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# White Oleander

By Mary Agnes Donoghue

Everybody asks why I started at the end  
and worked back to the beginning.  
The reason is simple.  
I couldn't understand the beginning  
until I had reached the end.  
There were too many pieces  
of the puzzle missing.  
Too much she would never tell.  
I could sell these things.  
People want to buy them.  
But I'd set all this on fire first.  
She'd like that.  
That's what she would do.  
She'd make it just to burn it.  
I couldn't afford this one, but the  
beginning deserved something special.  
But how do I show that nothing,  
not a taste...  
... not a smell, not even  
the color of the sky...  
... has ever been as clear and sharp  
as it was when I belonged to her.  
I don't know how to express that being  
with someone so dangerous...  
... was the last time that I felt safe.  
The Santa Anas blew in hot  
from the desert that fall.  
Only the oleanders thrived.  
Maybe the wind was the reason  
my mother did what she did.  
If it was, I wouldn't have known.  
I lived in her shadow then.  
She was the most beautiful woman  
I'd ever seen.  
Everybody thinks that  
when they're small...  
... but she was the most beautiful woman  
most people had ever seen.  
He came into our lives without warning.  
She ignored him at first.  
He wasn't her type.  
We laughed about him, his persistence.  
"Never let a man spend the night,"  
she said. Never apologize, never explain.

She was breaking all her rules.  
And it would change everything.  
What are you doing up here?  
Come sit next to me.  
It's the best place to feel the wind.  
I can feel it from here.  
No, you can't.  
It's okay.  
You should get some sleep.  
I never sleep.  
I've been up here for hours.  
I had the most amazing idea for how to  
use my Polaroids in the Newport show.  
I'm gonna skip work today.  
Keep going until I finish.  
You're still coming to parents' night,  
aren't you?  
Oh, God, I forgot.  
I made plans to go to Greta's opening.  
All the other parents go.  
What can they tell me about you  
that I don't already know?  
Time's up! Pencils down.  
Papers, please. Thank you.  
Thank you. Time, Astrid.  
Thank you.  
Is your mother coming tonight?  
No. She has other plans.  
More important than parents' night?  
She's an artist. She doesn't care  
about things like parents' night.  
Right. And don't forget, you guys,  
chapters 17 and 18 for tomorrow.  
Finished my mug shots.  
What do you think?  
They're great.  
No. You're not looking.  
You can't be an artist if you don't see.  
Why do you think they're great?  
I don't know.  
They're lonely.  
It's me in the center.  
It's our secret.  
You can't tell anybody.

I won't. I never tell our secrets.

It's the deer-in-the-headlights look.

Hilarious.

- How long has this been going on?

- Couple months.

- His wife's gonna figure it out.

- She's an idiot.

Cinema Scene.

It's Barry Kolker again.

Tell him I was killed

in a climbing accident in the Himalayas.

Barry, she's still out of town.

We don't have any eggs.

We never have any eggs.

Barry can take us out to breakfast.

Barry spent the night?

Yeah.

Excuse me.

I bet he's still out of town.

I called the magazine.

He got back three days ago.

He's probably working.

He doesn't call then.

He doesn't call when he's getting  
what he wants from somebody else.

I don't think you should do this.

He'll get mad.

- I'll just say we were in the neighborhood.

- He won't believe us.

You're not my type.

You're not my type.

What happened?

He has a date.

He made love to me

and then said I had to leave...

...because he has a date.

- No! Get away from me.

- Get her out!

- You have no right!

- You're under arrest...

...for the murder of Barry Kolker.

- They can't keep me!

I'll be back in an hour!

You must be Astrid? I'm Miss Martinez

from Children's Services to pick you up.

If you need more time, I can  
give you 15 minutes, but that's it.

I'm not going. I'm waiting  
for my mother to come home.

Your mother won't be coming home.

At least not for a while.

- Any legal cause why sentence of  
judgment should not now be imposed?

Therefore, in accordance  
with the laws of California...

...I sentence you to the term  
prescribed by law for murder.

Not less than 35 years to life  
in a maximum-security prison.

- Hey!

- Hello, Starr. How are you?

Well, I'm fine! How are you?

- Good to see you.

- You too.

Y'all must be starving.

I hope you like olive loaf.

- I made enough to feed an army.

- Astrid?

- How was traffic?

- Bad downtown...

...but it cleared up pretty fast.

- Oh, good.

There you go. Astrid Magnussen,  
this is Starr Thomas.

It is so nice to meet you, Astrid.

Come on in! Here, let me help you  
with that. Was it a long drive?

- Yeah.

- Yeah?

I hope you didn't bring a ton of stuff.

You'll share a room with my daughter.

This is our home.

This is where we have company.

Then in here is the kitchen  
and whatnot.

The boys sleep here.

We don't have enough bedrooms.

That's Davey in the glasses, and Owen.

