

SISTER CITIES

By Colette Freedman

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SYNOPSIS: The internationally-acclaimed play by Colette Freedman that was both a critical and commercial smash in the United States and Europe, *Sister Cities* tells the story of four estranged sisters who reunite for their mother's alleged suicide.

Artistic, self-indulgent matriarch Mary, has married four different men and named her daughters after the location of their births. Mary focused her attentions on her men, spawning deep sibling rivalries now manifested in her bickering adult daughters. When Mary allegedly kills herself, her four daughters return home and put together the pieces of their fractured lives.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 females)

AUSTIN (f).....(290 lines)

CAROLINA (f).....(180 lines)

BALTIMORE (f).....(217 lines)

DALLAS (f).....(171 lines)

MARY (f).....(48 lines)

DURATION: 85 minutes.

TIME: An afternoon.

SETTING: A living room in Poughkeepsie.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE 1: Noon

SCENE 2: 1pm

SCENE 3: 2pm

SCENE 4: 1 week earlier

SCENE 5: 3pm

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT START: *Saturday, noon. The lights go halfway up on a modest living room. One window. A couch. A coffee table. Two side chairs. A small dining table. A television sits on a sizable cabinet. A shelf lined with Russian nesting dolls. An alcove upstage right leads to the kitchen. A hallway upstage left leads to the rest of the house. The front door is downstage. The muted television flickers in the darkness. Framed pictures everywhere.*

The front door opens. CAROLINA, late thirties, a tight-laced, too-thin woman in a business suit, enters. She walks with a purpose, rolling an overnight bag. The door remains open. BALTIMORE, late twenties, an attractive mixture of bohemian student and intellectual do-gooder, replete with knapsack, bolts in.

BALTIMORE: Pee. Gotta pee. Gotta pee.

BALTIMORE barrels past CAROLINA through the hallway. CAROLINA examines the room. She turns off the television and inspects a pile of unopened letters. AUSTIN, mid-thirties, athletic, in a Princeton lacrosse tee shirt and pajama bottoms enters from the kitchen eating a TV dinner macaroni and cheese.

AUSTIN: Carolina.

CAROLINA is startled, she loathes being surprised. She acknowledges AUSTIN. There is no love lost between them.

CAROLINA: No one outside the family calls me that anymore.

AUSTIN: Well, since I'm inside the family, I should be allowed to call you by your Christian name, but, hey, Carol works for me... Carol Channing! Carol Burnett... *A Christmas Carol. (Whispers.)* You know who else changed her name, well, not really changed it, more like modified it: CCH Pounder. Her name is like a condensed sneeze. *(Loudly.)* Ha... Cch.

CAROLINA: Are you drunk?

AUSTIN: Not yet. Cch's real name is Carol Christine Hilaria Pounder.

What's it been Carolina, three years?

CAROLINA: Two.

AUSTIN: And a half.

AUSTIN pecks at the macaroni.

CAROLINA: When's the last time you cooked for yourself?

AUSTIN: A few minutes ago.

CAROLINA: When's the last time you cooked for yourself that didn't involve microwaving a box?

AUSTIN: A few years ago.

CAROLINA: If Mother could see you now, she'd be horrified.

AUSTIN: It's good to see you.

CAROLINA: This place looks like a mausoleum.

CAROLINA goes to the window and opens it. Light streams in.

AUSTIN: It is a mausoleum. *(Covers her eyes, unhappy with the light.)*
Where's Baltimore?

CAROLINA: In the bathroom.

AUSTIN: Is she pregnant?

CAROLINA: No! ...Why, is she seeing someone?

AUSTIN: Pregnant people always rush to the bathroom when they get somewhere.

CAROLINA surveys the room. She examines another picture.

CAROLINA: She's been on the road four and a half hours. She wanted to take the bus the whole way from Boston, but I met her in Albany and we rode the last hour and a half together.

AUSTIN: You took a bus?

CAROLINA: No, Baltimore took the bus. I flew.

AUSTIN: Because you're definitely not a bus person.

CAROLINA: I'm not. I flew... and then rented a car.

AUSTIN: Oh. Did you have scintillating conversation? Baltimore's a scintillating conversationalist.

CAROLINA: I drove. She slept.

AUSTIN: Why didn't you fly into Poughkeepsie?

CAROLINA: It was half the price to fly into a major airport.

AUSTIN: And Albany's a major airport?

CAROLINA: It's more major than Poughkeepsie.

AUSTIN: But, you're rich.

CAROLINA: What does that have to do with it?

AUSTIN: Rich people should be able to fly into whatever airport they choose. That's why we live in a class based society, to cater to the convenience of the rich.

CAROLINA: Austin, the rich stay rich because they don't spend their disposable income on last minute airplane tickets flying into Poughkeepsie... and if it makes you happy, I flew first class.

AUSTIN: It does make me happy. *(Beat.)* Did you remember to put in your frequent flyer miles?

CAROLINA: *(Annoyed.)* I remembered. Can we drop it?

AUSTIN: Sure. Dropping it. No worries. Just making scintillating conversation.

They are silent. There is a sound of a toilet flushing. BALTIMORE bursts into the room.

BALTIMORE: Mom's in the tub.

AUSTIN: Yeah.

BALTIMORE: Okay, just checking.

BALTIMORE kisses AUSTIN on the top of her head and flops into a chair. She eats from an open potato chip bag.

CAROLINA: Wait. Wait. Wait. Mom's in the bathroom? Our mother's in the bathroom?

CAROLINA rushes into the other room. Silence.

BALTIMORE: She looks good.

AUSTIN: I thought so.

They continue to eat in silence.

BALTIMORE: How've you been?

AUSTIN: I've been better.

CAROLINA rushes back. She is furious.

CAROLINA: Mom's in the tub.

BALTIMORE: That's what I said.

AUSTIN: That's what she said.

CAROLINA looks at her SISTERS as if they're crazy. She goes to the phone. Dials.

CAROLINA: *(Into phone.)* Can I have the number for the— *(To her SISTERS.)* Who do I call?

BALTIMORE: 911?

AUSTIN: The coroner?

CAROLINA: *(Into phone.)* Hi. Yes. May I please have the number for the police? *(To AUSTIN.)* You are completely inept. *(Into phone.)* Hello, my mother's passed away and I'm not sure who I should talk to about.... What? Okay. *(To SISTERS.)* She's transferring me. I thought you could at least take care of this before I got here.

