDITH
 Yes, well. I hope it's not past
 your bedtime.

As she enters, a SECURITY GUARD arrives, breathless from taking the stairs.

GUARD
 She just barged right in, Mr. B.
 Wouldn't even give me a name.

Miles motions "It's okay" and closes the door, watches from the entrance as Judith weaves her way through the 60-something GUESTS in evening attire, conspicuous in her nightgown. She seems oblivious that there's a party going on until she takes a glass of champagne off a server's tray and carries it with her to the back of the room and down the hall. Braxmann's wife steps in front of Judith and starts to speak but Braxmann holds up his hand and follows Judith.

INT. HOME OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Miles' home office. Judith enters, Miles following. He shuts the door behind them.

MILES

It's my wedding anniversary,
Judith. You can't just barge into
my home like this.

JUDITH

I had no choice. It is your
ludicrous policy not to call in
refills and I'm out of my
medication. You think I like
trudging about in the rain?

Miles sighs and motions for her to sit. He goes to his desk
and picks up a prescription pad, sits on the edge of the desk
and stares at her, contemplating.

Judith looks at the faux fireplace.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I've often wondered why you have a
fireplace in a room without a
chimney.

MILES

You don't find it soothing?

JUDITH

(shakes her head)
It's just phoney.

Miles picks up a remote, presses a button and the image of
the fire disappears.

MILES

So. How have you been?

JUDITH

Fantastic. Never better. Here.

She hands him a list of her medications. He takes the list.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Make sure to specify the candy-
flavored ones. Enteric coated, I
think is the medical term. They're
much easier to dry swallow. Oh and
I'll need a six-month supply.

MILES

(reading the list)
These are controlled substances,
Judith. I'll need to see you back
in two weeks.

JUDITH

No can do, Miles. I'm going away for a while. Far far away for a very long while.

MILES

If I didn't know you better I'd say you were acting erratic.

(removes his glasses)

Is there something you'd care to discuss? Given you're history, I'd be remiss if I didn't inquire.

JUDITH

No, Miles. I am not planning anything drastic.

(pause)

Well that's not entirely true. I'm not planning on taking me life.

(pause)

That's not perfectly accurate either. I won't go and commit suicide, if that's what you're asking. I'll just be taking a vacation.

MILES

I find that hard... Do you even own a passport?

JUDITH

I do not. The plan is still rather, er, amorphous.

MILES

What about Buster?

JUDITH

Who?

MILES

Your cat, Judith.

JUDITH

Of course, Buster. I've already contacted a sister. A sitter, rather. Tried at least.

Miles seems satisfied with this.

MILES

A change of scenery might do your writing some good.

JUDITH

That's another thing. I've officially put down the pen. I've retired, Miles.

MILES

Your latest effort wasn't well-received I take it.

JUDITH

No it wasn't. I made too much money writing junk for halfwits and now the money is gone and I'm washed up. So if you'll give me my meds I can go back outside and rinse off.

Judith stands.

MILES

Just so I don't feel like a lowly pill-pusher, will you just sit down and humor me for one minute?

Judith sits back down.

MILES (CONT'D)

Ever heard of the Jonah Complex?
(Judith shakes her head,
no)

Jonah was a Biblical character. Old Testament. A prophet. He foresaw the ruin of a city and tried to leave town rather than become the great person he was destined to be by predicting the catastrophe.

JUDITH

And this applies to me how exactly?

MILES

You're afraid of your own greatness, Judith.

(pause)

And you're a bit manic at the moment.

Judith takes the prescription and heads for the door.

MILES (CONT'D)

I wrote for Lithium. Please take it.

As he says this, Judith slams the door.

MILES (CONT'D)

(to himself)

I predict a catastrophe if you don't. And Happy Valentine's Day to you, too.

He picks up Judith's champagne glass and drains it in a swig.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Judith walks down a residential street reading her mother's phone book. She stops in front of an apartment complex and checks the address.

EXT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - DAY

She knocks on apartment door 201. A grossly overweight WOMAN carrying a child opens the door. She could pass for an aged and heavy version of Mia. Judith looks pleasantly surprised.

JUDITH

Mia? My how you've grown.

TENANT

Nobody by that name here.

JUDITH

Sorry.

EXT. APARTMENT - DAY

Judith knocks at the door marked MANAGER. The manager, a tough-looking woman in her late 50s, opens.

JUDITH

Hello. I'm looking for Mia Marlowe. I have this suite listed as her most recent address. Any idea where I might find her?

MANAGER

Mia?

(thinks)

She left about two years ago, maybe three. Just took off one day, didn't say where to.

JUDITH

Sounds like Mia... She didn't leave a forwarding address?

MANAGER

No.

As Judith walks off:

MANAGER (CONT'D)

You tell that girl when you see her that she owes me two weeks in back rent. Tell her I have her mail. I'm holding it ransom till I get paid!

EXT. JUDITH'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Judith arrives at her front door. Perched on the doorstep is her sister, MIA MARLOWE. Mia is like a ray of sunshine. Everywhere she goes gets instantly brighter. The backpack slung over her shoulder makes her look much younger than mid-thirties.

JUDITH

Well if it isn't the waif.

Mia looks up from the book she is reading and pops up to greet Judith.

MIA

Hi sis!

(cheerful)

I always thought you called me a waif because I'm thin. But that was before I bought this.

(holds up the book she is reading)

It's called Word of the Day. I started reading from the back like I always do. And because I did, I can say with confidence that "waif" also means a helpless person, like an orphan or something.

Mia hugs her sister.

JUDITH

I used to say you were adopted.

MIA

Even though we share a father.

JUDITH

Who you look nothing like.

MIA
 So you were teasing me!
 (gives Judith another hug)

JUDITH
 (grimacing)
 Please, I'm not much for PDAs.
 Let's go inside before somebody
 sees us.

INT. JUDITH'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The two can be heard walking toward the living area. Mia is talking.

MIA (O.S.)
 I just got back in town. The first
 thing I did was visit my old place
 to see about, you know, renting a
 room since it's within walking
 distance from my new job and rent's
 cheap. But there's is no vacancy.
 Marcy - she's the manager - held
 onto my mail for me since I forgot
 to fill out one of those change of
 address forms at the post office
 and that's how I got the letter you
 sent me.

They enter the living area. Judith goes to the portable bar to fix drinks. Mia wanders around the room noting the various plaques that adorn the walls: a tribute to Judith's writing career.

JUDITH
 I had forgotten all about that
 letter. That's untrue. But I sent
 it at my mother's insistence. It
 was during one of her final lucid
 intervals.

MIA
 Final?
 (gasps)
 You mean...

JUDITH
 She asked for you before she passed
 away.

MIA

(crying)

Judy I'm so sorry. Mom was like...
she was like a mom to me.

JUDITH

The operative term being like. Call
her Hedda, please.

MIA

I'm sorry. Judy, this is so sudden.

JUDITH

It's been six months. And don't
call me Judy. It's Judith.

MIA

(lost in thought)

Sorry. I can't believe that Hedda's
dead. Gosh, it even rhymes. Hedda
and dead. Like it was meant to be.

(feeling Judith's
withering stare)

Gosh, I'm sorry.

JUDITH

Will you please stop saying sorry!

Mia mouths the word sorry, then covers her lips.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Now, what are you drinking?

Mia instantly brightens.

MIA

Champagne, but only if you have it.

JUDITH

I don't.

Judith hands Mia a bottle of water and leads her to the sofa.
Mia sits. Judith sits opposite her. She takes a sip of her
martini.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I'll get right to the point. We
don't like one another very much--

(off Mia's look of
surprise)

--you're just better at concealing
it.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I'll admit I'm a bit peevish that I can no longer resent you for ignoring my attempt to contact you, since you didn't receive my letter.

(pause)

But there is still the fact of your being beautiful and delightful and our father's favorite.

Mia freezes with her water to her mouth.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

(calling out to
housekeeper)

Consuela be so kind as to bring us some tea.

(to Mia)

So how long has it been that we did this? Yes, since father's funeral.

MIA

A lifetime ago.

JUDITH

Ten years, actually. You were left the bulk of what little inheritance there was left. Father was an alcoholic who lived the last five years of his life in his pajamas and drank up the proceeds of a successful screenwriting career. I've fallen on hard times. While you benefitted from your Hollywood connection, using nepotism first to get bit roles in father's films. As a young girl you were often cast as a waif. But by father's end he had burned so many bridges that anyone using his name was persona non grata by association. I imagine you have squandered the funds and are still struggling as an actress. Correct me if I'm wrong.

MIA

Judith, daddy didn't leave me that much money, and most of it went towards my education. I'm proud to say I've graduated. I'm officially--

JUDITH

A nurse.

MIA

Yes. How did you know?

JUDITH

You were voted most likely to help the needy. In your high school yearbook. I put two and two together.

MIA

I can't believe you remembered that! You have such a good memory.

JUDITH

And a lot of time on my hands.

The MAID enters with tea. She sets it down on the table. She hands Judith a stack of mail. Without looking Judith scans the letters and slips one letter after the other into the shredder next to her. She lets Mia talk as she does this.

MIA

This is the beginning of the rest of my life. Got out of a dead-end relationship. Sold all my things. Gave most of them away, actually. The future is so bright. My boyfriend, Rusty. Did I tell you about Rusty? He's my ex, actually. I have to get used to saying that. I was misled for almost six years.

JUDITH

(looks up from papers)
Rusty Lead... Now there's a handle.

Mia cracks up laughing.

MIA

No. Not Ms. Lead. Misled. Misllead, but in the past. Past being the operational word.

JUDITH

(correcting)
Operative.

MIA

I've got to get used to keeping Rusty in the past. But you can guess how tough this is for me, after being together for so many years. On and off of course. And no we were never married.

(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)

Because I never trusted him. Lied through his front teeth. He said that's why God put a gap there.

(pause)

At least he never knocked me up.

JUDITH

(absently)

Yes, there is that...

MIA

But he was sweet. Tattooed my name on his chest. Not many guys will do that for you. Other than Johnny Depp, so that puts him in good company. And of course he's just as handsome. Has red hair like you and me. We'd certainly have had red haired babies. Thank God he never knocked me up.

JUDITH

You can say that again. It wouldn't be the first time.

MIA

(continuing)

Best sex I ever had though. But that's never enough.

Mia's cellular phone rings.

MIA (CONT'D)

That's Rusty calling. Ears musta been ringing.

JUDITH

Ignore it.

MIA

But that'd be dishonest.

JUDITH

Say you're unavailable.

MIA

He might like me more.

(on phone)

Hello Rusty. Sweetheart, I can't talk now. I'm in LA. No I haven't found a place to stay. I'm at my sister's house...

Judith vehemently shakes her head, no.

MIA (CONT'D)

My dentist's home. Office. Home office. It's by Westwood, just off Beverly Glen.

Judith shakes her head no.