This is Astrid.  
Boys, you say hi?  
Carolee? I said, get out here right now.  
Let's just go in there.  
This is Carolee, my daughter.  
Make some room, okay?  
This is where you'll sleep.  
She'll clean up. Don't worry.  
Just don't mind her. She's hormonal.  
The problem is she hasn't been saved.  
What about you?  
What?  
Have you accepted Jesus Christ  
as your personal savior?  
I don't know.  
When you do, he'll be waiting. Okay?  
This is where Ray and I sleep,  
and the bathroom's here.  
Let's go back in here.  
Ray's home late tonight. It's poker night.  
Don't talk to him about Jesus.  
He acts like he's the repo man or  
something, not a carpenter like him.  
You must be the new addition.  
I'm Ray.  
Or Uncle Ray, but that's Starr's idea.  
Not mine.  
I'm Astrid.  
It's nice to meet you, Astrid.  
You coming in?  
Well, how come?  
I'm thinking.  
Oh, what about?  
My mother.  
Starr was telling me about her. She's  
doing time for killing her boyfriend, right?  
Yeah, well, those things happen.  
You come in when you're ready, okay?  
That slut said I was grounded, like  
she's the mother in The Brady Bunch.  
Listen to that.  
Saved by Jesus.  
She's such a hypocrite.  
They shouldn't be doing it.

They're not even married.  
Reverend Daniels always blah-blahing  
about Jesus.  
All he really wants to do  
is look at her ass.  
Don't forget to leave the window open.  
Don't look at me like that.  
You're no different than I am.  
You just don't know it yet.  
I'm gonna kill you, Ingrid!  
I'm gonna strangle you, bitch!  
You bloody bitch!  
Sin is a virus.  
That's what Reverend Thomas says.  
It's infecting the whole country  
like the clap.  
We've got every excuse.  
What's wrong if I shovel coke up my nose  
or want to feel good? Who does it hurt?  
Well, it hurts us.  
And it hurts Jesus. Because it's wrong.  
I don't know how you swallow that.  
"He who believeth in me, though he was  
dead, yet will he live." Don't forget it.  
Here we are.  
It's a miracle I'm not dead. They took  
my kids away. I was an alcoholic...  
...a cokehead. I was dancing topless.  
- People are staring.  
Oh, Astrid, look!  
Look at that. That is gonna go  
perfect with your new shoes.  
I mean, I thought:  
"Who cares if I hang my tits in a  
stranger's face? It's nobody's business."  
You know what?  
This is gonna be good on you.  
Astrid, those are ugly shoes.  
Snakes don't bite above the ankle.  
You're better off being bitten  
by snakes than dressing for them.  
We need to get her a bra. Carolee  
had her first bra when she was 9.  
You don't want them hanging

to your knees when you're 30. Try it on.  
Carolee, will Ray love that?  
Look at that. That is so nice!  
Hurry, Astrid, it's here!  
I told you you were gonna miss it.  
Astrid. This one's for you.  
Who's it from?  
My mother.  
I didn't think she knew where I was.  
Dear Astrid, have you been getting  
my letters?  
It's been six months.  
Why don't you write?  
It's only a few minutes  
before they turn out the lights.  
I can hear the women screaming  
in their cells.  
We're both in prison, you and I, punished  
for our strength and our independence.  
Don't forget who you are.  
The best part of me is well-hidden  
and you have to do the same.  
Remember it all,  
every insult, every tear.  
What are you doing?  
I'm writing a letter to my mother.  
You ever write your dad?  
I don't know where he is.  
I never met him.  
He left when I was 2.  
- Your mother tell you much about him?  
- No.  
- Well, aren't you curious?  
- I think about what he would think of me.  
He probably thinks you're still 2.  
That's how I remember my son, Seth.  
- You have a son?  
- Yeah.  
- Hey, Ray.  
- Hey, Patty.  
So you're going to the Jesus show?  
- Aren't you coming?  
- To Bible study? No.  
In my opinion, if there's a God,



he sure as hell ain't worth praying to.

That sounds like

something my mother would say.

She wouldn't take me

to the Christmas pageant.

She made me beg a ride

off another kid.

Hey, Ray.

Leanne, hi!

How you doing, Reverend?

I don't think he likes me very much.

Why don't you and Starr

get married?

'Cause I'm already married.

- Astrid, come on in. We're starting.

- Okay, I'm coming.

Where's your wife?

Who knows?

I haven't seen her or my son

in over five years.

I baptize you in the name of the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Do you believe in God now?

Maybe it's not such a bad thing

to believe in something.

- It's better to know things.

- Why?

What does it get you? Does it tell you

the difference between right or wrong?

She didn't kill that guy alone.

I knew what my mother

was doing, you know?

I could've saved his life,

but I didn't.

Come on.

I'm gonna kill you, Ingrid! Open the door!

Think there was something

valuable on that hard disk?

Maybe a collection of essays

due at the publisher's this fall.

You bloody bitch!

You can't do this to me!

You don't know what I can do.

Fill out your registration slips.  
Know your inmate's number.  
No number, no visit.  
Hey, baby.  
Astrid Magnussen?  
Astrid?  
Follow me.  
Mama!  
No, no, no, no, no.  
Don't cry.  
We're not like that.  
We're the Vikings. Remember?  
You're so beautiful.  
Prison agrees with me.  
There's no hypocrisy here.  
Kill or be killed,  
and everybody knows it.  
Do they hurt you?  
Not as much as I hurt them.  
I won't be in here forever.  
I promise you that.  
One day you'll look out your window  
and I'll be there.  
Your hair smells like clover.  
I wanna remember you just like this,  
in that sadly hopeful pink dress.  
- Starr picked it out.  
- Of course she did.  
What's that?  
Nothing. It's just a cross.  
I know it's a cross.  
Why are you wearing it?  
It's a present from Starr.  
She force you to go to church?  
They're really nice people.  
It's called the Assembly of God.  
To join you have to accept Christ as your  
personal savior. And you're baptized.  
They call it being washed in the blood  
of the Lamb. But really, it's just water.  
Have you accepted Christ  
as your personal savior?  
- There's nothing wrong with Christians.  
- Are you out of your mind?