AUSTIN: And miss this drama?

CAROLINA: *(Into phone.)* Hi.... Yes. Who do I talk to about getting a body removed? ...730 North Diversey Avenue... two blocks west of Greenspring.... What? Uh, no, technically, it's not, I mean, I grew up in it, but I don't live here now... it's my mother's house, was my mother's house, but it is my mother's body.... What? No, I found her dead.... She slit her wrists.... Because her wrists are slit. Yesterday.... Because I wasn't here, yesterday. I was in Seattle, litigating a case.... Yes, I flew. I took the red eye. American flight #22. Obnoxious stewardess—

AUSTIN: Flight attendant.

CAROLINA glares at AUSTIN.

CAROLINA: (*Irritated.*) They showed a Leonardo DiCaprio movie, but I'm not a Leonardo DiCaprio fan so I didn't watch it. Enough details? Can we please focus on my mother's corpse rotting in the tub? ...Thank you. (*To SISTERS.*) He's transferring me. Is everyone completely incapable?

AUSTIN: Government worker.

BALTIMORE: Bureaucracy at its best.

CAROLINA: (*Into phone.*) Hello. Hello.... Yes. My name is Carol Baxter-Shaw and my dead Mother is in the bathtub. I need you to send someone to pick her up.... Yesterday.... Because I wasn't here. (*Growing irritation.*) ...Because I was under the false impression that someone else *had* called yesterday. (*Looks at AUSTIN.*) Because she's mentally unbalanced. (*Losing it.*) CAN YOU PLEASE JUST SEND SOMEONE OVER HERE TO REMOVE THE FUCKING BODY?! (*Composing herself.*) Thank you... Two to three hours? ...Yes, I'm certain busy metropolises like Poughkeepsie are littered with dead bodies you people need to pick up... 730 North Diversey Avenue... D as in David, I.V.E.R.S.E.Y. Thank you. (*To AUSTIN.*) Do you have anything to drink?

AUSTIN: It's noon.

CAROLINA: I didn't ask for the time, I asked for a drink.

AUSTIN: There's vodka in the liquor cabinet.

BALTIMORE: Do you think 911 operators are equipped to handle hysteria?

AUSTIN: They must take a course.

CAROLINA goes to the cabinet. She methodically pulls bottles of vodka.

CAROLINA: Smirnoff. Absolut. Absolut Pepper. Grey Goose. Stolichnaya. Findlandia. Popov. Absolut Citron. It's a vodka cornucopia.

CAROLINA goes to the kitchen. BALTIMORE surveys the vodka collection.

BALTIMORE: That's a lot of vodka.

AUSTIN: Cornucopia?

BALTIMORE: I sent her a word of the day calendar for Christmas.

AUSTIN: That's a thoughtful gift.

BALTIMORE: I thought so.

AUSTIN: Cause I would have said mélange or potpourri. Even hodgepodge, but cornucopia: That's a mouthful.

BALTIMORE: I didn't know Mom was a boozier.

CAROLINA returns and pours herself a long shot of Grey Goose.

AUSTIN: She wasn't. She just liked to "be prepared" in case she had company. Like today.

BALTIMORE examines the liquor supply.

BALTIMORE: Being prepared is having a bottle, maybe two, not a fully stocked liquor emporium. Like this is the set of "Cheers."

AUSTIN: Where everybody knows your name.

BALTIMORE: Oh my god, the nesting dolls!

BALTIMORE plays with some of the Russian Nesting Dolls on the shelf.

AUSTIN: Mom took preparedness to a whole new level. Check the closet, there's enough baby powder and Listerine to disinfect a third world country. Once, I was running low on paper, so I asked Mom to pick me up some. Four hours later, she comes home with twenty different varieties. Bright white. Matte White. Print white. Did you know there are actually different colors of white? I'm still using that paper.

BALTIMORE: That's prepared.

AUSTIN: That's psychotic. Who needs twenty reams of paper? It's not like we live in the wilderness. There are five Office Depots in walking distance. Plenty of paper.

CAROLINA: Are we going to talk about it?

AUSTIN: What?

CAROLINA gives AUSTIN a look.

CAROLINA: You know what.

AUSTIN: We've just covered paper and alcohol. That's earth and water. All we have left are fire and air and we've exhausted conversation on the four elements.

BALTIMORE: Carolina flew in on the red eye.

AUSTIN: That's air. Fire anyone?

BALTIMORE: I wouldn't mind a cigarette—

CAROLINA: —Mother's suicide. I need to talk about it. Can we please—talk about it.

AUSTIN: Why? You weren't present during her life, why should you give a shit about her death?

CAROLINA: That's unfair.

AUSTIN: Suicide is personal.

CAROLINA: I talked to Mother at least once a week.

AUSTIN: Once a week?

CAROLINA: Okay. Maybe every other week.

AUSTIN: Biweekly.

CAROLINA: Yes. Look, she didn't indicate any symptoms of unhappiness.

AUSTIN: "Symptoms of unhappiness?" You really need to let the legalese go when you're out of the courtroom.

CAROLINA: Was she upset?

AUSTIN: Do people commit suicide if they're not upset?

CAROLINA: How can someone who isn't in pain suddenly kill herself?

AUSTIN: See, there's your misconception. One does not suddenly kill one's self. It is a systematic, methodical event. Mother did not slit her wrists with an old Bic shaver from Rite Aid. The razor, should you choose to examine it, is a top of the line Zirconia ceramic razor blade.

CAROLINA: You're joking.

AUSTIN: We saw them on QVC.

AUSTIN goes to the liquor cabinet and pours herself a drink.

AUSTIN: Hey! Complete non sequitur: Guess who I saw last week?

BALTIMORE: Who?

AUSTIN: What's her name? Your friend. That prom queen—

BALTIMORE: —Lori Braithwaite?! Let me guess. Three kids. She lives down the street from her mother. And she's fat. She's very fat. Am I right?

AUSTIN: An A+ to young Baltimore Baxter. Three kids, two blocks and... she's enormous.

BALTIMORE: Enormous or ENORMOUS?

AUSTIN: Well, she's not "lose a few pounds at Jenny Craig" chubby or "watch yourself change" Weight Watchers fat. I'd say, she's... "my husband doesn't touch me, I hate my life, give me another muffin" enormous.

