

A Length of Rope
By Robert Strasser
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Prologue

Spot up on a woman who stands alone on stage

Leslie:

I have a photograph in a black frame. Natalie gave it to me when we worked together. It's hers. Meaning, she photo'd it or took it or snapped it or something like that. No verb seemed right for that sentence. The photo is sepia and depicts a building in ruin. Whole walls are rubble. I-beams run at odd, uncomfortable angles. The sky in the background, as seen through the missing roof, looks flat and musliny. When I bump into Natalie now and then, at South City or The Jade Room or an art opening, I mention this photo, and she gets all apologetic. Saying how new and young she was to the medium. She's embarrassed I have it. I hung it over a bookshelf.

So, that's how I'll start out. An anecdote about my photo that Natalie gave me that long time ago. Why not? You've seen this before. A person, alone, starts giving a kind of introduction to the whole sorted affair. By sorted affair I mean story. An introduction to the story.

I'm sorry I don't have a chorus. I don't mean Greek. No, more Shakespearean. One guy. Like at the beginning of Henry V, "Oh for a muse of fire..." sort of thing. I'm sorry you won't get that. (beat) No apologies. (beat) I'll be my own chorus. "Make do with what you got," as they say. (beat. Leslie strips until she is naked and alone on stage) This is what I got. (with Shakespearean authority) "Oh for a Muse of fire..." (lights down)

ACT 1

Scene: An office in an art warehouse. The warehouse is a large old-school brick building on the riverfront north of the landing. Two entrances are in opposite corners along the back wall. (One leads out and has a large opaque glass window in it that causes silhouettes to appear before anyone enters. The other leads to the warehouse and has no door, just an impenetrable blackness.) The ceiling is high and in disrepair. Most of the original tin ceiling tiles are lost except for a small patch in the middle of the ceiling. They are painted white, stained yellow and peeling. A large water stain starts on the stage right ceiling and continues half way down the wall. A desk sits stage left in front of the door to the warehouse. A large copier, a fax machine and a coffee maker are clumped together along the stage right wall. A potted tree, bare except for two leaves, is along the back wall. Lights up. A woman sits at the desk reading a magazine. A silhouette appears in the door and pauses as if the shadow's owner is unsure this is the right place. She notices this, puts the magazine down, and watches. A man enters. He pauses to get his bearings. There is a confidence about him, but he's definitely not a man who has reason to spend time in offices. He notices the woman watching him. They share eye contact for a five count. He moves toward her as she bolts up and heads to the copier with a stack of papers.

Detective:
(Meeting the woman halfway) Hi.

Leslie:
(she passes) Hello.

Detective:
(to Leslie's back) Um, I'm Stan Ballwin.

Leslie:
(Not turning around) Okay.

Carl:
(shouts from back) Lez.

Detective:
What was that?

Leslie:
(still at the copier) What?

Detective:
(louder over the various electronic noises) Who was that?

Leslie:
Carl.

Detective:
Carl?

Carl:
(shouts from back) Lez.

Detective:
Who's Carl?

Leslie:
You don't know him.

Detective:
No, I don't know Carl.

Carl:
Lez-a-lee

Leslie:
(shouts to Carl) What?

Detective:
I didn't say anything.

Leslie:
(turns and address Stan) True. (finishes her work and goes and sits at the desk and starts writing)

Detective:
(He's left standing in the middle of the room. So he goes and looks at the tree.)

Leslie:
(stands) Don't do that. Jesus, that thing has never had any leaves in the five years I've worked here. We usually just dump our coffee in it. And here you go picking at.

Detective:
You don't dump coffee in trees if you want leaves. And I wasn't picking at it.

Leslie:
Why don't you sit here? (Stan sits) (Leslie finishes writing something down) Okay. Hello. Sorry about the wait.

Detective:
Don't worry about it. I'm not going anywhere.

Leslie:
Well, good. What can I do for you, today?

Detective:
Oh, just looking for a lost painting.

Leslie:
Yeah, that's what I figured.

Detective:
Really?

Leslie:
Yep.

Detective:
That's kinda hard to believe.

Leslie:

That's why I wrote it down.

Detective:

Wrote what down? (She shows him the paper. He smiles) Oh, I see. Cute.

Leslie:

I thought so.

Detective:

Are you Ms. Larson?

Leslie:

Yes, but please call me Leslie.

Detective:

Leslie. Got it. Well, Leslie, I'm Stan Ballwin.

Leslie:

How can I be of help Mr. Ballwin?