How did this happen? I raised you,  
not Bible-thumping trailer trash.  
I raised you to think for yourself.  
No, you didn't.  
You raised me to think like you.  
Maybe thinking for yourself isn't so  
great. Reverend Daniels says it's evil.  
Evil? If thinking for yourself is evil,  
then every artist is evil.  
Is that what you believe, now that  
you're washed in the blood of the Lamb?  
- Man's ability to reason is evil? Am I evil?  
- No.  
No.  
But killing people who  
don't want you is evil.  
We pray for your redemption.  
Fuck my redemption. I don't want it.  
I regret nothing.  
Attention. Visiting hours are over.  
Visitors, return to the holding area.  
It's good that you're trying  
to identify evil, Astrid.  
But evil is tricky.  
Just when you think you know  
what it is, it changes its form.  
Learning its nature takes  
a lifetime of study.  
I will not lose you.  
Not to them.  
Those people are the enemy, Astrid.  
- Visiting hours are over.  
- Write to me.  
- Time's up.  
- Write to me...  
...at least once a week.  
- I love you.  
I'm the only person you know  
who can keep you honest.  
- Okay?  
- Okay.  
Don't forget who you are, Astrid.  
You're my daughter  
and you're perfect, remember?

How far away is it?  
About a mile. Maybe two.  
Shouldn't we pack up and go?  
No, not yet. The wind's still in our favor.  
My mother used to love fire season.  
She made me decide what I'd take  
if we had to go.  
She said if I was brave,  
I wouldn't take anything.  
Your mother sounds tough.  
Not like you.  
What am I like?  
You? You're a sweetheart.  
Astrid, honey?  
Astrid?  
You come on in here a minute?  
Well, sit down. I won't bite.  
You having fun here, aren't you? Making  
yourself at home, getting comfortable?  
Little too comfortable, I'd say.  
I might not be a genius, but I get your  
game. And it takes one to know one.  
- One what?  
- Always hanging around...  
...handling his tools.  
"What's this for, Ray? Can I help you?"  
We're not doing anything.  
I'm calling Children's Services.  
- It's all over.  
- But...  
Don't "but" me.  
He is a man. And he sees what he sees,  
and he does what he can.  
I've got a nice thing going here.  
Ray's the best man I ever had.  
And I've lived too long  
and come too far to blow it now.  
I never had a father...  
Don't.  
I've got myself and my kids to worry  
about. We hardly know each other.  
I don't owe you a thing.  
- Jesus would give me a chance.  
- Well, I'm not Jesus. Not even close.

He might be mad...  
...if he knew you sent me away  
because you were jealous.  
You're trying to make him a prisoner.  
He's gonna hate you.  
What do you know?  
I know that men don't like women  
who try to own them.  
I like you. I like the kids. I would  
never do anything to screw it up.  
You swear you're not  
interested in him?  
I swear to God.  
- There. Did you see it?  
- I'm not sure.  
- See anything yet?  
- It's just starting.  
But we should be getting  
The Quadrantid is the shortest  
meteorite shower, but the densest.  
Except for the Perseids.  
You and Starr, you having a beef?  
No.  
Why?  
Just something she said.  
I guess it's hard getting older...  
...pretty girl coming up in the house.  
Ray, honey? What are  
you doing out here?  
Nothing, baby.  
Just having a smoke.  
Looking at the stars.  
And this is \$40,  
not even \$40 a month.  
- Forty dollars is \$40.  
- You waste \$200 in one night.  
- You've been doing it weekly.  
- I won last week.  
What else are you doing  
with the money, Ray?  
- You can't even look at me.  
- I'm looking right at you.  
You weren't. And you've got  
your car out there.

God knows what you spend on that.

That comes out of my pocket.

- Don't ruin this.

- Ruin what?

You didn't come in till 3:00  
in the morning.

- I was with John.

- She's drinking again.

And who else?

I saw you eyeing her.

Thought you all were  
going to a movie.

I had a lot of homework.

- How come you aren't playing poker?

- The game got cancelled.

- They coming home soon?

- Not too long.

Well, there's plenty  
of food if you want.

Thanks.

This isn't right.

Is everyone gone?

- It is my business! This is my house!

- It is not!

- Get out of my room!

- You abide by the laws I put down!

I am not gonna get out! I waited up for  
you. I want to know who you were with!

Don't give me your shit.

You stayed up to drink.

- I stayed up to catch you, you whore!

- You should know.

Try it again,

I'll take you out, bitch.

Carolee! You walk out that door,  
don't you bother coming back.

Why the hell would I want to? I've been  
down this road with you before, Mom.

Sorry, Davey.

I can't go through this again.

Carolee.

You used to like it before you started  
doing that bitch. Admit it, bastard!