BALTIMORE: It's poetic justice. The prettiest, most popular girl at Our Lady of Lourdes High School, is now obese.

AUSTIN: Clinically obese. But she's still really pretty.

BALTIMORE: Sure. Pretty face. They never lose the pretty face.

AUSTIN: Hey, where's my hug? I haven't seen you in months. Why didn't I get a hug?

BALTIMORE: Because you smell. You know I have a thing about body odor.

AUSTIN: How can I shower? ...Mom's in the bathtub.

They laugh. Unable to contain herself, CAROLINA grabs her purse and goes to the door.

CAROLINA: I need some air.... Does anyone need anything?

AUSTIN and BALTIMORE continue to laugh, almost hysterical.

AUSTIN: Paper.

BALTIMORE: Vodka.

CAROLINA: I'm thrilled. Really thrilled that my sisters are handling the suicidal death of our mother so damn lightly. Maybe, when I get back, we can have a grown-up conversation about how to handle this.

CAROLINA exits. Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT START: *One hour later. Lights up on the television set. "Casablanca" plays. DALLAS, late twenties, the eternal sorority sister, sits on the couch between AUSTIN and BALTIMORE. They watch, mesmerized.*

AUSTIN: Every time I watch this, I pray she lets Laszlo get on the plane by himself.

DALLAS: It wasn't Ilsa's choice. Rick told her to go.

AUSTIN: He tells her to go, so she goes. Sit Spot. Stay Spot. Go Ilsa.

DALLAS: She goes because she realizes that politics are more important than love. Because if she stayed, the movie wouldn't have caused emotional unrest and probably wouldn't have won an Oscar.

AUSTIN: Yeah, but her role sucked. Both Claude Rains and Bogie got nominated, but Bergman didn't. Not even a nomination. Why? Because she's just a pawn in the whole thing. Sit Spot. Stay Spot. Get on the plane with Laszlo Spot. No red carpet for you Bergman.

BALTIMORE: Is there a dog in this movie?

DALLAS: The fact that you've never seen Casablanca explains so much about you, Baltimore.

BALTIMORE: Wait, she and Laszlo get on the plane? Did you just totally give away the ending?

AUSTIN: It's not like I told you Rosebud is the sled.

BALTIMORE: What?

AUSTIN: Never mind.

BALTIMORE turns off the television.

AUSTIN: "Casablanca" is a classic.

DALLAS: Baltimore considers "Sixteen Candles" a classic.

BALTIMORE: Molly Ringwald did some of her most definitive work in the eighties! ...I defy you to name a movie that defines teen angst better than "The Breakfast Club".

DALLAS: Movie, or film?

BALTIMORE: There's a difference?

AUSTIN: "To Sir with Love."

BALTIMORE: Huh?

AUSTIN: Sidney Poitier. Lulu...

BALTIMORE looks at her and shrugs.

AUSTIN: Never mind.

DALLAS: Films don't have titles like "Pretty in Pink." There's a cliché.

Why can't you be pretty in a color other than pink?

AUSTIN: Alliteration. You wouldn't say pretty in maroon or—

DALLAS: Pretty in purple, why couldn't she be pretty in purple?

AUSTIN: Is anybody pretty in purple?

BALTIMORE gestures to herself. She is wearing purple. Neither of her SISTERS acknowledge this.

BALTIMORE: So what happens? Do Ilsa and Lazlo make it to America?

AUSTIN: Sure. They move to Darien, Connecticut and have 2.5 kids.

DALLAS: —And a white picket fence.

AUSTIN: —And they open a bar. Call it Laszlo's Place. Hire a Black piano player.

BALTIMORE: Speaking of which.

AUSTIN: A Black piano player?

BALTIMORE: A bar. What's your poison? Vodka or vodka?

DALLAS: I'm going to go with the vodka, thanks.

BALTIMORE goes to the cabinet.

BALTIMORE: Smirnoff. Absolut. Absolut Pepper. Grey Goose. Stolichnaya. Findlandia. Popov. Or Absolut Citron?

DALLAS: I don't usually drink before five... unless it's a Bloody Mary at Neiman Marcus with my mother-in-law on a Sunday afternoon.

AUSTIN: We have tomato juice.

DALLAS: Stoli works for me. *(Looks at the array of bottles.)* God, there's a lot of vodka here.

AUSTIN: A potpourri.

BALTIMORE: A hodgepodge.

AUSTIN: A cornucopia.

BALTIMORE: A cornucopia.

DALLAS: Tabasco sauce?

AUSTIN: Kitchen.

DALLAS exits.

BALTIMORE: I'm starving.

AUSTIN: I have thirty-two varieties of beef in a box.

BALTIMORE: Do you ever cook for yourself?

AUSTIN: Do you?

BALTIMORE: No. That's why I date men who can cook.

AUSTIN: Because why do it yourself when—

BALTIMORE and AUSTIN: Men can do it for you.

BALTIMORE: The third commandment in Mom's biblical philosophy.

AUSTIN: Sandwiched in between marry for love and divorce for money.

BALTIMORE: And name your children after the cities in which they're born. Dallas is in trouble.

AUSTIN: Why?

BALTIMORE: She'll have to name her kid Philadelphia.

AUSTIN: She's pregnant too?

BALTIMORE: *(Whispers.)* Who else is pregnant?

AUSTIN: *(Whispers.)* You are.

BALTIMORE: I am?

AUSTIN: You're not?

BALTIMORE: No.

AUSTIN: Oh.

BALTIMORE: Dallas is a little puffy. Besides, if she's not, she will be. She and Peter are always going on about having a family. Like there aren't enough unwanted children on this planet already. I'm just glad Carolina didn't have kids before the divorce.

AUSTIN: Because she'd be a terrible Mother?

BALTIMORE: She's too skinny. Skinny people never have good pregnancies. Carolina and I take after our fathers, whereas you and Dallas both inherited mom's childbearing hips.

AUSTIN: Thanks?!

BALTIMORE: Was she always this uptight?

AUSTIN: Dallas?

BALTIMORE: I don't think Dallas is uptight. She's fun.

DALLAS enters with a glass of tomato juice.

DALLAS: Who's fun?

BALTIMORE: You are.

DALLAS: I know.

BALTIMORE: Austin thinks you're uptight.

AUSTIN: Thanks.

DALLAS: Compared to Austin, a baboon's uptight.