MIA (CONT'D)

I'm kidding. Look I got to go. I told you we're through.

(listens)

Uh-huh. Mmmhmmm... It's just better for both of us, baby, and--

Judith has had enough. She reaches over and takes the phone from Mia's hand.

JUDITH

(into phone)

Look, you vacuous imbecile. What part of "we're through" did you not understand! Goodbye!

Judith hangs up and hands the phone back to Mia.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

So what type of nursing did you say you do?

The phone rings again. Under Judith's watchful gaze, Mia presses "ignore."

MIA

I'm thinking ER, since they got fireman hours and I like to sleep all day. But maybe psych. World's full of crazies. But you know about that. After all, you write about them in your books. Which I love.

JUDITH

Zombies aren't crazy. They are brainless. Like most of my readers.

(pause)

Let's get down to the point. I have a business proposition for you, Mia. I need to disappear for a while, and I need your help. This may seem odd to you because we've lost touch, but you're my only living relative, which is significant given what I am planning to do. And therefore you are my only hope.

MIA
Okay, I'm happy to help. What do you need me to do?

JUDITH
I am planning on taking my own life.

MIA
(gasps)
You mean... suicide?

JUDITH
Pseudocide. It's a variation on a theme.

Mia looks the word up in her book.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
You won't find the word in that little book of yours.

MIA
Then what does it mean?

JUDITH
I'm planning on faking my own death.

MIA
But why?

JUDITH
Isn't it obvious? Sales skyrocket after an artist's death.

MIA
(shakes head)
Poor George Michael.

JUDITH
All those royalty checks he'll never see. And I could really use the funds.

MIA
What about your books?

JUDITH
They stopped selling long before you met Mr. Lead. I'm broke. I used to call you the waif, but these days that term also applies to me.

MIA
Waif as in thin.

JUDITH
And in need of your help.

MIA
What you're talking about,
Judith...

JUDITH
Pseudocide.

MIA
Is that legal?

JUDITH
It's not illegal. All you need to
know is that I've made you the
executor of my will.

MIA
(genuine)
Wow. I've never been an executioner
before. Thanks for thinking of me.

JUDITH
As I said you are my only living
relative and have always looked up
to me in a vague sort of way. You
are ingenuous and devoted to a
cause.
(pause)
Besides I have no friends and no
one to loan me any money either.

MIA
Gosh, Judith, you really know how
to make a gal feel special.

Judith smiles at the sarcasm.

JUDITH
Are you with me?

MIA
I just, I'm not sure. This seems
really complicated. I mean, unless
you're planning on holding your
breath for a really long time,
you'll need a corpse. They don't
just sell those on eBay.

JUDITH

Actually, most faked deaths happen near a body of water, so the body is never found. However, in these cases, suicide is usually presumed.

(to herself)

But I'm not so certain my fandom would embrace death by my own hand the way they would death by, say, natural causes. Besides, money won't come my way until my body was found.

MIA

So like I said... you need a dead body.

JUDITH

That, or one that looked dead - as in stiff.

MIA

And not breathing, which I already said.

JUDITH

There are medications that slow bodily functions to imperceptible levels - I have researched some of them for my books - but in the event of sudden death 911 would need to be called. This would entail an ambulance trip to the hospital and much too many hands fondling my rather ticklish body.

MIA

Is that how Hedda died? Was it sudden?

JUDITH

No. She had Alzheimer's. It was a long, slow, painful process. Half the time she didn't even know who I was. The other half she couldn't stand the sight of me.

MIA

Judith, that's terrible.

JUDITH

I'm over her death. As for my own,
I've something else in mind
entirely. I'm just not sure what.
The plan is still rather amorphous.

Mia starts to look up the word amorphous. Judith reaches over
and slaps her sister's hand.

MIA

Sorry. (catches herself) Sorry for
saying sorry. How much money do you
need?

JUDITH

Ten thousand.

MIA

Can't you just have a garage sale?
You have all this stuff...

JUDITH

Please. An estate sale. That's what
they're called in this part of
town. An estate sale is much too
plebeian and intrusive. Besides it
would call too much attention to
the fact that I have gone from
being a "have" to a "have not."
It's bad enough I'll have to let
Consuela go. I haven't even told
the poor lady. No. I've made up my
mind and I prefer simply to
disappear. I am broke and my career
is in shambles, and so "killing"
myself, in quotes, is really the
only viable option. Not suicide.

MIA

Pseudocide.

JUDITH

There's your word for the day.

EXT. - STREET - DAY

Judith and Mia walk.

JUDITH

I need you to stay at my place,
watch after my cat, be my LA
contact in the event I have to
leave town, which I expect I may.

They arrive at a bank. Judith opens the door for Mia as they enter.

INT. BANK - DAY

They stand in line for the teller.

JUDITH

In exchange I'll give you a portion of the proceeds. I was thinking ten percent. It's what my agent received before I fired him.

(to teller)

I'd like to open a joint account.

INT. BANK - MOMENTS LATER

They sit in front of the bank manager.

JUDITH

(to Mia)

Now, leave the details to me. The less you know the better. I don't want you to be incriminated if I am caught.

MIA

How do you spell incriminated?

JUDITH

(thinking aloud)

If this works out it may put my name back on the map. Maybe I can come out with books from the vault, published posthumously of course. Or at least pay for mum's funeral.

MIA

Didn't Hedda die six months ago?

JUDITH

That reminds me, I need to phone the mortician.

The bank manager hands a paper to Mia.

BANK MANAGER

Sign here please.

JUDITH

This means she will have access to all my funds, correct?

BANK REP

Yes, but currently the account is overdrawn. So she will also be liable for any overdraft charges.

Judith gestures at Mia "not to worry."

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Now the girls are patio dining at a hip new spot. Above them an overhead TV plays the news.

MIA

(through a mouthful of food)

You still haven't told me how you're going to kill yourself.

JUDITH

Because it's rather complex. With so many hoops, it's easy to understand why faking one's own death doesn't happen more often. I mean surely a lot of people would want to start over in new places with new names and faces while erasing debt and ditching dead end relationships. I mean if given the opportunity, wouldn't you?

MIA

(swallows)

Nope. I prefer to face my fears.

Judith's phone rings.

JUDITH

(to Mia)

I have to take this. Help yourself to more of the Rose. I promise you - the more you drink the more palatable this plan will become.

INT. WOMEN'S RESTROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Judith sits in a stall talking on the phone.

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

Marty.

MARTY'S VOICE

Ms. Cranston.

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

I was just about to ring you.

MARTY'S VOICE

Yes... Will I be seeing you today
as we discussed?

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

No can do, Martin. Quite busy at
the moment. Hatching plots, as they
say.

MARTY'S VOICE

As I mentioned in our previous
discussion, I cannot keep your
mother on ice indefinitely. Six
months is 5 months longer than
professional courtesy dignifies.
Not to mention way outside the
bounds of common decency. We here
at Sherwood & Faun have a
reputation to uphold.

JUDITH

I'm gathering the funds, I promise.
Bear with me.

MARTY'S VOICE

I have borne with you about as long
as I can bear. You have two weeks
to come up with the funds, or else
Hedda Cranston becomes property of
the state. You know what that
means. Burial in an unmarked grave.

JUDITH

Anonymity, anything but that!

(pause)

I promise you will hear from me in
two weeks.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Judith returns to the table looking concerned. Mia sips her wine. Her attention is fixated on the news. On TV we see a photo of the rap artist Eminem. He is lying in a pool of his own blood.

JUDITH

(re: TV)

When did that rapper die?

MIA

He didn't. It's just pretend. They're happening oftener and oftener, these viral celebrity death hoaxes. Last one was Shia LaBeouf. Now Eminem. Next one will probably be, I dunno, Prince.

JUDITH

Prince died last year. Sales of his albums went through the roof.

MIA

I wouldn't know. I don't watch TV.

(pause)

Eminem beat up the paparazzi who took that photo.

(has an idea)

You know, Judith. That's what you should do.

JUDITH

Beat up a paparazzi?

MIA

No, write a story that you died.

JUDITH

That's ridiculous. If I wrote it as me everybody would know it was a hoax. That or they'd think it a piece of short fiction.

MIA

I don't mean a short story. I mean an article, like in National Enquirer or one of those online gossip columns. Perez Hilton or something. You write it an-an...

JUDITH

Anonymously.

MIA

If you write that you died and don't let on, nobody would know that it's a joke, except me. And I won't tell a soul. Foolproof, see?

THE LIGHT GOES OFF HERE. But Judith downplays her sister's

stroke of genius, not wanting to give her the credit.

JUDITH
 (nonchalant)
 I thought you didn't watch TV.
 (to herself)
 I've written for those sites you
 speak of. A great while ago of
 course. I could publish a fake news
 story. That's in my wheel house.

A WAITER places their bill on the table. Judith pulls out her check book.

MIA
 If you're broke, won't that check
 bounce?

JUDITH
 Not if we work quickly it won't.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE - DAY

In the women's section of a Nordstrom's-type store, Judith and Mia are at the counter. The attendant is loading piles of designer clothing into bags. Judith pulls out her checkbook, winks at Mia who turns away.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

As the sisters walk to Mia's car.

MIA
 You're spending a ton of money you
 don't have.

JUDITH
 I've a lifestyle to keep up and an
 image to uphold. Besides I won't be
 around if the creditors call.

MIA
 Yes, but I will

Judith shrugs, hands the bags to Mia and opens the passenger door. A beat, then Mia loads the bags into the trunk and climbs into the driver's side.

INT. JUDITH'S - DAY

The girls enter the house. Judith hands her purse to Mia.

JUDITH

Would you mind putting this in my room? I need to speak to the housekeeper.

(calling out)

Consuela?

Consuela appears.

CONSUELA

Si?

Judith grasps her elbow and leads her to the door.

JUDITH

I'm going to be taking a little vacation, so I won't be needing the house cleaned for a while. Thank you for your kind attentions.

(hands Consuela a check)

Here's what I owe you plus severance. Best to wait a few days before you cash it, thanks.

Consuela nods dumbly and exits.

INT. JUDITH'S HOUSE - LATER

Judith sits at her laptop computer doing research. Mia stands over her shoulder.

JUDITH

Those gossip websites are not known for their fact-checking. This should be a cinch. Did you know that the top stories get millions of likes and comments and hits. Do you have a Facebook account?

MIA

I have a personal one, yes.

JUDITH

I'll need to borrow it. You also tweet, I presume.

Mia nods.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

How many followers?

MIA
 Couple hundred. Mostly just friends
 from school.

JUDITH
 It's a start.

MIA
 If you're going to do this right,
 you'll need to spread a hashtag.

JUDITH
 I don't even know what that is.

MIA
 I can help you with that.

JUDITH
 Not now. I can't focus with you
 looking over my shoulder. Go have
 some more wine. Enjoy the jacuzzi.