- You're screwing her!

- You need to call your sponsor.  
- Screw my sponsor!  
- Go back to bed.  
I should've gotten rid of her.  
Know what I'm gonna do?  
I'm gonna go in there  
and cash her check.  
Hey, Starr. Starr. Hey! Starr!  
Give me that gun.  
- What the hell is wrong with you?  
- Get off!  
Starr! Starr!  
Get off of me, goddamn it!  
Get off of me!  
No, Ray! Goddamn it, Ray.  
Get off of me!  
No, don't cry. We're not like that.  
We're the Vikings, remember?  
Astrid? Can you talk to me? Astrid?  
Astrid? Can you talk to me? Astrid.  
Talk to me. Can you talk to me?  
She's coming around. This boy saved  
your life. If he hadn't called 911...  
...you'd be dead.  
- Who did this to you, Astrid?  
- Who shot you?  
- I don't know.  
Hey, watch your feet.  
- Okay, rug.  
- Got it.  
- Where's Ray, Davey?  
- He's gone. They're both gone.  
I'm sorry.  
I'm so sorry I ruined it.  
Doesn't matter.  
Something would have.  
Bye, Astrid.  
Okay. One step.  
- Davey.  
- We got you, Astrid.  
Okay, step.  
We got her.  
It's okay. We got you.  
We'd prefer to find a permanent place,

but we have so many children right now.  
You need special attention,  
which you'll get at McKinney Hall.  
They have all sorts  
of activities for kids.  
You're dead, bitch!  
You hear me? You're dead.  
Don't ever look at my boyfriend  
again. You hear me?  
You look at my boyfriend,  
you're dead!  
Next time you and your friends jump me,  
I'll cut your throats when you're sleeping.  
- What do you want?  
- I was looking at your picture.  
It's good.  
Who is it?  
- How come you chopped off your hair?  
- None of your business.  
- You're still beautiful.  
- Looks don't interest me.  
That's easy for you to say.  
You've never been ugly.  
Look. It's the puta.  
She's so ugly now.  
You're not ugly.  
You write as if you're surprised  
to find me still beautiful even here.  
Our beauty is our power, our strength.  
We can't allow them  
to change us, to lessen us.  
I will never grant them that  
satisfaction and neither should you.  
So is this your first time in Mac?  
Figured. You're so unfriendly.  
- Life's easier without friends.  
- Maybe. I like it here.  
It's better than being in a foster home.  
It's the floor you can't fall below.  
- What's that?  
- A letter.  
- From who?  
- My mother.  
- And where is she?



- In prison. For murder.

- And your father?

- Don't know the guy.

How about you?

They were junkies.

She OD'd when I was 6.

He disappeared a couple years later.

- I was born addicted to heroin.

- Really? What was that like?

I don't know. I was out of rehab  
by the time I was six months old.

So...

- What's the deal? Are you gay?

- What?

I don't know. I get this feeling from you,  
like you're not interested in guys.

You're right. I'm not.

You think that's funny? I'm sick of this.

I'm not gonna let you do this again.

Why don't you shut up?

You're not even in this.

- Cut it out.

- She does this shit.

I'll beat your ass.

Wait until we get off the van.

- Back off.

- I'm gonna push you farther.

- What if they catch us?

- They'd put us in McKinney Hall.

- Hurry.

- Come on.

Come on, come on.

The guy's a genius.

I started out copying his stuff,  
but no...

I could never touch him.

He's great. But you're better.

You're insane.

No, I'm not. I mean, he's a great  
cartoonist, but you're an artist.

What's the difference?

Well, that's like asking

why a joke is funny.

Either it's funny or it's not.

You're either an artist or you're not.

You are.

It's hard because they keep moving.

That's good.

Don't look. I'm not done.

- There's another one. Do you see it?

- Yeah.

The Lyrids shower is visible

most of the night.

The brightest star is Vega.

But you can't look right at it

or you'll miss the fainter meteors.

You can trace them back to Lyra.

How do you know all that?

A kid I used to know.

I used to have a foster home

right over there.

It's nice living on the beach.

Do you ever think about your father?

Not really. He was an asshole.

I think about mine sometimes.

That when I'm an artist...

...he'll read about me in the papers

and he'll want to meet me.

I'm not gay.

I know that.

I'll show you the one

that he did of me.

It's right here.

They're not bad, for what they are.

For what they are?

What are they?

Cartoons.

No, they're not.

They're so much more than that.

I mean, he's really talented.

- Don't do it again, Astrid.

- Do what?

Attach yourself to anyone who  
shows you the least bit of attention...

...because you're lonely.

Loneliness is the human condition.

No one is ever going to fill that space.

The best you can do is know yourself.