BALTIMORE: We're dissecting Carolina.

DALLAS: Lovely state. Good air quality. Nice beaches.

AUSTIN: And extremely uptight.

DALLAS makes herself a Bloody Mary.

DALLAS: Give her a break. Her husband just left her. She puts up this ridiculous veneer of stoicism, but she's really just as confused as the rest of us. She just hides it better.

AUSTIN: I'm not sure she's hiding it.

DALLAS: She works fifty-two hours a day.

BALTIMORE: Yeah. Someone in our family needs to perpetuate the myth that women can have it all. Husband, family, career.

AUSTIN: She doesn't have a family.

DALLAS: Or a husband.

BALTIMORE: Okay. Career. Look, when Mom graduated high school, her two options were to become a secretary or a teacher.

DALLAS: So, she got married. Four times.

BALTIMORE: Yes. Marriage was also an option. But, I'm talking career.

AUSTIN: So, Carolina has made up for mother's lack of academic fortitude and marital ineptitude by schooling herself through a law degree and ignoring her family in favor of her career.

DALLAS: Is miss-never-get-uptight, tightening?

AUSTIN: Observing. What's the point of a successful career if you can't share your life with someone?

DALLAS: Okay. And I don't mean to be morbid or accuse you of being hypocritical or anything, but who's the one with the successful career still living with her mother?

AUSTIN: Technically, I'm not living with her anymore.

DALLAS: You'd think after your novel came out, you'd, I don't know, move at least NEXT DOOR to Mom, rather than be her roommate.

AUSTIN: (To BALTIMORE.) In college when your roommate dies, you get an immediate 4.0.

BALTIMORE: I thought that was just a rumor.

AUSTIN: Fact. Besides, I pay rent. Paid rent.

DALLAS: You and Carolina aren't that different.

AUSTIN: Really? Well, I didn't ignore my family. I've spent countless hours on your couch. I've even visited Baltimore at Harvard.

BALTIMORE: It's true. She has.

AUSTIN: Family is my priority. Carolina has the career. I choose the family.

BALTIMORE: Dallas has the husband. So, where does that leave me?

AUSTIN: With the potential. That's the nice thing about still being young. You can do anything.

BALTIMORE: I can't do that many things.

AUSTIN: Yes, but your youth perpetuates the illusion that you're capable of infinite possibilities.

BALTIMORE: I'm getting my masters in sociology. I think my possibilities are pretty finite.

CAROLINA enters with a cardboard carrier filled with three large Jamba Juices with straws. She hugs DALLAS.

CAROLINA: Hey, when did you get here?

DALLAS: I just missed you. Train ran late, surprise. What flavor?

DALLAS picks one up.

CAROLINA: Protein with ginseng and echinacea.

DALLAS puts it back.

DALLAS: Yum. Enjoy.

CAROLINA distributes the juices.

CAROLINA: Did the coroner call?

BALTIMORE: Was he supposed to?

AUSTIN: Why do you assume it's a he? Coroners can be she's.

BALTIMORE: Nope, it's a he. Definitely a he. A tall, cute, muscular he.

AUSTIN: Really, how do you know?

BALTIMORE: I was right about Lori Braithwaites's body composition. It's a gift. No, he didn't call. Do coroners call? I thought they just appeared.

CAROLINA: It's been an hour. I wonder if he's running late?

AUSTIN: It's not like Mom's going anywhere.

CAROLINA: WILL YOU PLEASE START TAKING THIS SERIOUSLY.

EVERYONE is quiet. CAROLINA walks to the vodka bottles and pours a healthy shot of Smirnoff in her Jamba Juice.

BALTIMORE: Gross.

AUSTIN: You drink a lot for a lawyer. Do all lawyer's drink so much?

CAROLINA: Do all writers act with complete disregard for their family in times of crisis?

AUSTIN: I don't disregard my family. I visited Baltimore at Harvard.

BALTIMORE: It's true. She has.

CAROLINA: And you. You just instigate her. Having one of you is bad enough, but two, I think I'm losing my mind.

AUSTIN: Have more vodka, that'll help you find it.

AUSTIN exits.

CAROLINA: What's her problem?

DALLAS: I think grief hits people differently. (*Beat.*) When's the last time you saw Mom?

CAROLINA: I spoke to her bi-weekly.

DALLAS: When's the last time you saw her?

CAROLINA: I don't know, Christmas?

BALTIMORE: You guys were in Hawaii at Christmas.

CAROLINA: Right. The "maybe-THIS-will-save-the-marriage" vacation. He fell in love with a stewardess, I got shingles. (*She takes a long swig.*) Easter.

DALLAS: You had the O'Hagan case.

CAROLINA: Why do you know more about my career than I do?

DALLAS: You're the second most famous person to come out of this family, we all have your clippings... somewhere.

BALTIMORE: I do... somewhere.

DALLAS: The point is, you haven't seen Mom in over a year. (*She looks at BALTIMORE.*) Have you?

BALTIMORE shakes her head.

DALLAS: I haven't since... last Christmas. Wow. Then I guess none of us have really seen her... except Austin. And we're not the ones who found her.

BALTIMORE: And that whole razor thing. That's really fucked up. (*Beat.*) She obviously really planned this.

CAROLINA: You cannot make me believe that Mother planned this.

BALTIMORE: I'm just saying, we don't know the particulars.

CAROLINA: That's what I'm trying to find out.

BALTIMORE: Did you ever have foreplay before sex?

CAROLINA: That has nothing to do with anything. (*Beat.*) It's none of your business.

BALTIMORE: Says the woman who taught me how to give a blow job with an unripe banana.

CAROLINA: Yes. I have foreplay. Your point?

BALTIMORE: You can't just barge in and ask what happened. You need to chat, catch up, communicate; enjoy some light banter and witty repartee and then ease into the more intense stuff. A conversational seduction of sorts.

CAROLINA: When did you get so smart?

BALTIMORE: I go to Harvard.

They sit silent.

CAROLINA: So, until Austin's ready to open up, we what?

DALLAS: We relax. We try to relax.

CAROLINA: How?

DALLAS: To relax? Take your hair down.

CAROLINA: What?

DALLAS: Take your hair down. Literally. It's not just figurative speech.
I want you to take your hair down.

CAROLINA: This is ridiculous.

BALTIMORE: You show me yours, I'll show you mine.