Mia leaves.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 (to herself, rehearsing)
 Novelist Judith M. Cranston has
 passed away in her off-Beverly Glen
 home. She died of a broken heart.
 (calling out)
 I'll need a picture of me resting
 peacefully in bed in a deceased's
 pose, hands clasped over my
 breasts.

Mia reenters wearing a bikini. She sneezes.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 My God you have the body of a
 teenager.
 (muttering)
 It matches your intellect.

MIA
 I'm not sure how I feel about all
 this. Sure it's fun to talk about.
 It's like writing a crime novel.
 And I always thought it'd be fun to
 write a book together.

JUDITH
 Yes, well, I don't do writing
 partners. Besides faking your death
 is not a crime.

MIA

Because if it is, and I participate, then that makes me an...ass...an access...

JUDITH

I said it's not a crime. It often lead to crimes, like tax evasion. I haven't made enough money to have to file a tax return in years.

MIA

I'm just nervous.

JUDITH

You cannot be an accessory to a crime without a crime. Have some more wine.

MIA

I'm light-headed already. This is the strangest catching up session I've ever been privy to. Yes, I said privy.

Mia sneezes. She opens a drawer at the bar and the knob falls off.

JUDITH

Don't worry about that I'll have it fixed. Things are falling apart here.

MIA

Last time we were together you lived in a mansion.

JUDITH

Please nobody uses that word any more.

MIA

Where did all the money go?

JUDITH

Mother's medical bills, I suppose. Bad investment deals. Crooked investors. A decade's worth of writer's block.

MIA

Why not just declare bankruptcy?

JUDITH

Already done it - that stays
between you and me.

MIA

Don't worry I'm right there with
you. Isn't everybody? Ninety-nine
percent of everybody at least.

Mia sits down behind her sister. She sneezes.

MIA (CONT'D)

What if the money doesn't come in
right away?

JUDITH

I'm glad you brought this up. I
have here the name of my New York
publisher. I or you can contact him
and breathe down his neck if it
comes down to this.

MIA

What if nobody really cares? What
if your books don't sell?

JUDITH

They will sell, somewhat. I like to
think I'm fairly realistic about my
prospects.

(pause)

Look this is a very viable plan. As
workable as the plots of any of my
novels. If people start buying my
books tomorrow, and in sufficient
quantities, in two weeks I should
have more than enough to pay for my
mum's funeral--

MIA

You just won't be able to attend
it, unless you plan on coming in
disguise.

JUDITH

I realize.

MIA

There's no coming back from this
Judith. Do you really want to die -
in quotes?

JUDITH

Frankly, I can't wait. I've been bored with living for half my life. If nothing else, it will be a welcome change.

MIA

Okay.

JUDITH

Where did you say you are staying?

MIA

I just got back to LA today. I haven't found a place to stay.

JUDITH

Good you'll stay with me. Do you need to go somewhere and collect your things?

MIA

Everything I own is in my backpack. And in my car, but that's a rental.

JUDITH

I'm asking you for two weeks. Then you can go back to your life. Are you with me?

MIA

What are sisters for.

EXT. JUDITH'S - LATER

Wine glasses clink.

JUDITH

A toast. To the final night of my life.

The girls are in Judith's portable hot tub. They drink. Mia looks concerned.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

It's funny. All those lavish dinners and luxurious settings. And look at what I've been reduced to. Drinking discount wine with a brat I cannot stand.

(beat)

It seems so sudden. But really, it has been years in the making.

MIA

I know we've agreed to call this pseudocide, Judith. But it still seems like suicide to me. I feel creepy just being a part of it.

JUDITH

Leave the thinking to me. Just sit and look pretty. It's what you do best.

Mia frowns. She sneezes.

INT. JUDITH'S - NIGHT

On the TV we see Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg speaking about fake news.

ZUCKERBERG

Identifying the truth is complicated. While some hoaxes can be completely debunked, a greater amount of content, including from mainstream sources, often gets the basic content right but some details wrong or omitted.

With this as her anthem, Judith is at a laptop computer. A mass e-mail is open. The cursor blinks against the blank page. She poises her hands above the keyboard, exhales and begins typing. This time the words just flow.

JUDITH

(pecking away)

This is a mini-masterpiece. I haven't written like this in ages.

An interested Mia peers over her shoulder. By this time she is sneezing emphatically.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I told you I don't write well with an audience. Go get plastered while I wax bombastic.

In the BG Mia's phone goes off.

MIA

Rusty is blowing up my phone again. What should I do?

JUDITH

Who is Rusty?

MIA

I already told you, Rusty's my ex.

JUDITH

(not listening)

How does this sound:

(reads from screen)

"Just last night novelist Judith Cranston suffered a massive heart attack in her sleep. Ms. Cranston's mother, the famed actress Hedda Cranston, whom the novelist tirelessly cared for in the twilight of her life, died six months ago of Alzheimer's-related complications."

Mia sneezes

JUDITH (CONT'D)

"It is believed that Ms. Cranston died of a broken heart. She will be missed by the millions of fans who read her prose" - a bit of creative license, more like hundreds of thousands, maybe tens - "is survived by her sister, Mia." - Your five minutes of fame have come, my darling. - "Her dozen novels, all richly crafted masterpieces, are on sale now wherever books are sold."

She looks at Mia, who sneezes.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Gesundheit. This is just the last paragraph. I fabricated eye-witness testimonies and police statements. I even used the phrase "unexpected but not suspicious," like they did for the British pop star. Be honest, does this sound too cheeky?

MIA

I'm not sure. Lemme look up cheeky.

JUDITH

Don't bother.

Judith poises the cursor over the computer's "send" command. There is the quasi-comedic gravity of the commander-in-chief about to push the proverbial atomic bomb button.

We can even hear an explosion as she hits the key. Then, silence. Nothing happens.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
That was easy. I'm spent. Night
night.

Judith rises. As if on cue Buster the cat appears from under the sofa. He has been hiding there all day. Judith collects the cat in her arms and snuggles it.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Buster! Where have you been hiding?

As she enters her bedroom and shuts the door:

MIA
(sneezes)
You have a cat?
(sneezes again)
I shoulda known!

INT. JUDITH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Judith awakens in bed. She sits down in front of her laptop. Amazon.com is open in her browser. She types her name in the search field and clicks ENTER. Scrolls down to Amazon Best Sellers Rank. She is ranked #3,720,538 in books. She refreshes the page. It doesn't change.

JUDITH
Crap.

She shuts the laptop.

INT. JUDITH'S APARTMENT - MORNING

Judith opens the front door. She is about to take Buster out for a walk on his leash. Mia comes out of a room rubbing her eyes and wearing something skimpy.

MIA
So... Are you an overnight success?

JUDITH
I'm afraid not. I'm going out for a
walk. And put some clothes on.

She tugs Buster outside and closes the door.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Judith walks along a quiet residential street. She passes a jogger who looks over his shoulder, recognizing her.

A car drives by and a passenger points at Judith.

A neighbor comes out on his front lawn and uses his mobile phone to snap a photograph of Judith.

She shakes her head and smiles. Fans, she thinks.

She stoops to pick up the morning paper and gasps. Her picture is on the front page. The headline reads:

Novelist Judith Cranston, 50, Found Dead.

INT. JUDITH'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Judith rushes in with Buster in tow. Mia comes to the door sipping coffee and wearing jeans and a t-shirt.

JUDITH
(harried)
I'm leaving town. I have to pack.

MIA
What? Why?

JUDITH
I'm all over the paper. And the photo is not a particularly flattering one.

She throws the newspaper at Mia.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
If I get recognized it will be the death of me. For reals. I must get out of town.

MIA
That's ridiculous. Nobody reads the paper anymore unless they're over fifty.

JUDITH
My fan base is over fifty. I have to get out of here before the news people arrive.
(pause)
I never thought I'd be saying that.

INT. JUDITH'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Judith hastily packs a bag. Buster looks on gloomily.

INT. ENTRANCE - DAY

Judith lugs her bag towards the front door. Buster is meowing at her feet. Mia looks concerned.

JUDITH

I want you to remain here and hold down the fort. I have left my contact information as well as other particulars. I will be checking sales.

MIA

Where are you going?

JUDITH

To New York.

MIA

Flying?

JUDITH

Driving. I can't use any mode of transportation that requires me to present an ID. I'll have to drive.

MIA

But you don't have a car.

JUDITH

I'll borrow yours. Give me your keys.

Overpowered, Mia presents her keys.

MIA

You need ID to drive. Do you even have a license?

JUDITH

No time to get caught up in the nitty-gritty.

MIA

The what?

JUDITH

The details!
(pushes past her)
Now out of my way.

MIA

Judith, you can't leave me here
with this fur ball. I'm allergic.

JUDITH

Buster, right. Thank you for
reminding me. You are to take
especial care to feed him at
appointed times. And administer his
medication. He has diabetes. I've
left the instructions. Also, under
no circumstances is he to be given
human food, no matter how much he
begs. He's an incorrigible nag,
with an incorrigible sweet tooth.

MIA

Can't you take him with you? Look
at me. My face is huge.

JUDITH

For that there's Benadryl. You'll
find it in the medicine cabinet
next to the Lithium I'm not taking.

Judith opens the front door.

MIA

I have a really bad feeling about
this, Judith.

JUDITH

You're making me late.

MIA

Judith...

JUDITH

Relax. Enjoy the digs. Raid the
fridge. Have a party. Just don't
invite anyone! I'll be in touch.

Judith vanishes through the door. As it slams shut and blows
Mia's hair back. Mia scowls down at the cat. Buster hisses
back at her.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Judith pulls out of the driveway and almost hits an oncoming car. She waves "sorry" and lets the car pass. The car's DRIVER waves for her to go first. Judith turns onto the road. As she drives down the street she sees through the rear view mirror as the car she almost hit pulls into her driveway. She frowns, pulls to the side of the road, and kills the engine.

A MAN (50) wearing a sports jacket and jeans and carrying roses steps out of the driver's seat of the car, checks his blow-dried hair in the window, and proceeds to Judith's front door.

JUDITH

OhmyGod. Is that... That's Blake
Tanner. Of all the times in the
world...

Judith perks up, checks her look in the rear view mirror, and exits the car.

Judith watches from the hedges as Mia opens the door for Blake. She can't hear what is said but her eyes bulge as Mia lets Blake in the house and closes the door.

Judith frowns and moves along the side of the house towards the back yard.

EXT. BACK YARD - MOMENTS LATER

Judith is in her back yard now watching through the window as Mia and Blake interact inside the house. Blake hands Mia the flowers. He puts his hand to his chest. Mia laughs and puts her hair behind her ear. Mia excuses herself and leaves the room. Judith watches as Blake looks around the house. Touching CDs, fingering photo frames. He puts a CD in the deck. He has made himself at home. He's talking to Mia who is in the other room. We can't hear what is said.

Judith moves along the back of the house and pops her head over the kitchen window to see Mia pulling out take-out leftovers from the fridge and putting them onto paper plates.