Know what you want.  
And don't let the cattle  
get in the way.  
You're not talking about me.  
You're talking about yourself.  
Sometimes I get the feeling you  
don't even want me to be happy.  
Why wouldn't I want you to be happy?  
- Where are they sending you?  
- I don't know.  
Look.  
The comic book store  
will hold letters for me.  
Wherever they take you,  
keep checking there.  
Why do we have to go  
to Mexico to buy this stuff?  
It isn't FDA approved.  
- What's it called?  
- DMSO.  
- What's it for?  
- All sorts of things.  
You'll like these people. She's an actress  
and he does something with television.  
- Do they have any kids?  
- No. They're looking to adopt.  
She's had an incredibly hard time.  
She's very smart.  
She's just missed a lot of school.  
- You don't have to decide immediately.  
- Okay.  
Just talk to her.  
If you're uncomfortable  
in any way, just let me know.  
There you are.  
I'm really sorry Mark couldn't be here  
to meet you. He's filming in Nova Scotia.  
Well, this is it.  
I left it plain on purpose...  
...because I thought that way, you know,  
you could put your own things up.  
- I like the Drer watercolor.  
- You know who Drer is?  
- My mother's an artist.

- Oh, that's right. Of course.  
Of course. They said that. Hey, listen.  
Do you want some tea or something?  
Or Pepsi. I bought Pepsi. I didn't know  
what you'd drink. We have juice.  
I could make you a smoothie, if you like.  
Would you like a smoothie?  
Tea is fine.  
Okay. I look, I look. Stop. Look...  
And now I die.  
- You were really good.  
- Do you know what a nightmare it is?  
I mean, you spend all this time  
getting ready, ages getting ready...  
...drag yourself to this audition.  
They look at you for two seconds...  
...and tell you that you're too ethnic,  
or too classic, too something.  
Too ethnic?  
It means brunette.  
And too classic means old.  
And too small, breasts.  
- Why do you do it, then?  
- What? Give up show business?  
Come on!  
- Well, here. To your first run at the beach.  
- Never again.  
- How's your shoulder? You okay?  
- Yeah. Yeah, it's fine.  
No, you did really well.  
You did really, really well.  
What was...  
...the best day of your life?  
Today.  
- What should we do later?  
- I don't know. What do you want to do?  
Swim?  
Okay.  
Oh, my God!  
He's back early.  
Mark.  
Hey.  
Hi.  
You must be Astrid.

It took us three hours to get him back.

The whole film crew's in there.

He still almost chickens out.

I think he thought it was gonna  
come back and finish him off.

- What would you have done if it had?

- Ducked.

Come on.

Okay, here we go.

Perfect. Just, just right there.

Thanks.

- Well, cheers.

- Cheers.

Cheers, Astrid.

So we've got some catching up to do.

Claire tells me you're quite an artist.

- Not really...

- She's wonderful.

In fact, Tricia Day accepted Astrid  
for one of her watercolor classes.

- At the museum?

- She loves Astrid's work.

You should show him.

They're really, really beautiful.

She's never even studied.

She's self-taught.

Is that right?

Is she all right?

- I know you're perfect.

- I'm not perfect.

Of course you are.

You're my daughter.

Hey.

- Are you okay?

- Yeah. Just thinking.

- Are you getting my letters?

- Yes.

- I can never be sure.

- I get them.

Why doesn't she have any children?

She can't have them.

You dress like her now.

She takes me shopping.

What's her husband like?

He's nice.

He's gone a lot.

So you spend most  
of your time with Claire?

Yeah.

I'd like to meet her.

Why?

Because you don't want me to.

Who did this belong to?

That was my great aunt's  
on my father's side.

She was a field nurse at Ypres.

Very, very brave woman.

It's pretty, isn't it?

- And whose was this?

- It was my mother's.

My father gave it to her.

My parents were completely inseparable.

Not at all like Mark and I.

I hate it when he has  
to go away for so long.

- Why don't you go with him?

- He says it slows him down.

- I think it's because he's having an affair.

- He wouldn't have an affair.

He loves you.

Yeah, I know. If he did,  
I would never know about it.

You're just being paranoid.

Yeah, that's what he says.

That can be very negative.

- Should I put this here?

- Yeah, perfect.

Everything ready inside?

- You're leaving tomorrow?

- In the morning.

I bet Claire would  
love to go with you.

Coordinating our schedules is difficult.

She's not working.

I mean, she could fit into yours.

What about you?

Doesn't she need to be here for you?

Yeah.

How is she these days, when I'm gone?

She okay?

She's fine.

- Why do you ask?

- No reason.

You're back early.

How long has my mother

been writing you?

Not long. We've only written  
to each other a couple of times.

- Why didn't you tell me?

- She asked me not to.

Well, she thought

that you wouldn't like it.

Her letter was so powerful.

She's so strong.

And God, she's talented.

We'd like to meet.

Whose idea was that?

Mine.

I bet.

- You know, I really love your work.

- What have you seen?

Astrid showed me the collages...

...and some of your earlier work  
in the catalogues.

Oh, I love the Polaroid installation.

Really? Why?

I don't know.

Well, because...

Well, because it's great.

- I'm actually very visual myself.

- A kindred spirit.

It must be difficult  
for you to work here.

It is. I spend so much time  
fighting off sexual advances...

...I hardly have time to think.

That was a joke.

- Jailbird humor is hard to get sometimes.

- Sorry.

So, you're an actress.

- So glamorous.

- No, my career is a disaster.