Detective:

Well, Charlie, out of your Philadelphia office, said to...

Carl:

(enters from the warehouse, where he just finished smoking, like he's continuing a conversation) See, what you don't want, Lez, is the clap. The clap will stop you dead. Both you and Will. Ain't no fucking with the clap.

Leslie:

Really?

Carl:

(looks at the detective, than at Leslie) Shit no. See, when I was a young man, I fucked my way up and down Glendale.

Leslie:

Glendale?

Carl:

Hell, yeah, bunch of bonnie housewives waiting for their husbands to wander off to work, so they could jump on the newspaper boys. Glendale is probably one of the most contaminated places on earth, but the husbands never knew because they'd get home, maybe want a good roger but the wife'd say, "Oh, not tonight honey I got a headache," and though the dumb bastard didn't believe her a lick, he'd acquiesce because he spent all his energy fucking the secretary, who he at least knew wasn't carrying no bugs.

Detective:

You got gonorrhea from bored housewives?

Leslie:

My question exactly.

Carl:

I'm getting to that. Anyway, I'm working for this vacuum dealer, and I start knocking on doors. A knock on the door was like a bottle of red wine for these women. It'd get em wet immediately, and I'm not talking a little drizzle, no this was like a cave during the spring thaw. I'd be at the front door in the coat and tie I just spent a hundred bucks on at Famous, and the next second my pants were around my ankles, and I was gripping the arm of the living room couch while this pearl-wearing beehived floozy sucked me dry.

Detective:

And that's how you got the clap?

Carl:

No, that was good and fine. It was when they wanted a ride that caused problems. Most of the time we never made it anywhere close to a piece of furniture. Just fucked there on the floor, on the new carpet. These women would straddle you and ride you through the floorboards and cum like mad. You'd be amazed at how many cursed their husbands in the throws of ecstasy. "Fuck you, Jim. You're a cunt shit Rodney. Allowance my sweet ass, Phil." The first couple times I didn't even get off, because it happened so fast, but once I began to expect it, I had to fight like mad not to blow my wad in the first two minutes. Just something about fucking the wives of all these rich guys. Damn.
(beat)

Detective:

(to Leslie) Your turn.

Leslie:

(shares a look with the detective) And that's how you got the clap?

Carl:

Yep. And that'll stop you cold. You got this shrunken swollen blob between your legs that's oozing puss like a runny nose. Your underwear has to be peeled off every night.

Leslie:

I don't need a full description.

Detective:

Pretend it's a PSA.

Carl:

Thank you. Whoever you are? And of course you'd go to the free dick doc downtown and there's this big fat black woman minding the foot long q-tip, who's face to face with this sloppy pigmy prick and can't tell it's the clap. "I still need to do a test, so this ain't going be fun." And on "fun" she rammed this q-tip straight up your cock, so "fun" filled the air with a long high screech of pain. She never smiled outright, but you could see it in her eyes.

Leslie:
Poor you.

Carl:
Poor me.

Detective:
When was this?

Carl:
Nineteen seventy-two.

Detective:
They have a blood test now, Carl.

Carl:
Really? I bet it costs yuh?

Detective:
It's worth it.

Carl:
I bet. (beat)(looks at desk, sees what Leslie has written) What's "TROUBLE" mean. Who the hell are you? Fuck it. I don't care. Welcome. Come sit down and take a load off. Me casa, su casa. Eat, partake of the wine and woman (if she lets you,) sleep, then we will talk of your needs.

Detective:
Thank you, Carl.

Carl:
Need a beer?

Detective:
I thought you said wine, Carl?

Carl:
Oh, sorry, wine was just part of the sales pitch.

Detective:

Got it. Don't need a beer, Carl, but thanks. Plus, it's eleven in the morning. See I just came from Philly....

Carl:

Come on. Who doesn't want a ... Philly, as in Philadelphia? How do you know my name?

Leslie:

(like she was waiting for the boulder to hit the water, she points to the paper) Told ya he's "TROUBLE".

Detective:

And the people in Philly...

Carl:

You understand that the beer thing is for guests only. We'd never drink on the job.

Detective:

Sure.

Carl:

I mean, I'm very dedicated to the MAE corporation. You tell those nice people at the corporate office in Philadelphia I've spent some of the best years of my life watching over the Void here(gestures to the warehouse), and would love to continue watching it for as long as I can.

Leslie:

What Carl is trying to say is, "please, don't tell on us."

Detective:

Okay.