Mia leaves the kitchen and Judith's eyes follow her back into the living area where she sets the plates down in front of Blake who is now seated on the sofa. Mia holds up her finger as if to say wait one minute.

While Mia is out of the room Blake pulls out a lighter and lights the candles. Then, from his coat pocket Blake extracts a one-hitter of marijuana and puffs on it.

Looks at his reflection in the mirror and checks his hair, satisfied with what he sees.

Mia comes back carrying two glasses of champagne in one hand and the bottle in the other. She sets the drinks down on the table. Blake pours the champagne. Mia sits down beside him on the sofa. Listens attentively to what he says, nods several times. She is facing Judith who is in the yard ensconced behind the shrubs. Mia and Blake toast. Their glasses clink.

Judith looks at the bottle in extreme close-up. Wait a minute! It's the bottle she dumped her mother's morphine in on the night she considered ending her life! Judith starts to go inside, but thinks better of it.

Mia and Blake toast and put their glasses to their lips but before they drink Mia holds up a finger to say excuse me and mouths the words "small bladder" and moves to the restroom.

Blake shifts his junk, looks around and ... downs his champagne glass in one gulp. He drinks Mia's too! As he starts to refill the glasses he sways and plops face down on a pillow and then rolls onto the floor.

Mia exits the bathroom and gasps when she sees the unconscious Blake face down on the carpet.

JUDITH
(watching the scene)
OhmyGod.

She opens the door and rushes in.

MIA
OhmyGod.

MIA AND JUDITH
OhmyGod!

MIA
I've never had a man fall asleep on me ... before sex!

JUDITH
We have got to get him to a hospital. By we I mean you.

MIA
Don't be silly.
(off empty glasses)
He drank too much, the lightweight.

JUDITH

Yes, well... There may have been morphine in that champagne.

(off Mia's look)

I don't have time to explain. Can't you do something? You're a nurse for God's sake.

MIA

(thinking)

Actually, I may have something. Let me get my nurse's kit.

INT. JUDITH'S HOUSE - A SHORT WHILE LATER

Mia bends over Blake's prone body, a syringe in hand. She pushes the contents into his arm vein.

MIA

(to Judith)

Naloxone is the treatment for morphine overdose. It's an antidote. That's your word for the day.

As the groggy Blake is coming out of his stupor, Judith disappears behind the corner. Blake sits up, looks around, bleary-eyed.

BLAKE

What the hell?

MIA

You fell asleep. You may have wet yourself a little. Your wife is coming to pick you up.

BLAKE

My wife? I told you I was married?

MIA

You said you were divorced, actually. But she was listed as your emergency contact. In your wallet. The truth will set you free.

Mia hands Blake back his wallet. The doorbell rings.

MIA (CONT'D)

That must be Mrs. Tanner now.

(helps Blake up)

No time to explain.

INT. ENTRANCE - NIGHT

The door opens to reveal a very irate-looking MRS. TANNER. She glares first at Mia, then at Blake.

MIA
(pushing Blake outside)
Off you go. Nice to have met you.

She closes the door and Judith comes out of hiding.

JUDITH
I know what you're going to say. I didn't try to poison your drink. I can explain.

MIA
I was going to say that you lied when you told me you didn't have any bubbly. But since we're on the subject, explain away.

JUDITH
Perhaps you can tell me what you were doing hitting on Blake Tanner. He is my friend.

MIA
I wasn't hitting on him, Judith. I was being a good hostess. He came in with this elaborate story. First to say how sorry he was that you died, obviously. And if you wanted to give your money to a good cause, he knew of a great charity. Which he happened to own. His last words, before he passed out I mean, were that he knew your wishes would be for me to give him all your money. As your executioner.

JUDITH
Executor for the umpteenth time. My God, Blake is a liar and a cheat. He's a pothead--

MIA
And an alcoholic, apparently.

JUDITH
And you tried to seduce him.

MIA
I was being a good hostess.

JUDITH

Does your idea of hospitality mean--

The phone rings. A BEEP and then a voice on speaker.

VOICE (ON PHONE)

Hello Ms. Marlowe? This is
Detective Dawson with the LAPD? I
have a couple questions for you
regarding the recent, uh,
disappearance of Judith Cranston.
Please give me a call back at...

Judith talks over the voice.

JUDITH

Holy God. The shit is hitting the
fan.

MIA

Why would the police be calling?
You said we didn't do anything
wrong.

JUDITH

I got to run. At this rate I'll
never make it to Manhattan.

MIA

You can't leave me alone to deal
with this...

JUDITH

Do nothing. Wait for my phone call.
I'll be in touch.

MIA

Where will you sleep? What will you
eat? You have no money.

JUDITH

Do you?

MIA

Some.

JUDITH

Well, give it to me.

Mia grabs her wallet, fishes through it.

MIA

(handing her some bills)
Not even seventy-five.

(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)

Gas alone will run you ten times
that, at least.

Judith snatches the money.

JUDITH

Call it a loan. This and bounced
checks plus an overdrawn Amex
should get me where I need to go.

Mia follows Judith to the front door.

MIA

Have you ever taken a road trip
before, Judith? It's not safe to
drive at night. I really think you
could use some company--

By now Judith is gone.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Judith driving. On the passenger seat is a Manhattan address.

INT. CAR - DAY

Judith still driving and looking haggard. She passes a motel.
The No Vacancy sign flashes.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Judith asleep in her car, bundled against the cold. Outside
it is raining.

INT. CAR - MORNING

Judith driving.

EXT. HIGHWAY PAYPHONE - DAY

Judith on phone speaking over the din of roaring traffic.

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

My phone is dead and I forgot the
charger in my haste, so I'm at a
pay phone. I'm somewhere in middle
America. No I've never been here
before.

(MORE)

JUDITH (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

I've already passed through several states I've never heard of let alone visited. If this is New Mexico, I'd hate to see the old one. No they were never included in my book tours. I'm not sure people even read here. Look, I'll call you from New York. Time is money.

Judith hangs up.

INT. JUDITH'S PLACE - CONTINUOUS

MIA (ON PHONE)

Wait Judith!

Mia hangs up the phone. Her face is so puffy that her eyelids are practically swollen shut.

MIA (CONT'D)

(to herself)

The Benadryl's not working.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mia opens the oven and pulls out brownies. She places the tray on the counter beside an open bag of medical marijuana - we can see the leaf (universal marijuana symbol) on it. At her feet Buster sniffs the air.

MIA

(to Buster)

For the pain relief.

INT. LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Mia is curled up on the sofa watching a comedy on TV and eating pot brownies, laughing hysterically. On the screen plays The Big Lebowski. Walter Sobchack tells the Dude:

SOBCHACK (ON TV)

The beauty of this plan is its simplicity. If the plan gets too complex something always goes wrong.

MIA

(to herself)

Maybe Judith's right.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Buster hops onto kitchen counter, lumbers over to the brownies, and devours them.

INT. LIVING AREA - NIGHT

Mia asleep in front of TV. She rubs her face, yawns, opens her eyes. She gets up and turns off the TV.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Mia enters kitchen.

MIA
Buster? Come here, boy.

She sees the empty tray of brownies, and Buster lying beside them. He's zonked.

MIA (CONT'D)
Ohmygosh!

EXT. VETERINARIAN - NIGHT

A taxi stops in front of the vet. Mia exits carrying Buster and rushes inside.

INT. VETERINARIAN - LATER

Mia sits in the waiting area nervously fidgeting. The VETERINARIAN appears and motions for her to follow.

INT. VETERINARIAN'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The vet and Mia enter and Buster sits gloomily in a cage, back to being his own sullen self.

MIA
Is he going to be all right?

VETERINARIAN
You mean from too much chocolate?
Sure. I administered an emetic to get all that crap out of his system, plus some IV fluids. But he's old, and his diabetes is severely out of control.
(MORE)

VETERINARIAN (CONT'D)

At some point we should have the end of life conversation.

MIA

It would make my life easier with this cat out of it, but it's not my decision to make.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

Judith checks into a motel. She stands at reception.

JUDITH

How much for a shower? I just need hot water.

INT. MOTEL SHOWER - NIGHT

Judith luxuriates under the steaming water.

INT. MOTEL ROOM - MORNING

Judith applying makeup. She tweezes her eyebrows really thin. Her hair is a darker shade. There is an empty bottle of hair color on her bed. She slicks her hair back and puckers for the mirror. Satisfied with her make-over she gets up and turns off the light.

INT. MOTEL RECEPTION - DAY

Judith at the cashier, checking out.

CASHIER

I'm sorry, Ms. But we don't accept checks.

Judith hands the cashier her Amex. The cashier swipes the card, waits.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, it's been denied. If you'd like I can call the company so you can speak with a representative?

JUDITH

Please.
(thinks)
Actually, no.

She takes out her remaining cash and hands it over.

CASHIER
You're still fifteen dollars short.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Judith approaches her car. Her head scarf is now missing. Through the window we can see the cashier wearing Judith's scarf and waving goodbye.

INT. CAR - DAY

Judith sits in the car in a public park. She has her computer on her lap. On the screen we see her Amazon sales rank has moved up from the millions to the hundred thousands. Judith smiles, closes the laptop.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Judith pulled over checking her sales rank. It's now at the ten thousands.

INT. DINER - NIGHT

Judith drinking coffee and eating bread. She checks her sales rank again. It's now at the thousands.

JUDITH
(to herself)
That should do it.

She closes the laptop.

INT. DRUG STORE - DAY

Judith browses the junk food section, throws some candy in her basket.

She passes the paperback rack and sees a MAN reading one of her novels. She frowns at the title. She picks a different title and hands it to the man.

JUDITH
A much better read. Trust me.

The man nods and takes it.

Judith arrives at the counter with a basket filled with candy and soda. In front of her another CUSTOMER is buying her book.

CASHIER

(to customer)

Until a few days ago Judith Cranston was a forgotten author. Now we can't stock enough copies of her books.

CUSTOMER

Her sudden death is such a tragedy.

Judith can't resist interjecting.

JUDITH

Every cloud has a silver lining.

As Judith exits the store she passes the magazine rack. She looks at the tabloids and sees her name on the cover of one or two magazines. Not People or Entertainment Weekly but the ones with a smaller circulation.

A TODDLER sits in a cart as his MOM reads a magazine. The toddler looks at the cover of the magazine and then at Judith. He points at Judith.

TODDLER

Look, mommy.

Another CUSTOMER, an older gentleman, looks up from the magazine he is reading to see Judith. They make eye contact. She lowers her eyes and exits. He follows her out of the store.

EXT. - PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The man (VERNON SMOOT) follows Judith out.

SMOOT

Miss?

Judith ignores him, speed-walks to her car, enters and pulls out of the lot.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Judith drives down the desolate road towards the freeway on-ramp. Behind her a car appears, trailing her at an inconspicuous distance. She gets on the freeway, and the car follows.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Judith drives along the highway. A sign reads: YOU ARE ENTERING NEW YORK, THE EMPIRE STATE.