I think it's the process.  
It, you know, may be too painful for me.  
You're such a sensitive person, it's...  
All that rejection has gotta be hard  
on your self-esteem.  
I'm a typical Pisces, but that's  
why Astrid and I get on so well.  
Scorpio and Pisces  
understand each other.  
You're into astrology?  
She's not into astrology  
just because she knows our signs.  
Astrid and I  
used to understand each other.  
But she's become so secretive.  
Astrid isn't secretive at all.  
We talk about everything, all the time.  
We just love her.  
She's doing so well.  
She's on the honor roll...  
...and we're just working to keep  
that old grade point average up.  
Put a pyramid over her desk.  
It improves memory.  
- My memory's fine.  
- A pyramid? I hadn't thought of that.  
I do practice feng shui, though.  
You never mentioned that  
in your letters.  
How about your husband?  
Is he into feng shui as well?  
No, he's into frequent flier miles.  
He's gone half the time.  
That's not so bad, you know?  
And now that I have Astrid...  
She must be a great comfort to you...  
...not being able to have children  
of your own.  
Yeah. Yeah. She is.  
Would you mind letting us  
talk alone, sweetie?  
Grown-up things.  
- Don't we have to go?  
- No, it's okay.



We have time.  
Love humiliates you.  
Hatred cradles you.  
It's soothing.  
What did you say to her?  
She's having trouble  
with her husband.  
It's not you, is it? I know you  
have an attraction for older men.  
No, it's not me.  
- You leave her alone.  
- But it's such fun.  
Easy, but fun.  
In my present situation  
I have to get fun where I can.  
God, how can you stand  
to live with poor Claire?  
Did you know there's an entire order  
called the Poor Clares?  
She is a genuinely nice person.  
You don't know what it's been like.  
- If you love me, you'll help me.  
- Help you?  
I would rather see you in the worst kind  
of foster hell than living with that woman.  
What can you possibly learn from her?  
How to pine artistically?  
Twenty-seven names for tears?  
All I can say is...  
...keep your bags packed.  
I don't feel like it.  
I'm a stranger in my own house.  
You live here  
and I stay here once in a while.  
- Maybe if you gave a little bit.  
- I give.  
Why can't I give to her,  
why can't I be here?  
- Because I work! Because I have a job.  
- That's not fair.  
I give you everything you ask for  
and it's not enough.  
No, not everything.  
Not everything.

You promised things would change.  
- Mark, I'm trying, you know I'm trying.  
- Trying's not good enough.  
You're falling apart.  
We are back to where we started.  
It is not working out  
and I think we should send her back.  
You can't just send her back.  
- Where's she gonna go?  
- They'll find someplace.  
You're gonna send her away?  
You take everything away, don't you?  
- You just leave me with nothing.  
- Jesus Christ, you are such a bad actress.  
I really almost forgot.  
Okay, okay.  
All right, I'll send her back, okay?  
We can try that.  
Just don't go, okay?  
Just don't leave me.  
Unlike you, Claire, I work.  
Remember?  
And she going with you,  
your girlfriend?  
I've had it with this, Claire.  
I've really had it.  
Astrid?  
Astrid.  
Astrid, please.  
Claire?  
Are you awake?  
I'm sorry.  
Are you all right?  
Yeah.  
Take my advice.  
Stay away from broken people.  
You can't send me back.  
He's not coming back, Astrid.  
He's gonna divorce me.  
You know, Claire,  
it wouldn't be the worst thing.  
I'm cold.  
Real cold.  
Here. Get in here with me.

Come on.  
Okay.  
Stay with me, okay?  
Stay with me, please.  
Claire.  
Claire.  
Claire, wake up! Claire!  
God!  
Claire, please.  
No!  
Astrid.  
What is it?  
I'm back in Mac.  
- Didn't they tell you?  
- No.  
Claire's dead.  
She killed herself.  
- I'm sorry.  
- No, you're not.  
- You poisoned her too, but with words.  
- I told her what she already knew.  
You were just jealous.  
Of course I was jealous.  
I live in a cell with a woman...  
...who has a vocabulary of 25 words.  
Why do you think they got you?  
To create a perfect family?  
People get babies for that.  
Not teenagers recovering  
from bullet wounds.  
You were on suicide watch. Don't think  
it's the first time she tried it.  
It's just the first time  
she pulled it off.  
I'm not coming back.  
I wanted to tell you that in person.  
I'm gonna leave you here, alone.  
I know you think I'm cruel.  
I'm trying to protect you  
from those people.  
Those people are not the enemy,  
Mother. We are. You and me.  
They don't hurt us.  
We hurt them.

You still ignoring me?  
I turn 18 Saturday.  
I'm going to New York.  
I want you to come with me.  
I can't.  
Sure you can. Just leave.  
Is it your mother?  
Come on.  
I'll get a job. We'll find a place to live.  
We'll be like we always talked about.  
I don't wanna go to New York.  
I don't wanna be with you.  
She was with us for three years.  
Her parents took her back.  
We think you'd really like it with us.  
There are lots of kids your age  
in our neighborhood.  
Excuse me.  
Look. Don't worry about it.  
She's had a very hard time recently.  
Let me just go talk to her, okay?  
You're doing fine.  
So, what's wrong this time?  
I'm too old for them.  
Look, the Greenways are great.  
They've got a nice house  
with an extra bedroom for you.  
They go to church.  
Schools are good.  
They don't smoke.  
He makes his own beer.  
I want her.  
Workers of the world, arise.  
You've got nothing to lose but Visa card,  
Happy Meal, and Kotex with wings.  
Christ, Thursday.  
- Hey, lazy cows, you want smoke?  
- I quit for the baby, Rena.  
Why? You don't keep it, thank God.  
Hey, you, cheerleader.  
You want smoke?  
Russian cigarettes. No cancer.  
Clothes.  
- That really is a nice color.