BALTIMORE swiftly pulls her hair out of its ponytail. She looks at CAROLINA who sighs and deliberately unpins her hair, one hair pin at a time.

DALLAS: Now, kick off your heels and take off your pantyhose.

CAROLINA: You've got to be kidding.

DALLAS: I don't kid.

BALTIMORE: Pantyhose are an antiquated torture device men invented to give us an equivalent of a tie.

DALLAS: I know you're uncomfortable. Take them off.

CAROLINA does.

BALTIMORE: You've got great legs.

CAROLINA: (*Embarrassed.*) Yes. Thank you.

DALLAS: See, don't you feel better? (*She massages her shoulders.*)
A little loosey goosy, free flowing... this is what it feels like to RELAX.

CAROLINA: Okay. I get it. I'm relaxed.

She clearly is not.

BALTIMORE: Hey. Let's play scrabble and order pizza.

CAROLINA: Now?

BALTIMORE: Why not now?

CAROLINA: Because our mother is in the other—sure why not, I'm relaxed... I can be relaxed. Pizza and scrabble, sounds delightful.

DALLAS: Remember the tournaments we used to have?

BALTIMORE: You guys never used to let me play.

DALLAS: That's because you were a child.

BALTIMORE: Well I'm gonna kick your butt today. Who has the Harvard degree?

CAROLINA: Technically, you don't have it yet.

BALTIMORE: But I got in. Getting in to an Ivy League school is far tougher than staying in. I'll get the degree. Piece of cake.

DALLAS: I still think you should have stayed in New York.

CAROLINA: Not again.

CAROLINA goes to the cabinet and pulls out the Scrabble game. Sets it up at the table.

BALTIMORE: Right. Cornell is too depressing, NYU is too big, and the rest of the schools are too preppy.

DALLAS: Vassar is not too preppy.

BALTIMORE: You're dressed head to toe in Anne Taylor.

DALLAS: That just means I have impeccable taste.

BALTIMORE: No. It means that you're conditioned to dress to please others. It's not a big deal, it's learned behavior, Pavlovian. I'm studying it right now. Mom was pseudo-preppy and you wanted to please her so you dressed pseudo-preppy. The only reason you even went to Vassar, which is a good school, although inferior to fellow sister schools Wellesley and Bryn Mawr, which I happen to know you got into, is because Mom wanted you to stay close to home.... And I guarantee your bra and panties match.

DALLAS: What?

BALTIMORE: Your panties. They match your bra. I'll bet money on it. Mom's matched, so my guess is yours match too.

DALLAS: No they don't.

BALTIMORE: Show me.

DALLAS: I'm not going to show you.

BALTIMORE: You just made Carolina take off her pantyhose and you won't show me your bra? *(She postures like a lawyer and addresses CAROLINA.)* Counselor? I have just made an accusation. If the defendant pleads the 5th, wouldn't the jury be inclined to sway with my rather convincing indictment?

CAROLINA: She probably would win the argument if you refuse to provide the evidence.

DALLAS rolls her eyes, unbuttons her shirt and throws it open. She is wearing a pink bra. She tugs on the corner of her underwear. Pink.

BALTIMORE: Pretty in pink!

DALLAS: Happy?! You caught me, I match. I've always matched. Take a good look, I'm the mother-pleaser whose bra and underwear always match.

BALTIMORE: Don't get your knickers in a twist. I bet you five bucks Carolina's match too. And your tits are better than hers.

CAROLINA: Thanks a lot... don't take the bet. Guilty as charged. How could they not? Remember mom's sixth commandment?

ALL: *Always match your bra and knickers else the police will give you snickers.*

CAROLINA: That's one of my more disturbing childhood recollections.

DALLAS: I can't believe she was actually mortified at the thought of the police finding our lifeless body after whatever catastrophic accident we were in, and judging our poor upbringing by our uncoordinated underwear... talk about misplaced priorities.

CAROLINA: I was the only person in my gym class whose bra matched my underwear.

DALLAS: Peter makes fun of me. I get completely neurotic if I try to mix it up a little and go blue with red or purple with yellow, or pink with... white. It's pathetic. I can't feel good on the outside unless I feel good on the inside.

BALTIMORE: Mom's ingrained herself in us. Permanently.... Ironic that she decided to kill herself in the buff.

CAROLINA: Baltimore.

BALTIMORE: Well, she did. After all these years, I bet she's collected some pretty nice lingerie, but no... we've got to see her distended boobs and grey cootchie.

CAROLINA: Baltimore!

BALTIMORE: What? I'm only saying what you're thinking. And, FYI, I never listened to mom's dictum. *(She pulls off her jeans. Discards them. She is wearing men's tighty whities.)* I don't give a shit if a cop sees me in matching underwear. *(Imitates cop.)* S'cuse me miss. You are in possible vi-o-la-tion of the matching bra and panties act. D'ya mind straddling my car so I can frisk you? *(Sexually, straddles fake car, talks in southern accent.)* Why yes officer. Forgive me for my possible violation of the law. But, as you can see, it doesn't really matter what the color of my panties are, cause I never wear a bra *(She lifts up her shirt, no bra.)* ...so, academically speaking

everything I wear... matches my underwear. But you can still frisk me if you want.

She plops down in DALLAS'S lap.

DALLAS: You are such a slut.

BALTIMORE: If you've got it, flaunt it! Does anyone have a cigarette?

DALLAS: You smoke?

BALTIMORE: No. I'm asking for a cigarette to make conversation.

Yes. I smoke. Infrequently. When I'm either drunk or under duress.

I am currently under duress. Later, I plan to be drunk. I know all about the death stick lecture so save the sob song.

DALLAS: I think Mom smoked.

CAROLINA: She so didn't seem the type.

BALTIMORE: Really, what's the type?

CAROLINA: There are three types of people who smoke. One: pre-pubescent children who think that smoking will elevate them to the unattainable echelon of cool. Two: fucked up twenty somethings without a clue who use cigarettes like procrastination props, hoping the five to seven minutes of ingested cancer will give them some remarkable insight into their unfocused lives.

BALTIMORE gives CAROLINA the finger.

CAROLINA: And three: lonely older women.

DALLAS: My students definitely fit into the first category. And I have to say it Baltimore, you're a classic number two. But Mom, she didn't strike me as a lonely woman. I mean, she had Austin around all the time and she had her men.