INT. CAR (MANHATTAN) - DAY

Judith turns onto 5th Avenue and parks. She reads the address in her hand, squints up at the building's address. Puts the car in park.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE - DAY

Judith at the front desk talking to the RECEPTIONIST.

RECEPTIONIST

(on phone)

I have a woman by the name of Mia Marlowe here to Mr. Leventhal. Says she is Judith Cranston's sister.

(to Judith)

Fifteenth floor. You can go right up.

INT. FIFTEENTH FLOOR - DAY

The elevator door opens and Judith exits. A MAN, late 50s, comes to greet her. This is her publisher, Seamus Leventhal.

SEAMUS

Judith. I was expecting--

JUDITH

I'm Judith's sister, Mia. How do you do.

They shake hands. He looks amused and confused, but more the latter. He leads her to his office.

INT. OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Judith sits opposite Seamus. Judith is in the middle of explaining herself.

JUDITH

I thought, nothing better to expedite the dispersal of funds like a face to face meeting.

SEAMUS

This is all very strange, Ms.--

JUDITH

Marlowe. Judith's sister.

SEAMUS

Different fathers?

JUDITH

Same. Different names. I, I mean Judith, took her mother's last name. To show solidarity during the divorce, and as a statement against nepotism.

SEAMUS

You look very much alike. You wouldn't be twins?

JUDITH

Hardly. Separated by twelve years as a matter of fact. I was left executor of the estate. And I'm here to collect.

She hands Seamus a stack of papers. Seamus checks her sales history on his computer.

SEAMUS

First off, I'm very sorry for your loss. And while we are pleasantly surprised by the blip in your, er, Judith's, sales, royalty payments go to the literary agent. Not directly to the writer.

Judith pulls off her hat and glasses.

JUDITH

I'll cut the crap. I need ten thousand dollars, Seamus, and I don't have much time.

SEAMUS

Are we on candid camera, because this is really funny.

JUDITH

(inventing)

Yes, as a matter of fact. Yes. Research for my next book, actually.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I'm seeing what I can get away with, how far I can go with this death hoax.

SEAMUS

Because I was going to say, if this wasn't a stunt... you are aware of the, er, file-ability of a class action lawsuit against an artist who fakes her own death to reap royalties from previously published works. The legal fees alone would bury you in debt to your tweezed eyebrows and tinted hair.

Judith doesn't falter.

JUDITH

Frankly, I don't care if when this is over I never see the light of another day. So long as I put my mum to rest.

Seamus considers this.

SEAMUS

How much did you say you needed?

JUDITH

Ten grand. Make that twelve. Travelling expenses and what not.

SEAMUS

Wired to your account?

JUDITH

I'd prefer it in bills, since I'm here.

He presses the intercom button on his phone.

SEAMUS

(into intercom)

Helen, I need twelve thousand dollars in cash. From my personal account.

(to Judith)

Hundreds okay?

Judith gives the thumbs up sign.

SEAMUS (CONT'D)

(in phone)

In hundreds.

A moment as Judith and Seamus wait for the secretary to enter. Neither says a word. HELEN enters.

HELEN

Here you go, Mr. Leventhal. Twelve thousand.

She gives him the envelope and leaves.

SEAMUS

I don't want the house's name tied up in all this. If you get found out we'll eat the royalties and refund book sales. But if it's true what you say that you are writing something really substantial, then a best-seller would offset losses anyway. And there's no such thing as bad publicity.

(pause)

But just so we are clear, I consider this to be a gift from me to you. The only role I want in this mess you're in is as dispenser of charity.

JUDITH

(taking money)

I promise to pay you back.

EXT. CAR - DAY

Judith arrives at her car, finds a parking ticket on it, throws it on the street, enters the car, starts the engine and pulls away.

INT. JUDITH'S PLACE - NIGHT

Mia waiting by the phone, it's like she has ants in her pants. Her face is getting more swollen by the minute. She sniffs and sneezes and scratches without stopping. From his perch on the sofa Buster looks on contentedly.

MIA

Come on, Judith. Where are you?

The phone rings.

MIA (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Judith?

VOICE

Ms. Marlowe. This is Detective
Dawson. LAPD. Do you have some time
to talk?

Mia slouches, preparing for the worst.

INT. JUDITH'S HOME - NIGHT

Mia paces by the front door. Her mobile phone rings. She
checks the caller ID. She answers.

MIA (ON PHONE)

Not now, Rusty.

RUSTY'S VOICE

Mia I got to see you.

MIA (ON PHONE)

I'm busy. A detective's coming
over.

RUSTY'S VOICE

Is that some code for you got a
date?

MIA (ON PHONE)

Don't be so childish, Rus.

RUSTY'S VOICE (ON PHONE)

Gimme your address.

MIA (ON PHONE)

Only if you promise to stop bugging
me.

RUSTY'S VOICE

Deal.

INT. JUDITH'S APARTMENT - LATER

Mia opens the door to reveal the dapper DETECTIVE DAWSON
(late 20s).

DAWSON

Ms. Marlowe, may I come in?

MIA

(pleasantly surprised;
Southern Belle accent)

Why, be my guest.

EXT. JUDITH'S - NIGHT

A black pick-up truck pulls to the curb outside Judith's house. A man in jeans and work boots exits the driver's side. He stoops to pick up the newspaper on Judith's driveway. A much smaller picture of her is still on the front page. He opens the paper.

INT. JUDITH'S PLACE - NIGHT

Detective Dawson gives the place the once-over as he talks to Mia.

DAWSON

This is just a routine investigation. In missing person cases--

MIA

Missing person cases? But my sister's body was found.

DAWSON

Was it you who found the body?

MIA

Allegedly. I'm not at liberty to say.

DAWSON

She died here?

MIA

Hmmm-hmmm. It's when she was last seen... by me.

DAWSON

We don't have any record of 911 being called from this house. Also, and I'm not nitpicking, but news of her death was leaked from this very ISP address.

MIA

Wasn't me. Can we talk about this later? I don't feel too good. Besides, I have to walk the cat.

DAWSON

Certainly. I'm sorry for taking up your time, Ms. Marlowe.

MIA

You can call me Mia. My friends all do.

DAWSON

Okay then, Mia. In case you can think of anything that might be important, here's my card. That's my home number there. May I get your number?

MIA

Don't you have it? You called me.

DAWSON

I'm sorry. I meant your cell number. In case I can't reach you here at home.

Mia scribbles down her number and hands it to Dawson.

DAWSON (CONT'D)

Thank you. I'll be honest with you. The reason I'm here is there has been a big crackdown on these fake news stories, death hoaxes and what not. They're sweeping the nation. Most of the time it just goes away on its own, swept under the rug. It's not as if the police, I mean me, don't have anything better to do. It's usually just a slap on the wrist by whatever Internet agency handles this sort of thing, I'm not really sure. But we need someone to make an example of, and your sister's at the wrong place at the wrong time. I'm not saying I suspect anything. I try to remain impartial. I'm just investigating.

(beat)

You seem real sweet. I hope you're not caught up in something. Missing persons, murder, accessory. I hope none of these terms apply to you.

(beat)

Thank you for your time. Oh, and, if you happen to want to leave town, don't.

Mia looks freaked.

EXT. JUDITH'S - NIGHT

The man in the boots watches from the shrubs as Dawson exits the house and ambles to his car. As the detective drives away, the stranger approaches the front door, which is still slightly ajar. He looks inside to see Mia.

MIA

Oh, Buster, Where's your leash?

The phone rings. Mia answers on speaker.

MIA (CONT'D)

Judith? It's about time!

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Judith at a payphone.

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

I have the money. Ten grand and then some. I'm on my way home. But I'm running out of gas.

INTERCUT PHONE CONVERSATION.

MIA

How can you run out of gasoline with ten grand?

JUDITH

I meant metaphorically. I need to crash, also metaphorically. It's five star hotels from here on out. I've earned it.

MIA

Judith, I've got to see you. Buster has got to see you. Can we meet you someplace?

JUDITH

Absolutely not. Stay put. The less commotion the better.

MIA'S VOICE

But Judith I am allergic to all hell, the Benadryl's not working. And there's a detective all up my ass. Metaphorically.

JUDITH

Did you say detective?

MIA

His name is Dawson. He's onto you. That you've gone missing. And I'm pretty sure he knows I played a role. It's all very confusing. I need to see you.

JUDITH

You stay put. I'll be back before you know it.

MIA

Where did you say you were again?

JUDITH

Highway 40. I'll find a place in Aspen for the night and then I'm home.

The front door closes.

EXT. JUDITH'S - NIGHT

The black pick-up peels out from in front of Judith's place.

INT. TRUCK - CONTINUOUS

There is some music playing. On the passenger's seat we see the newspaper open to the page with Judith's picture on it.

INT. DRUGSTORE - DAY

Judith at the register with snacks. She looks at the magazine rack. Her cover photos have been replaced with pictures of other celebrities, Pitt, Kardashian, Trump, etc. She is yesterday's news.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Judith yawns, drives. Sees a gas station. Checks the gauge. Still has a quarter of a tank. She drives by it.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Hours later, Judith looking worse for the wear. She sees another gas station. Checks the gauge. It's near empty. She pulls over.

EXT. GAS STATION

Judith exits her car. A car pulls up behind her, engine idling, waits.

INT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Judith is inside the mart, at the counter.

JUDITH
(to attendant)
Fill up number seven, please.

ATTENDANT
You need to pay in advance.

JUDITH
I don't know how much it will cost.

ATTENDANT
What kind of car?

JUDITH
That hybrid electric hipster piece
of garbage.

ATTENDANT
My guess is about forty dollars.
You can come back for the change.

Judith pulls out her envelope of money and extracts the entire stack of cash. The attendant's eyes bulge.

JUDITH
Surely you can break a hundred.

Behind her we see a TRUCKER standing in the beer section, his eyes on Judith.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Oh and mind lending me the key to
the ladies' room?

EXT. GAS STATION - NIGHT

Judith walks over to the ladies room.

INT. LADIES' ROOM - NIGHT

As the door closes behind Judith a foot appears in the crack to prevent it from shutting.

As Judith comes out of a stall she is forced back inside by the trucker.

TRUCKER

Gimme your money. All of it.

He places a knife to Judith's neck.

Behind the man a gun gets shoved into his ribs.

VOICE

Take the knife away from the lady,
and put your hands high in the air.

Judith breathes a sigh of relief.

EXT. GAS STATION - LATER

As police are leading the perpetrator away. Judith stands aside with her rescuer, whom we recognize as the older guy reading her novel in the drug store. Vernon Smoot.

JUDITH

I don't know how to possibly thank you.

VERN

You can start by telling me your real name.

JUDITH

I've already told you. If you want to see my ID, I can fetch it. It's in my hotel room.