- It's gorgeous.

- What's it made of?

- I don't know.

Why don't you just try it on  
and see how you look?

- It's really nice.

- Okay, thank you.

Hey, that's my dress.

These are all mine.

So? You get good price for them.

What do you need expensive clothes for?

- Melrose Place call you to be a star?

- Someone gave them to me.

Even better. All profit.

That's why I love this country.

Because it loves money

like I love money.

- Hey. You make a price, I take 25%.

- No.

What, you think you're gonna sell it  
all by yourself?

I pay for stall, storage, gas. They pay you,  
you pay me. You still make profit.

Hey.

Dead person who give you thing

don't care. The past is gone.

Sentimental is stupid.

It's smart to make money.

There's no price. How about \$20?

It's a Marc Jacobs dress.

It's been worn once.

- Fifty?

- A hundred.

Thank you. Let's go.

- How was last night?

- It was fun.

- Yeah?

- What'd you do?

- Watched TV.

- Who were you with last night?

- You know who I saw?

- Who?

I saw Danny.

- Don't you think Astrid would like him?

- No.

Astrid?

- I'm Hannah. This is Julie.

- Hi.

We went to your house.

The lady said you'd be here, so...

We visit your mother.

She's our project  
in Women's Studies.

- What does she want?

- She didn't send us.

We came on our own.

She asked us to mail you  
the interview, her show at Bergamot.

We thought we could deliver it  
and see if maybe...

- Is that it?

- Yeah.

Excuse me.

- What do you talk about?

- All kinds of things. Art, music...

She talks about you.

Really?

What does she say?

Well, that you're in a...

You know, fostered.

Look, she feels really terrible  
about what's happened.

So you thought you'd come out  
and what? Adopt me?

You don't think she killed him,  
do you?

Something you should know.

She did. I was there.

Oleander's poisonous.

I don't know why people grow it.

- Open the door!

- How dare you? You have no right!

They can't keep me.

Don't worry, I'll be back in an hour!

Who is that?

I don't know.

- You draw her all the time.

- I think her name was Annie.

She's someone I remember.  
I don't know who she was.  
Check it out, you guys.  
Rodeo Drive refugee.  
Excuse me, are you Rena Gruschenko?  
Gruschenka. If you come from INS,  
I have a green card.  
I have been all over this junkyard  
looking for you.  
You must be Astrid. I'm Susan Valeris,  
your mother's lawyer.  
Cigarette?  
- Don't know why I never quit.  
- I do.  
All the prisoners smoke.  
You can offer them one.  
Your mother's proud of you  
for not quitting school.  
You graduate soon. Are you making  
any plans for your future?  
Yeah. I thought I'd be  
a criminal lawyer.  
Really?  
Either that or a hooker  
or garbage collector.  
Your mother said you'd be difficult.  
- Mother knows best.  
- You've been through a terrible ordeal.  
Three foster homes, the shooting,  
the suicide of a foster mother.  
I understand you were close.  
Did you ask your client  
about her involvement with that?  
You can't blame her for the death  
of a woman she met once.  
But I do blame her, Susan.  
That's pretty cynical, Astrid.  
You want me to lie for her  
in court, is that it?  
Why do you hate her, Astrid?  
Because you think  
she committed murder?  
Or because you feel abandoned?  
Talk to her. People do change.

You should hear the way she talks  
about you. She worries about you.  
She asked me to find out  
if there's anything you need.  
Money for college? Car?  
There's money behind her.  
Just tell me what you want.  
You are stupid girl.  
You walk away from money  
to punish mother.  
You want car?  
You want art college?  
All costs money.  
You don't know anything about this,  
Rena, so just stay out of it.  
- I have plan for you, anyway.  
- Yeah? What's that?  
Niki leave soon.  
And Yvonne is stupid girl.  
Making third baby.  
Every time she look at the window  
to see baby's face, baby gone.  
Then she cries  
like it's a big surprise.  
But you, you're a special girl.  
You stay, I make you partner.  
Stay here?  
What, you got better place to go?  
Then go see mother.  
She need something from you,  
you need something from her.  
Go get it.  
Here she comes.  
Astrid, my God!  
What's wrong, Mom?  
You don't like my outfit?  
I'll leave you two alone for a while.  
So, what's the story?  
We didn't go to Mexico to buy DMSO?  
Barry beat you? He raped me?  
How bad does he have to be  
to get you out of jail?  
I can't believe what's happened to you.  
When I get out, I'll make it up.