They are quiet. They all know about "the men."

BALTIMORE: Do you think they'll start coming out of the woodwork now that she's dead?

DALLAS: My father won't. He's dead too. Mommy and Daddy are dead. Sounds like a country western song. *(To CAROLINA.)* Is yours still in Vancouver?

CAROLINA: No, I just moved him to Spokane. Alzheimer's. I'll tell him about Mom, but he won't remember her. Shit, he barely remembers me.

DALLAS: I guess on the Richter scale, you're worse off. I mean, I'd rather my parent be dead than suffering in silence.

CAROLINA: He's not exactly silent. He has visions, which I don't think he likes because he's always yelling at them. At first, I thought it was personal, but when he started screaming at me about cheating him out of forty bucks at a celebrity poker game in Vegas, I realized that it was one of his imaginary friends. That, and the fact that he called me Mikey.

DALLAS: Who's Mikey?

CAROLINA: No clue. He had a cat once called Mike. Maybe he thinks I'm the cat.... Hopefully, he'll get pneumonia and die before he realizes what his life has dissolved into.

DALLAS: That's cold.

CAROLINA: That's fact. I don't wish it on anyone. Watching a strong, vibrant intellect waste away. First his mind, then his body. Terrifies me. It's hereditary, you know. I've memorized the statistics.

DALLAS: You'll be fine.

CAROLINA: Easy for you to say. We all have the same mother, and she's not sick, just suicidal, which is sick in its own right. Your father died in a car accident. That's not hereditary.

DALLAS: He died because his blood alcohol content was point twenty two and he thought hitting a tree was the same as hitting the brakes.

She pours more vodka in her glass. Toasts.

DALLAS: Alcoholism. Hereditary.

CAROLINA: Austin's father is around somewhere. The city, I think. I wonder if they still see each other.

BALTIMORE: Well, I'm not dying of Alzheimer's or slitting my wrists in a bathroom. And I only drink on special occasions, so alcoholism's out of the question. When my time comes, I'm going to a leper colony to help sick children.

DALLAS: Do they still have leper colonies?

BALTIMORE: I'm going to help the kids.

DALLAS: You can do that before you die.

BALTIMORE: But then I might catch it. I'm still young. And virile.

DALLAS: That's terrible.

BALTIMORE: That's fact. I can do a lot more good work from my desk in Boston than in the middle of a leper colony.

DALLAS: You're being ridiculous. That's like saying a teacher can teach better outside of the classroom away from the students.

BALTIMORE: So you're comparing your students to lepers?

DALLAS: Lepers is politically incorrect.

BALTIMORE: How do you know?

DALLAS: Because it's not appropriate. It's like the N word or the F word.

BALTIMORE: You're comparing the word fuck to the word leper?

DALLAS: You know how much I hate that language. Why do you insist on using it around me?

BALTIMORE: Are you going to wash my mouth out with soap and send me to the principal's office?

DALLAS: I just don't think people use that word anymore.

BALTIMORE: Fuck?

DALLAS: If you google lepers, the last reference will be sometime in the Middle Ages. People just don't get leprosy anymore.

CAROLINA pulls out a Blackberry out of her purse.

BALTIMORE: Don't you teach history?

DALLAS: Social Studies. They're fifth graders.

BALTIMORE: Then they should be socially conscious. Recycling, global warming, lepers.

DALLAS: They're studying the presidents.

BALTIMORE: Reagan never mentioned the word AIDS in his eight years as president. Are you teaching them that?

DALLAS: The world is painful enough, they don't need to know about AIDS and leprosy.

BALTIMORE: They need to wake up and face reality.

DALLAS: THEY'RE ELEVEN!

CAROLINA: (*Reads from her Blackberry.*) Recently, 738,284 cases of leprosy were identified worldwide; 91 in the United States. Between 1 million and 2 million people are believed permanently disabled by the disease.

BALTIMORE: 21st century. Still lepers running around. Seems your curriculum is a tad outdated, teach.

DALLAS: 91 cases in the United States. Oh, I'm sorry Baltimore. I guess I have failed as a teacher for not knowing that there are fewer than a hundred lepers living in the United States.

BALTIMORE: I thought lepers was politically incorrect.

They stare, fuming. AUSTIN enters upstage sipping from her Jamba Juice. She's now dressed in jeans and a worn flannel shirt. She observes.

AUSTIN: Are we playing strip poker?

Embarrassed, DALLAS buttons up her shirt. BALTIMORE remains in her undies.

BALTIMORE: No. Scrabble. Wanna play?

AUSTIN: Sure.

BALTIMORE: Paper?

AUSTIN: Bookshelf.

BALTIMORE looks through the shelf.

BALTIMORE: Monopoly, Twister. Oh my god, my Chutes and Ladders game. I could totally get money for this on Ebay. Oh my god!

BALTIMORE holds up an old Ken Doll.

BALTIMORE: My Ken Doll! This is my Ken Doll! I love this doll!

BALTIMORE gasps. EVERYONE looks up.

BALTIMORE: My Ken Doll is a eunuch.

DALLAS: Huh?

BALTIMORE: He's missing his penis. Was he always missing his penis?

CAROLINA: Mattel was never a big fan of genitalia on dolls.

AUSTIN: Yet they had no problem giving Barbie 36 D's.

BALTIMORE: I can't believe it. Ken. Unable to procreate. Why didn't you guys tell me?

AUSTIN: We were trying to protect you.

BALTIMORE: From what?

CAROLINA: We wanted you to think that all men were like that. This way your expectations weren't so high.

BALTIMORE: Did you guys ever make your Barbies have sex in the bathtub? *(They stare at her, disbelief.)* I did. Lots and lots of sex. *(To Ken Doll.)* You got laid a lot! Barbie, Skipper, Francie, Black Barbie *(She bends him over.)* G.I. Joe... for a eunuch, you did really well.

CAROLINA: *(To AUSTIN.)* You changed.

AUSTIN: I was starting to smell. Can I get my hug now Baltimore?

BALTIMORE runs to AUSTIN, hugs her.

CAROLINA: Seems like you and I are the only fully dressed ones.

AUSTIN: You want to change into something less... lawyerly?

CAROLINA: Yeah. I should.

CAROLINA exits.

BALTIMORE: You smell like baby powder.

AUSTIN: I doused myself. Just for you.

BALTIMORE: How come Mom doesn't smell?