VERN

I know who you are. And I must say. I'm a huge fan.

JUDITH

(flattered)
You are?

VERN

The wife is too. Your books have made my retirement a pleasure.

JUDITH

Retirement from what?

VERN

From policing. But I can't resist following up on leads, and when I was in that drugstore back in Missouri and looked up from my magazine to see the face gracing the page was staring back at me, it was like a dream. And I knew I had to follow you. It beats drinking whiskey in a rocking chair in Kansas.

JUDITH

You've come all this way to fulfill idle curiosity? Your wife must be thrilled.

VERN

Absence makes the heart grow fonder. My advice, be careful. I don't know what you're into, but I bet it's one helluva story.

(tips his hat)

Night now. And good luck. Oh and since we're here... would you mind if I got your autograph? It's for my wife.

Judith smiles.

EXT. JUDITH'S PLACE - NIGHT

Mia exits with Buster in a crate. A cab pulls up and she enters.

INT. CAB - CONTINUOUS

MIA

The airport, s'il vous plait.

Mia turns to Buster and hands him a pink pill (Benadryl). He licks it up.

MIA (CONT'D)

Night-night, sweet child of mine.

INT. AIRPORT - NIGHT

Mia arrives before the ATTENDANT. She stands Buster's crate on the counter.

MIA

I'd like a plane ticket to Aspen.
One way.

EXT. HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The black truck speeding along the highway.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Judith enters Aspen. She slows by a ritzy hotel, pulls into the parking lot.

INT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Judith stands at reception, cash in hand.

JUDITH

I'd like a room. The best suite
you've got.

INT. SUITE - NIGHT

Judith soaks in a bath.

INT. HOTEL BAR - NIGHT

Judith sits alone at the bar. The BARTENDER approaches.

BARTENDER

What'll it be?

JUDITH

What's you most expensive drink?

BARTENDER

(thinks)

Johnny Walker Blue's not too bad.

JUDITH

Make it a double.

LATER

Judith still at the bar. It's pretty dead. She scans the TV for news of her "death." On the TV we see another celebrity death hoax, or some other tragedy that has quickly taken Judith's place. Judith turns away from the TV.

She downs her drink, starts to get up when at the bar's entrance in walks a handsome GUY in his 30s. He sits next to Judith at the bar.

STRANGER

Hey.

JUDITH

Hey.

STRANGER

Long night.

JUDITH

(tipsy)

It was until you got here.

STRANGER

Mind if I join you?

JUDITH

Make yourself at home.

The bartender comes over. The stranger looks at Judith. She gestures for two more of what she's having.

LATER

The two sit at the bar. Empty shot glasses lined up in front of them. Judith is rather drunk. She's in the midst of a monologue.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

So I travel cross country for some, you know, proverbial peace of mind. I just want to put my mum to rest. Is that too much to ask? And I'm too proud to ask anybody for help. Not to mention I have no friends. So if you were me what would you do?

STRANGER

Simple. I'd steal the money.

JUDITH

In effect that's what I did. My scheme was just more elaborate than picking pockets. Oh well, it's all under the bridge and off a duck's back. Water..

(downs her drink)

... or Scotch. It is Scotch that we are drinking. Bartender?

STRANGER

You have a room here? With a minibar?

JUDITH

The penthouse suite, as a matter of fact. And the mini bar is a misnomer, because it's huge. I like huge.

STRANGER

I bet we could have a lot more fun there with things that are huge.

JUDITH

Well, now that you mention it. Why not?

The bartender arrives.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Check please.

INT. HOTEL RECEPTION - NIGHT

Mia stands at the reception desk with Buster in a crate. She stands the crate on the counter.

MIA

I'm looking for Judith Cranston and this is supposed to be the finest hotel in Aspen. Did she check in here?

The CLERK is a pimply faced teen.

CLERK

I'm not at liberty to say, ma'am. We can't give out information about our guests.

MIA

I have a package to be delivered. UPS.

CLERK

You don't look like a UPS type. Where's your uniform?

MIA

(inventing)
Didn't make it through customs.

CLERK

Besides we don't allow pets in the penthouse suite.

MIA

I'll leave him here. Thanks.

CLERK

But I'm allergic!

MIA

There's Benadryl in the crate.

INT. JUDITH'S ROOM - NIGHT

Judith and the handsome stranger stumble into the room. She casts her purse on the dresser as they fall into bed. They fumble around atop the bed, kissing, fondling. He pulls off his shirt, and then hers, and her skirt, leaving her in her bra and panties. She's somewhat self-conscious.

JUDITH

I'll need another drink to stop thinking about my inner thighs.

STRANGER

Relax, you're beautiful. I've never been with a gal twice my age before.

JUDITH

I'm not exactly... forget it. I haven't had this much fun since Bill Clinton was in office.

STRANGER

Since we're on the subject of nevers, have you ever been tied up?

JUDITH

You mean, sadomasochism?

STRANGER

None of that. Dominatrix. I'll do you if you do me?

JUDITH

What's the saying... When in Rome... What do we use for rope?

The stranger pulls out a pair of handcuffs from his back pocket.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
That's convenient.

He cuffs Judith to the bedpost.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
I'll say this much, you sure are
gentle for the rough-hewn sort.

He drops between her legs, kissing her.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Oh... Oh...

Judith climaxes. The stranger looms above her, smiling.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
That was wonderful.

STRANGER
Worth every penny?

JUDITH
Every penny of what?

STRANGER
Of the money you stole. I reckon
it's right there in that purse of
yours?

JUDITH
It is as a matter of fact. Do I get
points for honesty?

STRANGER
How about I just help myself to the
whole thing.

JUDITH
I don't suppose my screaming
"police" would deter you.

STRANGER
Since you mention it...

He kisses her full on the lips. Grabs his shirt, stuffs it in
her mouth. Gets off her and goes to the dresser where he
takes her purse, backpedals to the door and opens it.

STRANGER (CONT'D)
You tell that bitch it's
collateral.

And he's off.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

The stranger exits Judith's room. He looks left and right. Sees the exit sign, runs to it, opens it, and disappears down the stairs.

Across the hall, the elevator door dings open and Mia appears. She arrives at Judith's room, the door still ajar.

INT. JUDITH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mia enters to see Judith cuffed to the bed, wearing her muzzle.

MIA

Judith!

She takes out the muzzle.

JUDITH

Thank God! Untie me.

MIA

Not so fast. I need you to promise me you'll take me with you.

Wherever you go, I go, promise?

JUDITH

Absolutely not. I've told you--

MIA

Look I've saved your ass three times. First by agreeing to this whole thingamajig, next with that Tanner character, and now this. You need me.

JUDITH

No. I don't need anyone. I--

MIA

You know what your problem is, Judith. Everyone revolves around you. You are the star at the center of your little universe.

JUDITH

Not exactly true. In a cosmos stretching to infinity each individual person is technically at the center. But there's no time to argue. Untie--

MIA

And you have an answer for everything, you... last word freak. Your world must be really sad and needful. Because you see people only for what they can do for you. But I'm here to tell you that getting along can't always mean giving in!

This recalls the psychic Olga's advise. Judith remembers.

JUDITH

What did you say?

MIA

It's always your way or the highway, but relationships don't work that way.

JUDITH

See I don't believe in compromise. When two people modify their desires for the sake of each other, neither gets what she really wants and both wind up miserable.

MIA

It's not about your way or my way. There's a thing called our way!

JUDITH

What would you have me do?

MIA

Give in.

JUDITH

I thought you said that's not the way to get along.

MIA

Give in to balance the occasion.

JUDITH

I think you mean equation. Balance the equation.

MIA

What I want you to do is assume whenever you and I argue you are wrong and go from there.

(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)

Either that or you can spend your entire life all alone, and the rest of tonight in handcuffs.

JUDITH

Fine, but I'm driving.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

The two girls rush to their car. The parking lot is otherwise empty. The mysterious stranger is nowhere to be found.

JUDITH

(looking around)

It's no use.

She hands Mia the keys.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Judith sits shotgun, stroking Buster on her lap.

MIA

So... Aren't you going to tell me what happened? How did you wind up tied to the bed? Is that an amenity I haven't heard of?

JUDITH

(not hearing)

It's no use.

MIA

What's no use? You got what you came for. We have a couple days before you need to be back in LA. Why don't we make the most of this sister road trip thing? We can maybe see some sights. There's a lot between the Rockies and California that would rock your world. No pun intended.

JUDITH

I'm tired. And drunk. Or just drunk.

MIA

At least tell me who tied you up.

A beat. Mia looks over at Judith, who is snoring.

INT. CAR - DAY

Outside we see the car driving by some scenic views, without slowing or stopping. Judith's still sleeping in the passenger seat.

INT. CHILI'S TYPE RESTAURANT - DAY

Mia is eating wings and chatting. Judith stares out the window sullenly, pouring whiskey into a paper cup.

EXT. MOTEL PARKING LOT - NIGHT

The car pulls into a parking lot.

INT. RECEPTION - NIGHT

Judith and Mia stand at reception.

JUDITH

One room please. The cheapest
you've got.

MIA

I thought we were going in style
from here on out...

Judith says nothing.

CLERK

That's sixty dollars please.

Judith looks at Mia.

JUDITH

Better put it on your card.
(under breath)
I don't want to get noticed.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

The two girls enter the motel room. Judith crashes face down onto the bed.

MIA

I don't mind paying my way, Judith.
But since we left Aspen I've paid
your way too. Can't you spare some
of that twelve grand on travelling
expenses?

Judith mutters into the pillow.

JUDITH
I was robbed.

MIA
What?

JUDITH
I was robbed!

MIA
How?

Judith sits up on the bed and takes a swig of her drink.

JUDITH
Do you think that my purse just
crawled away? I met a man in the
bar, a very attractive, rugged sort
- my weakness, apparently - and he
finagled his way back into my room,
where one thing led to another, and
I was robbed.

MIA
I'm so sorry. But it serves you
right. Money bought by dishonest
means...

JUDITH
You don't buy money! I feel sick.
Must have been that rancid chicken
you ordered.

Judith goes to the bathroom. Buster follows.

MIA
You didn't eat any chicken. All you
do is drink.

INT. BATHROOM - CONTINUOUS

Judith closes the door and sits on the toilet, seat down. She pulls out her pills. Opens them up. Takes a swallow of alcohol. Holds the pill bottle to her lips but as she is about to gulp a mouthful down, her head falls between her legs. A beat and she passes out sideways, knocking the pills into the bathtub. She's out cold.

INT. MOTEL - LATER

Mia is watching TV. She laughs, then remembers. Turns to the bathroom door and frowns.

MIA
 (calling out)
 Judith? You've been in there a
 heckuva long time. Is everything
 all right?

We can hear the sound of Judith groan.

MIA (CONT'D)
 Judith? I hope you're decent 'cause
 I'm coming in.

Mia opens the door.