Who said you're getting out?  
I said I'd talk to you.  
I didn't say I'd do it.  
Then what do you want?  
I have a deal to make. A trade.  
You tell me the truth,  
I'll lie for you in court.  
- The truth about what?  
- Everything you kept from me.  
- And if I don't?  
- Then you can rot in here.  
I hate this look, by the way.  
You're a Sunset Boulevard motel,  
a \$20 hooker in the back of a car.  
Why did you murder Barry?  
If I submit to this, you'll testify?  
Yes.  
Self-defense. He was killing me.  
Claire did nothing to you.  
Why'd you go after her?  
Claire went after herself.  
I just showed her how to do it.  
Who was my father?  
Why do you always ask that?  
It's ancient history.  
It's my ancient history.  
Who was he?  
His name was Klaus Anders.  
- What'd he do?  
- He was an artist.  
How did you meet?  
At Venice Beach, at a party.  
He had the drugs.  
Did you love him?  
It was a long time ago.  
I'm not the same person.  
Liar. You're exactly the same.  
Answer the question.  
You're such a child,  
taking my propaganda for truth.  
So set me straight.  
Did you love him?  
We had a very sexual relationship.  
One overlooks many things.

You worshipped him.  
I read it in your journal.  
"Worship" isn't exactly the word  
we're looking for here.  
Who is Annie?  
What?  
Who is Annie, Mother?  
She was a neighbor who took in kids,  
did people's laundry.  
- What did she look like?  
- Dark, curly hair, freckles.  
Did she take care of me?  
How can you possibly  
have remembered this?  
It will only hurt you.  
Imagine my life for a moment.  
How unprepared I was to be  
the mother of a small child.  
I was used to having time to think  
and you just wanted, wanted, wanted.  
I felt like a hostage.  
Can you understand  
how desperate I was?  
I dropped you off  
at her house one afternoon...  
...to go to the beach  
with some friends.  
And one thing led to another.  
They had a place in Ensenada.  
It was wonderful.  
You can't imagine.  
To take a nap in the afternoon...  
...to make love all day if I wanted  
and not have to think:  
What's Astrid doing? Where's Astrid?  
Mommy, Mommy...  
...clinging to me like a spider.  
At the end, I just wanted  
to throw you against a wall.  
How long were you gone?  
About a year.  
Give or take a few months.  
- My God.  
- You're not asking the right question.

Don't ask me why I left.  
Ask me why I came back.  
You should've been sterilized.  
I could've left you there  
but I didn't.  
Don't you understand?  
For once, I did the right thing.  
When I came back, you knew me.  
You were sitting by the door.  
You looked up and you reached for me.  
It was as if you'd been waiting  
for me all along.  
I was always waiting for you.  
That's the constant in my life.  
Waiting for you.  
Will you come back?  
Will you forget that you tied me up in  
front of a store or left me on a bus?  
- Are you still waiting?  
- No.  
I stopped when Claire showed me  
what it felt like to be loved.  
What did you think?  
That I would amuse you?  
That's what babies are like, Mother.  
Did you think we'd talk  
about Joseph Brodsky?  
I thought Klaus and I would  
live happily ever after.  
Adam and Eve in a  
vine-covered shack. I was crazy.  
- You were in love with him.  
- I was, all right?  
I was in love with him,  
baby makes three and all that crap.  
Then why did you leave him?  
- Why did you leave him?  
- I didn't leave him. He left me.  
You wanna know about your father?  
He left us when you were  
six months old for another woman.  
I never saw him again until he came  
looking for you when you were 8.  
- He came to see me?

- Yes, he did.

But it was too late. Why should I let him see you after what he did to me?

It wasn't about you! It was about me and I wanted to see him!

My whole life I've wanted to see him.

That decision was mine, not yours!

Everything's always been about you, never about me.

I knew you were gonna kill Barry, but you didn't even care.

You didn't give a damn about what that would do to me.

I'll say whatever Susan wants, but I gotta go.

You don't just walk away from me.

I made you. I'm in your blood.

You don't go anywhere

until I let you go.

Then let me go.

You look at me

and you don't like what you see.

But this is the price, Mother.

The price of belonging to you.

If I could, I'd take it all back.

I would.

Then tell me you don't

want me to testify.

Tell me you don't want me like this.

Tell me you would sacrifice

the rest of your life...

...to have me back the way I was.

Listen, forget it. A deal's a deal.

Let's just leave it at that.

Excuse me.

It's probably a waste of time...

...but I'm looking for someone who used to come here. His name's Paul Trout.

- You Astrid?

- Yeah.

He said you'd turn up.

Thanks.

- What's going on?

- I don't know.

- Excuse me. Is it a recess?  
- No. Jury's out.  
Don't you need me to testify?  
Your mother told me  
to leave you alone.  
What happened?  
She let me go.  
Two years after Paul and I  
moved to New York...  
... I received a letter  
from my mother.  
In it was the Los Angeles Times  
Magazine, my mother on the cover.  
A Santa Monica gallery had mounted  
a showing of her work.  
The Times included seven pages...  
... of her hauntingly  
distant prison collages.  
She stares out from the cover,  
the bars of her cell behind her.  
Beautiful.  
Dangerous.  
Proud.  
The Times said she was close to winning  
a retrial after a first failed appeal.  
They called her show a triumph.  
It's too much to imagine her tempering  
her joy with a moment of grief...  
... a moment for what  
that triumph had cost.  
These suitcases are  
a map of that country...  
... a terrible country  
I will never revisit.  
Even so...  
... I find myself thinking of her...  
... wanting to feel that wind.  
It's a secret wanting...  
...like a song I can't stop humming...  
... or loving someone  
you can never have.  
No matter how much  
she's damaged me...  
... no matter how flawed she is...

... I know my mother loves me.