AUSTIN: You smelled her?

BALTIMORE: I didn't smell her, but I happen to have ultra sensitive nostrils. Remember when old Mrs. McFeeley's dog died? I knew three days before she did. And she lived three houses down.

DALLAS: I loved that dog.

AUSTIN: The water's probably blocking the odor.

Distracted, BALTIMORE pulls out a tile.

BALTIMORE: 'A'. I go first!

AUSTIN: I think I figured out why Ilsa gets on the plane.

DALLAS: She really loves Laszlo?

AUSTIN: No. In the end, being left behind really sucks.

Blackout.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

AT START: *One hour later. The SISTERS sit around the table, well into the scrabble game, whose board is almost full. CAROLINA wears sweats and a tank. She shakes the egg timer.*

CAROLINA: Time's up.

BALTIMORE: Turn it again.

DALLAS: You're not twelve. We're not modifying the rules for you anymore, Miss Harvard.

BALTIMORE: Fine. *(She puts her letters on the board.)* But I could have done something better. *(She lifts up the letters, counting the points.)* That's ten, one, one, one, one, one, double s is two, one, one, one is twenty. Triple word score is sixty. Plus fifty for using all of my letters. That's 110 points. *(She adds up the scores.)* Looks like little Baltimore has taken the lead!

AUSTIN: You can't just add erastia onto zoo and count it.

BALTIMORE: I can and I did.

AUSTIN: What the hell is zooerastia?

BALTIMORE: You don't want to know. But it's a word.

AUSTIN: I challenge you.

BALTIMORE: You'll regret it.

AUSTIN: I still challenge you.

AUSTIN jumps up to get a dictionary. CAROLINA pulls out her Blackberry.

BALTIMORE: Fine. Challenge me. Just because zooerastia wasn't in your book, doesn't mean it's not a word.

DALLAS: I've never heard of it.

BALTIMORE: It's not a fifth grade word.

CAROLINA and AUSTIN find the definition at the same time.

AUSTIN: Wow.

CAROLINA: That's disgusting.

DALLAS: What? What is it?

AUSTIN: She's right, it's a word. Once you know, you'll never get it out of your mind.

DALLAS: What?

AUSTIN: Why is a word like that in your vocabulary?

BALTIMORE: I'm a sociology major. I study different forms of behavior.

CAROLINA: Variant behavior.

DALLAS: Will someone please tell me what the *fuck* zooerastia means!

BALTIMORE: You just used the 'f' word!

DALLAS: I don't like being out of the loop and feeling stupid.

BALTIMORE: You just said it.

DALLAS: Huh?

BALTIMORE: The definition. Fuck zooerastia. Fucking animals. Bestiality. Sexual intercourse with an animal. 110 points. (*She turns over the timer.*) Your turn, Dallas.

DALLAS: I don't feel like playing anymore.

BALTIMORE: Told you it would offend your prurient mind.

DALLAS: My mind is not prurient and I'm tired of defending myself.

BALTIMORE: You're just bitter that you're losing. You can't handle the fact that I'm smarter than you are.

DALLAS: Just because I didn't go to a precious Ivy League school, doesn't mean that I'm any less smart than you are. And I'm happy. I have a husband. I have a job. What do you have Baltimore?

BALTIMORE: I'm twenty-six. You're not supposed to have anything at twenty-six.

DALLAS: Really? At twenty-six, Carolina was already a junior partner at her firm. At twenty-six, Austin had already sold her first short story. And at twenty-six, I was already married.

BALTIMORE: Things are different now. My generation is more lost than yours.

DALLAS: Your generation? You're four years younger than I am.

BALTIMORE: In dog years, it's twenty-eight.

DALLAS: You're not a dog, you're a basket case.

BALTIMORE: Maybe I inherited it from Mom.

AUSTIN: Mom wasn't a basket case.

CAROLINA: Yes she was.

AUSTIN: No. She wasn't.

CAROLINA: Oh, no. She just happened to slit her wrists in the bathtub because she was perfectly sane. Cause that's what all sane people do. Wake up, eat Cheerios and decide, "It's a bit cloudy out today, so I think I'll take a bath instead of a shower and, whoa, look at that razor—

AUSTIN: A zirconia ceramic razor.

CAROLINA: —I think I'll slit my wrists and die." That's a basket case.

AUSTIN: No, Carolina. A basket case is someone who finds out she has ALS and does nothing as the disease slowly eats away at her body. Until the only functioning organ left is her brain and it's completely helpless to stop the eroding body around it. Someone who decides to voluntarily remain trapped in her dying shell. That's a basket case.

The SISTERS stare at AUSTIN.

AUSTIN: I'm starving. We should order that pizza.

CAROLINA: Mom had ALS?

DALLAS: Fuck.

BALTIMORE: What's ALS?

DALLAS: Lou Gehrig's disease. Everything in your body degenerates except for your mind.

CAROLINA: That's hereditary.

AUSTIN: Children of people afflicted by ALS have a ten percent chance of developing the disease.

BALTIMORE: Wow, Carolina, you're totally screwed.

CAROLINA: I need a drink.

DALLAS: We all need a drink. Fuck.

BALTIMORE: So, this was a planned death.

AUSTIN: That's what I've been trying to tell you.

BALTIMORE: Right. The zirconia razor. So this means—

CAROLINA: —That our beloved fucking mother decided to plan a sisterly reunion with her death. That she selfishly decided to kill herself before talking to any of us about it.

AUSTIN: She talked to me.

CAROLINA: Of course she talked to you, *you* were here. There are four of us, Austin. It was our right to know.

AUSTIN: It was her choice.

CAROLINA: That's bullshit. She obviously wasn't in her right mind. If it was her choice, then you should have had the common sense to overrule her choice.

AUSTIN: We're not in a court.

CAROLINA: You should have called me. I would have been able to talk her out of it. I could have helped.

AUSTIN: Mom specifically didn't want you to know. She was afraid you would have talked her out of it.

CAROLINA: Of course I would have talked her out of it. Suicide is wrong. It's fucking wrong.

AUSTIN: Is that the bible or your conscience speaking?

CAROLINA: You could have done something.

AUSTIN: I did. I killed her. (*Long beat as SISTERS look at AUSTIN.*) She had ALS. Her body wasn't functioning. She was too weak. I had to do it.

CAROLINA: You are fucking kidding me.