Judith is still face down beside the toilet.

MIA (CONT'D)
 Judith are you okay? Where's
 Buster?

JUDITH
 Hunh?

Judith pulls herself to a seated position.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
 Am I dead yet?

Mia looks into the bath.

MIA
 No, but someone is.

In the bath Buster lies motionless beside an empty pill bottle.

INT. CAR - DAY

The girls drive.

JUDITH
 I blame you.

MIA
 Why me? They were your pills. If
 Buster had a sweet tooth, ordering
 candy-coated medicine is just
 asking for trouble.

JUDITH
I wasn't thinking about him.

MIA
My point exactly.

JUDITH
Never mind. If you had stayed in LA
as I instructed, Buster would still
be in my lap.

MIA
If I'd stayed in LA as you'd
instructed you'd still be tied up
in Colorado. And Buster is still in
your lap. He's just not breathing.
And somehow I'm not allergic
anymore.

Now we see that on Judith's lap the dead cat is wrapped in a
sheet.

JUDITH
We need to dispose of the remains.
But I can't afford a shovel.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Mia digging a grave for Buster, who lies in the dirt by the
growing pit. The area is lit by the car's headlights. Judith
looks on solemnly, drinking whiskey. Mia emerges from the
pit, carefully lays Buster inside, and begins shovelling dirt
back into the grave.

MIA
I could use some help.

JUDITH
Keep at it. You're doing fine.

LATER

Buster is buried. The sisters stand over the grave. Judith
places a package of candy over the plot of earth.

JUDITH (CONT'D)
Buster, my darling, you died so I
could live.

INT. CAR - DAWN

The girls drive through a small town in silence. Judith looks out the window at "help wanted" signs. At motel reception, in a liquor store, supermarket. She watches people waiting at bus stops and street corners, sweeping, serving coffee, drinking coffee, scratching their asses. Mia watches her sister.

JUDITH

Imagine that sort of life.

MIA

It's been mine since high school.
Waiting tables, making ends meet.

JUDITH

I could never do that sort of
thing. I'd rather die.

MIA

We could write a book together. A
buddy book. Something funny. I
always thought--

Judith puts her hand up to silence Mia.

MIA (CONT'D)

Fine, forget I mentioned it!
(looks at her phone)
The darndest thing. Ever since I
left LA Rusty hasn't called once,
not once. I mean I'm relieved, but
also concerned. It's not like him.
Even when I took out a restraining
order he still blew up my phone.

JUDITH

Will you stop with that guy! Rusty
this, Rusty that. Everything is
about Rusty.

MIA

I guess because he is so freakin'
cute. You know, in that rugged sort
of way. Like a cover of one of
those trashy romance novels. If you
met him I know you'd go crazy.

JUDITH

The next thing you'll tell me is he
had your name tattooed on his
chest.

MIA
As a matter of fact--

Judith looks at her.

JUDITH
That's funny. Because the guy I was
with had a girl's name tattooed on
his chest. Wasn't yours though.

MIA
What was the name?

JUDITH
It was Mimi.

MIA
That's what Rusty called me. His
little Mimi. So sweet.

A beat.

JUDITH
Your boyfriend is a thief. He was
the one who tied me up and robbed
me, after--

MIA
Oh Gosh, Judith. I'm so sorry. I
didn't expect him to follow me out
here, or to beat me to you. I only
told him where you were if he
promised not to come chase us down.
Which I realize now wasn't such a
brainy strategy.

JUDITH
What did you owe him?

MIA
I didn't owe him anything.

JUDITH
When he left he told me to consider
the money collateral. Collateral
for what?

MIA
(sheepishly)
What does collateral mean?

JUDITH
Repayment for something. Did he
loan you money?

MIA

I'm not that type of girl. But he did buy me many gifts over the years. Just knickknacks. Which when we broke up I gave away with the rest of my things.

A beat.

MIA (CONT'D)

After what?

JUDITH

What?

MIA

You said he robbed you after. After what?

Suddenly Judith starts laughing.

MIA (CONT'D)

What's so funny?

JUDITH

He robbed me after we had sex. Best I've had in I can't remember when.

MIA

You didn't!

JUDITH

Oh we did. Serves you right. You practically stole all my boyfriends, or would have had you not been underage at the time. Now you know what it feels like. This vindication is actually worth twelve thousand dollars.

MIA

Well if twelve grand of stolen money was the price it took to get Rusty off my back, it was money well spent. So we're even. I'm sure I'll meet somebody new when I start work next week.

JUDITH

How very philosophical of you. My life on the other hand can't get any worse.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

I put my name and life on the line
for a payday I didn't receive, and
now I'm broke and blocked. What
else can go wrong?

Mia sees a sign.

MIA

Oh look. Joshua Tree. Hedda took me
there once after the divorce. The
second divorce. It was her favorite
place. Wanna pull over?

JUDITH

Why not. Maybe we can find us a
good cliff somewhere - and jump.

EXT. JOSHUA TREE - DAY

Straggly trees and barren desert as far as the eye can see.

Mia exits the car and begins hiking to the top of an
overlook.

MIA

You coming?

JUDITH

(still inside car)
I'll watch.

Mia reaches the top of the overlook.

MIA

(screams)
Hedda!

JUDITH

For God's sake stop it. You'll call
attention to us!

MIA

Hedda!

Judith exits the car and joins her sister atop the cliff.

MIA (CONT'D)

Mission accomplished.

They take in the view.

MIA (CONT'D)

I meant what I said about Hedda being like a mom to me. My real mom was more like a psycho misfit kid. And Hedda had every reason to hate me. As the child of her husband's mistress, I mean. I think when my mom cheated on our dad and drove him to drink, Hedda was secretly pleased.

JUDITH

How dare you! But probably true.

MIA

I just wish I had a chance to say goodbye.

JUDITH

You could have come around. You didn't have to wait for the letter that never arrived.

MIA

I felt like you didn't want me around. You always pushed me away.

A beat.

JUDITH

I miss my mum. Nobody will ever care about me the way she did. She loved me no matter what. She was my biggest fan. Sometimes my only fan. No matter what.

MIA

You still got me, Judith. You'll always have me. And you can love other people like she loved you. No matter what. Starting with me.

INT. CAR - DAY

The sisters speed along the highway.

MIA

I know you resent me. For being dad's favorite, and maybe mom's too. For squandering the inheritance.

(MORE)

MIA (CONT'D)

But what you probably don't know is I spent dad's money on my mom, who was in and out of rehabs. When she wasn't making porn.

JUDITH

What?

MIA

Yes. Changed her name to Nikita di Gregorio. Had starring roles in several X rated features. She even had a part in Nero. You know, the flop with the guy from A Star Is Born.

JUDITH

That was actually where dad met her. He was doing rewrites for that flop.

MIA

Anyway, after her heyday, my mom moved to San Diego and one day she drove to a cliff, like the one we were just at, but overlooking the beach. She parked, and the next day she was found face down in the sand by joggers.

JUDITH

Suicide...

MIA

I'm not so sure about that. They said if she had jumped, investigators say that her body wouldn't have landed in the water because the tide didn't come up that far. They think maybe it was murder.

JUDITH

By whom, an obsessed porn addict?

MIA

Nobody knows.

JUDITH

That's quite a story.

MIA

We can write it together!

JUDITH

Get off it. My writing days are over.

MIA

I was just joking anyway. My mom is living outside of Del Mar, Texas with a used car salesman. After all these years searching, she has finally found true love.

JUDITH

Really, Mia. Inventing a story about your mother dying is cold and heartless.

MIA

Just giving you a taste of your own medicine.

JUDITH

Well don't. Who elected you avenging angel?

MIA

So you admit I have something to avenge myself for?

JUDITH

Like what?

MIA

Like that time when I was in high school, using your address so I could get in to Beverly High. And you told dad I was smoking weed and having sex in your bed.

JUDITH

Well, weren't you?

MIA

Not with girls, I wasn't. Dad was so pissed he grounded me till my senior year. I couldn't drive till I was 18. And it was your weed! You just wanted me out of there. You were jealous that all your boyfriends wanted to hang out with a girl barely half their age.

JUDITH

We already covered that. And I'm done rehashing the past.

MIA

I'm just saying all was for the best. No resentment, no regrets. I was forced to live a sheltered life on the straight and narrow. Yes I used dad's name acting for a while. But you could have too, in screenwriting. He wanted to get you gigs. You just pushed him away.

JUDITH

I'm not good at this. Human relationships are not my thing. Much too tiresome. Just keep driving.

Judith takes out a pen and note pad from her purse and begins writing.

MIA

What are you writing?

JUDITH

Never mind. Just drive!

INT. DINER - DAY

Mia and Judith sit at a diner. Mia is chatting with a waitress while Judith is writing on diner napkins.

INT. MOTEL - NIGHT

The sister are side by side on the bed watching TV. On the TV plays Zombieland. Jesse Eisenberg's character says:

JESSE

A zombie isn't a dead person who's come back to life. It's someone who's been infected with the plague of the 21st century.

Mia is laughing. Judith gets an idea, grabs motel stationary and begins writing. Mia looks over at her sister, feeling left out.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

The girls pull over. Judith is in the passenger seat.

MIA

I'll pump, you pay. And get us some snacks.

Judith enters the mini-mart.

Mia's phone rings. She ignores it. Then, she checks her messages.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE

Ms. Marlowe, this is Detective Dawson. I went by your place and you weren't there. I thought I instructed you not to leave town without first notifying me. Maybe I didn't. But you should have. Aw, hell, what am I saying?

Mia presses delete.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Ms. Marlowe, please call me back.

Delete.

DETECTIVE'S VOICE (CONT'D)

Ms. Marlowe, you know we can find you. This is the 21st century. Your phone can be traced. We have that capability. If I don't hear back from you in the next hour, I'll be seeing you before you know it.

Mia tenses, then hits delete. Judith appears at the car.

JUDITH

My turn to drive.

Mia scoots over.

INT. CAR - DAY

The girls are driving.

JUDITH

I think I'm starting to feel a bit better. Creative juices are starting to flow. And we're all set to make it back to LA in time for my meeting with the mortician. Face to face I know I can prevail upon him to arrange something suitable in the way of a burial.

(MORE)

JUDITH (CONT'D)

(beat)

Actually I haven't felt this alive in quite some time. Sometimes you have to hit rock bottom, huh?

MIA

Speaking of rock bottom. Uhm, remember that detective who came by your house while I was in LA? Well, he's coming to get us as we speak.

JUDITH

How does he know where we are?

MIA

Traced my phone.

JUDITH

If you hadn't followed me, I wouldn't have been robbed, my cat would still be alive, and we wouldn't be going to jail.

MIA

We? Who said anything about we? What did I do wrong?

(pause)

You think he'll take us to jail?

Then the BLOO-WHUP of a short siren blast and a squad car with flashing gumballs appears in the rear-view mirror.