AUSTIN: Her mind worked perfectly. It was exactly what she wanted, she just needed a little help.

CAROLINA: You murdered her.

AUSTIN: I assisted her suicide.

CAROLINA: That's illegal.

AUSTIN: You gonna call the cops on me?

CAROLINA: I don't know.

BALTIMORE: Carolina!

CAROLINA: She committed murder.

BALTIMORE: She's your sister.

CAROLINA: And she killed my mother.

AUSTIN: Yes. It's all very oedipal.

CAROLINA: I'm so glad you can make a joke about this.

AUSTIN: You've only had a minute to digest it. I've had almost two years.

DALLAS: Mom was sick that long? She didn't seem sick last Christmas.

AUSTIN: Did you ever see her get up from her chair?

DALLAS: I thought she was tired.

AUSTIN: She still had it together then, but she went downhill. Yesterday, she was having trouble breathing.

BALTIMORE: (*Realizing.*) God, Mom was alive yesterday.

AUSTIN: If you call it alive.

CAROLINA: It still doesn't give you the right to do what you did.

AUSTIN: Had you been here.... Had you seen her... you would have done the same thing.

CAROLINA: Don't you dare tell me what I would have done. You don't know me. You don't know anything about me. (*Beat.*) Right. Well, I'm screwed. I was planning to be a judge one day. Not with these skeletons out of the closet.

AUSTIN: I'm not planning to go public with this, I was telling you guys as a courtesy.

CAROLINA: Assisted suicide is illegal—

BALTIMORE: Not in Oregon.

CAROLINA: We're not in Oregon.

BALTIMORE: I hate our government.

CAROLINA: What you did was morally wrong. It was reprehensible, it was—

DALLAS: How did you do it?

CAROLINA: What?

DALLAS walks over to AUSTIN and stands in front of her.

DALLAS: Show me how you did it, exactly. I want to know.

AUSTIN: No.

DALLAS: She was our mother too, Austin, I want to know what her last few minutes were like.

DALLAS grabs AUSTIN'S hand and places it on her wrist.

DALLAS: I want you to show me!

AUSTIN starts to lose it. This is not what she was expecting.

AUSTIN: I'm not going to show you. You think I enjoyed it? You think I wanted to kill my own Mother? I don't wish my last week on anyone... FUCK. You have no clue what's been going on in this house. None of you do. Carolina, you haven't been home in three years. Dallas, you refuse to deal with the slightest hint of dysfunction; hey, Mom started dying right in front of your eyes and YOU DIDN'T NOTICE. And Baltimore, you're so fucking self-absorbed, you can't see past your own terribly oppressive life fraught with important collegiate decisions.

BALTIMORE: What? Me? I'm on your side.

AUSTIN: There are no sides, here. There is only reality. Mom was dying and wanted to expedite the process. She gave me no choice but to help her. I have to live with this, okay. The three of you are uninvolved, personae non gratae, not culpable. So go be a judge Carolina, you're off the hook.

CAROLINA: (*Quietly.*) But you're not.

BALTIMORE: What are you talking about?

CAROLINA: She killed our mother. That is a punishable offense.

BALTIMORE: By who?

CAROLINA: Any court of law. It's our obligation to report you.

BALTIMORE: You're crazy.

CAROLINA: Am I? I think the crazy person is one who can get within inches of the woman who bore her, slit her wrists and watch her die. That is the crazy person.

AUSTIN: You have no idea what you're talking about.

CAROLINA: Don't I? You killed my mother.

AUSTIN: Our mother. You don't have proprietary rights.

CAROLINA: Either do you.

They glare at each other. Nose to nose. AUSTIN breaks the lock with an easy laugh, attempting to diffuse the tension.

AUSTIN: I need a drink. You definitely need a drink.

AUSTIN goes to the bar and pulls out four glasses. She pours the shots.

AUSTIN: We should all be drinking. Technically, this is a wake, right? So let's drink. And toast. To Mom, this is what she would have wanted.

AUSTIN hands EVERYONE a drink and toasts. They reluctantly join her.

AUSTIN: To our mom.

CAROLINA: What you did was illegal.

AUSTIN: What I did was compassionate. Do you have any idea what it feels like to lose control? Of course you don't. You've been in control your entire life. Straight A's from the second you left the womb. We all admit it Carolina, you're the best. The one sister everyone should try to emulate. Hey, your marriage is the only thing you've ever failed in your entire life.

CAROLINA: Your point?

AUSTIN: You want to be a judge? Don't judge a person's actions until you've walked a mile in their shoes. How's that for an appropriate cliché? You would have done the same thing.

CAROLINA: That's bullshit, and you know it. Help me out here. Baltimore, Dallas, would you have killed your mother? (*They are silent.*) I'm living in an asylum. You people are nuts. Austin committed a felony... (*She blinks her eyes, hard.*) I don't feel so good.

DALLAS: You've had a lot to drink.

CAROLINA: No. It's not that. (*She stumbles to the chair.*) I can't feel my fucking legs. (*She opens her mouth wide.*) What's happening to me. My arms—

Slowly, CAROLINA'S body becomes rigid. Only her eyes vividly express anguish. BALTIMORE and DALLAS rush to her.

BALTIMORE: Carolina? Carol? What's the matter with her?

DALLAS: Carolina!

BALTIMORE: Carol!

AUSTIN: I guess the game's over.

AUSTIN starts to clear up.

BALTIMORE: What's happening?

DALLAS: Carolina, can you hear me?

AUSTIN: She can hear you perfectly. She can see you perfectly. She just can't do anything else... perfectly.

DALLAS: What did you do to her?

AUSTIN: You can't judge someone unless you walk a mile in their shoes, right?

BALTIMORE: What are you talking about?

AUSTIN: I knew she wouldn't understand. She's too clinical. She had to be shown. It was the only way.

She pulls a small envelope with white powder in it from her pocket.

AUSTIN: Don't worry, it's not permanent. Doxycyclinal. Clinically speaking, it causes progressive supranuclear palsy. In laymen's terms, it causes temporary paralysis of all muscular functions. The brain works, the body doesn't. Carol can now walk a mile in Mom's shoes.

DALLAS: You poisoned her?

AUSTIN: I'm educating her.

CAROLINA murmurs inaudibly. Lights fade with spot light on CAROLINA'S pained eyes.

END OF ACT ONE

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