JUDITH

I've a mind to drive us off a bloody cliff. But I can't bloody find one!

EXT. STREET - DAY

The car pulls to a stop, with the detective's car behind them. The detective exits and approaches their car.

DETECTIVE DAWSON

Ms. Cranston, please step out of the vehicle.

INT. JAIL - DAY

The girls are in jail. Mia stands at the bars staring off into space. Judith sits on a cot in the adjacent cell, writing with a pencil on jail toilet paper. We hear her speak the words as she writes them.

JUDITH (V.O.)

Being locked up isn't all that bad. The amenities are spare but sufficient, the help civil if stand-offish, and most importantly during this low point in my life, the rent and the food are free. I cannot help but recall the many writers who composed some of their best material while imprisoned. Dostoevsky and Cervantes, for example. Machiavelli and Marquis de Sade as well. O. Henry. And of course, Hitler. My heroes, and now I sit among them.

Mia turns to her sister.

MIA

Judith? Judith? Talk to me, Judith.

(no answer)

I just want to say I know we have our differences. You think I'm foolish and resent me for being pretty. But we are sisters. Maybe this fact doesn't mean much to you. But if you can think of me not as your sister but as your father's daughter, maybe that will make it easier for you to love me. Because I know you loved dad. And mom. And I loved them both. What I'm trying to say Judith is I love you. I know actions speak louder than words and all. And I've been acting without thinking. Maybe you're right and I am foolish. So, I'm sorry. Do you forgive me?

Judith sets her writing implements down and lies back on the bed, sighs and closes her eyes. The silent treatment is at work.

INT. CELL - NEXT MORNING

The sound of the bars opening.

DETECTIVE DAWSON

Rise and shine.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

The detective sits opposite the two sisters.

DETECTIVE DAWSON

Faking your death is not a crime.
And though crimes like identity
theft, fraud and tax evasion, often
proceed from ... what was the word
you used?

JUDITH

Pseudocide.

DETECTIVE DAWSON

Yes. Although crimes often proceed
from that, you didn't get to the
point of committing one. Maybe had
I tailed you for a bit you'd have
gone off and done something more
foolish than bounce a few checks
and max out your credit cards,
poisoning a cat and yelling off
cliffs. But as it stands there is
nothing to hold you on, so you're
free to go.

(pause)

Have a nice life.

MIA

Thanks!

(holding imaginary phone
to her ear)

Call me.

EXT. - JAIL - DAY

The girls walk to their car.

MIA

Can I give you a lift?

Judith ignores Mia and heads towards the bus stop.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS - DAY

Judith sits in the bus and stares out the window as she heads home.

INT. CAR - DAY

Mia drives, looking somber. She sings to the radio.

MIA

(singing)

And teacher there are things that I
still have to learn. But the one
thing I have is my pride. Oh so I
don't want to learn. Hold you,
touch you, think that you're mine.
Because there ain't no joy for an
uptown boy who just isn't willing
to try. I'm so cold inside. Maybe
just one more try...

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

A few days later. Mia has started her new job. She is wearing scrubs and takes a patient's pulse, smiling and chatting good-naturedly. Right in her element.

EXT. - HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Mia exits the hospital. Detective Dawson leans against his parked car, waiting for her. She smiles and kisses his cheek and he lets her into the passenger seat.

INT. HARVEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Judith shows up at the front door of her agent's house, bags in hand. Harvey opens, smiles and moves to the side as she enters.

INT. HARVEY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Judith making the sofa into a bed as Harvey's small CHILDREN (ages 6 and 8) jump up and down on it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The house is quiet and the lights are off except for a glow that comes from beneath Judith's covers as she writes and writes through the night.

INT. MORTUARY - DAY

Judith sits across from Marty the mortician.

MARTY

I've been following you in the news, Judith. Quite an adventure.

JUDITH

Misadventure, really. I'm sure you can guess that I haven't any money.

MARTY

Yes.

JUDITH

Is there a more economical option for the disposal of my mother's remains. As in, free?

MARTY

As we discussed on the phone I can turn her over to the state. They'll bury her at no cost to you.

JUDITH

So ignoble.
(hopefully)
Is there an or?

MARTY

Actually there is. You can donate the body to science. They won't be a memorial service, but the medical institution handling the remains will turn them over to you at some point, usually within the month. They'll even plant a tree in your mother's honor, which you are welcome to visit.

He hands her a brochure.

JUDITH

You know, two weeks ago that would have been unbearable to me. My only concern was to give my mother a proper send off. I had a reputation to uphold. But after sleeping in my car, living off junk food, staying in seedy motels and spending time in jail, a tree doesn't sound too bad.

MARTY

However, you still owe the mortuary a holding fee.

(MORE)

MARTY (CONT'D)

I've reduced it as far as I can,
but as it stands, the total amount
due is this.

He hands Judith a bill.

JUDITH

Will you accept a check?

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

We are at the coffee shop from the first scene. There is a "help wanted" sign hanging from the door. Judith enters.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

The barista Judith berated in the first scene hands Judith an application. She takes it to the table and starts filling it out.

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Judith in worker's uniform is cleaning tables, filling dispensers, making cappuccinos. She splashes foam all over her face.

Judith stands at the counter and takes it as an angry customer berates her. Her coworkers look on in sympathy.

EXT. - COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Judith exits with a couple coworkers at the end of the shift. They move down the street smiling and gossiping. The feeling is one of friendly solidarity.

As she passes Bart the homeless guy she gives him a high five. But before their hands touched she moves hers away, knowing where his hands have been before.

EXT. - PSYCHIC - DAY

Judith stands in front of Olga the psychic's house still wearing her coffee shop uniform.

INT. PSYCHIC - DAY

Olga opens the screen door to see Judith, who hands her a hundred dollar bill.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Judith and Olga sit at the kitchen table.

OLGA

I'm happy to see you and not at all surprised.

JUDITH

Naturally. You're a prognosticator.

OLGA

So... How is your story going?

JUDITH

Still in the trash somewhere. But my story, my life... It's going good. I'm no longer a zombie.

OLGA

I'm glad to see you've stopped taking things so literally. And you've had your peak experience?

JUDITH

(realizing)
I guess I have.

OLGA

All that's left is self-transcendence.

JUDITH

Okay let's' have it, but the abbreviated version because I'm short on cash.

OLGA

Let's see...
(grabs a book)
Do you mind?

JUDITH

Go right ahead.

OLGA

(flipping through pages)
Self-transcendence is... It's what follows when you no longer see the world from your little perspective. You rise above effort and striving, wishing and hoping. You are beyond ambition. You have arrived. This is having rather than not having.

(MORE)

OLGA (CONT'D)

Being rather than becoming. Because you lack nothing.

JUDITH

Okay. Oh, there's more?

OLGA

You lose self-consciousness. You accept the natural world and let things be rather than judging and attempting to control. You are immune to people's ignorance or stupidity even when directed at you. You become your own mother and father. You yield to the will of a higher power. You are beyond human. And so - this is my favorite part - "you live casually in heaven and are on easy terms with the eternal and the infinite."

(pause)

Does this sound like you?

JUDITH

Not me. But somebody I know.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Judith dials a number on her phone and puts it to her ear.

MIA'S VOICE

It's Mia. I'm not here so leave a message and have a great day!

Judith hangs up.

EXT. SCENIC OVERLOOK - DAY

Judith sits on a bench in a wooded area with surrounding trails overlooking the San Fernando Valley. She is writing.

JUDITH'S VOICE

After so many novels about nothing, fiction feels fake and embarrassing. Once you have gone through enough, the idea of making up stories about Jack and Jill and having them do things together or not seems superfluous and superficial. I am ready for the real - even if not much happens.

Judith's phone rings. It is her NYC publisher, Seamus. She answers.

SEAMUS' VOICE

Judith. I received your book proposal. First thing I thought was: what, no zombies?

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

It's my life.

SEAMUS' VOICE

And it's so revealing. I'll get to the point. I can get you low six. I know that's not what you're used to, but what if I could negotiate a three-book deal and movie tie-in?

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

I'll have to discuss it with my agent.

SEAMUS' VOICE

Of course. I'll work out the details and send you something in writing by the end of the week.

Judith hangs up. She packs her bag and gets up.

INT. TREE AREA - DAY

Judith stands in front of a small tree. Beneath it is a picture of her mother with her name, Hedda Cranston. Judith addresses the picture.

JUDITH

The only thing that scares me is not finding someone to love me like you. But I can love people the way I want to be loved. I miss you, mommy.

Judith takes out a vial of ashes and sprinkles them at the base of the tree.

MALE VOICE

Redwoods are real sturdy. And they live for 2000 years.

Judith turns to see Blake Tanner, her high school crush.

JUDITH

Blake, what are you doing here?

BLAKE

Visiting my father's memory. He's
the oak at the end of the lane.

JUDITH

And your wife?

BLAKE

Divorced. For real this time.

JUDITH

I'm sorry to hear that.

BLAKE

I had it coming. How about you?

JUDITH

Unaffiliated for the last dozen
years.

BLAKE

You look even prettier than the
pictures that came with the
articles that said you were dead.

(pause)

You wanna get some coffee?

JUDITH

I don't drink coffee, and I don't
normally associate with liars, drug
users, or thieves, and you're all
three.

(pause)

But I have been too, so who am I to
judge?

BLAKE

I was in a bad place, Judith. But
I'm trying.

JUDITH

Fair enough.

BLAKE

Maybe we're both seriously f-ed up.
Math was never my subject, but as
my former tutor you know that two
minuses add up to a plus. So maybe
there's hope for us?

JUDITH

Maybe, but for the record, Blake: I
tutored you in English.

BLAKE

How about we take a walk and you
can refresh my memory.

Judith's face relaxes into smile as she allows him to lead
her toward the trail.

BLAKE (CONT'D)

You know I've read all of your
books.

JUDITH

I won't hold that against you.

Judith's phone rings.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

Will you excuse me a moment?

Blake nods and steps aside.

JUDITH (ON PHONE) (CONT'D)

Mia?

MIA'S VOICE

Hey.

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

Hey. How are you?

MIA'S VOICE

Not too bad. You?

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

Good. So... I have a business
proposition for you.

MIA

Uh-oh.

As Judith walks over to Blake.

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

A story about two sisters,
estranged, who never managed to see
eye to eye. They finally overcome
their differences and learn to love
each other. I was thinking we could
write it together. I know you're
busy, so between your shifts - and
mine.

MIA'S VOICE

Okay, but can we call it Love Is in the Details?

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

Sure. But only because Nitty-Gritty is already taken.

MIA'S VOICE

Does that mean you sold your book?

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

Yes! I'm back!

MIA'S VOICE

Congratulations, Judith! I'm so proud of you!

JUDITH (ON PHONE)

I couldn't have done it without you.

MIA'S VOICE

Awww...

Judith's voice fades out as she takes Blake's hand and they stroll into the sunset.

FADE OUT.

THE END