Leslie:

Lets update Carl. So, what brings you out our way, Mr. Ballwin?

Stan:

Who's Mr. Ballwin?

Detective:

Me.

Carl:

Right.

Detective:

I'm looking for some art.

Carl:

But, we don't sell art. We only keep it safely in the Void. (to Detective) But, you should know that. Aren't you from Corporate?

Detective:

No, I've been hired by Randolph&Hirsch to locate a paint....

Carl:

Oh, Jesus Christ you scared the shit out of me. First I thought you were another cleaning supply salesman, then a corporate hack, and then it turns out you're some kind of painting sniffing blood hound. (to Leslie) And you knew this and let me piss my pants anyway.

Leslie:

It was quite amusing.

Carl:

You're mean.

Leslie:

Yep.

Carl:

Yes, you are. You, Mr... whatever your name is, please continue. So, Sorry about the interruption, but our little Leslie here likes to cause me grief, give me grief, ram grief up my ass. Basically she's a bitch, you see. No, reason for it, just cold hearted I suppose. I mean, I come in every day...

Detective:

Yeah, no, problem. I'm not going anywhere. Anyway, I was hired by Randolph&Hirsch to locate a painting.

Carl:

Well, we don't sell art. We only house it. Keep it safe.

Detective:

Yeah, that's what I'm looking for.

Leslie:

Mr. Ballwin, be more specific.

Detective:

I'm looking for the kind of art you got.

Carl:
Really?

Detective:
So, do you think you have it?

Carl:
(unsure)No?

Detective:
Do you want to wait until I tell you what I'm looking for?

Leslie:
That might be good. But, Mr. Ballwin, please do hurry up. We're not mind readers here.

Carl:
I meant "no," like in "Oh, hey maybe."

Detective:
I figured as much.

Leslie:
So, whose are you looking for.

Detective:
Mrs. Frankstein's from Tampa. You got it?

Carl:
No.

Detective:
Why don't you check the records? Maybe it came and went, but at least a paper trail is something.

Leslie:
Good idea. Carl, why don't you go back to the Void and look through the files and see if we ever had anything in for Mrs. Frankstein.

Carl:
Yeah, but...Okay.(exit to the back)

Detective:
So, Carl, he's a character.

Leslie:
Yes he is. That's why we love him. Hey, you want some coffee.

Detective:
Coffee sounds great.

Leslie:
Creamer or sugar?

Detective:
No thanks. Black is fine.

Leslie:
All right then. (gets coffee) How long you been doing this “locate art” thing?

Detective
This is my first case.

Leslie
You like working for a law firm? I hear the money’s good.

Detective
I don’t work for the law firm. They just contracted me out.

Leslie
Oh, who do you work for?

Detective
Myself. I’m a private investigator.

Leslie
Wow, a PI. Maybe I should call you Maltese.

Detective
Why?

Leslie
You know the movie the Maltese Falcon.

Detective
But what does that have to do with me?

Leslie
They were looking for...

Detective
But it wasn’t the guy’s name.

Leslie

True. I'll just call you Mr. Ballwin.

Detective

Call me Stan.

Leslie

Okay, You like looking for art?

Detective

I'm not sure it's my thing, but supposedly it pays better than my normal gig of hunting for dead-beat-dads.

Leslie:

I see. Bills getting the better of you.

Detective

Something like that.

Leslie

It's amazing how just living life can fuck you over.

Detective

It does seem like the default doesn't it. The fuck over. Which is why I need the money.

Leslie

You get fucked over recently?

Detective

You could look at it that way.(beat)(a crash from the back)

Leslie

You all right back there.

Carl (from the Void)

Just looking through the files.

Leslie

Well be careful. (to Detective) So Mrs. Frankstein wants her paintings? Finally got that bigger house with more wall space?

Detective:

No, she died.

Leslie:

Oh, sorry.

Detective:
Yeah, a bummer. They're settling the estate.

Leslie:
That makes sense.

Detective:
Hired me to find a painting.

Leslie:
You keep saying that, Mr. Ballwin. Anyone famous?

Detective:
Never heard of him.

Leslie:
Who?

Detective:
Klimt.

Leslie:
A Klimt?

Detective:
Yeah, there's other stuff, but from what they told me it ain't really worth anything. The Klimt was appraised at 1.5 back in 2001, so that's the one they want.

Leslie:
1.5 million?

Detective:
Yeah. Never imaged a million dollars looked like oil on canvas. I always imagined it more 3-D, like a big green block sitting in a vault, to be guarded by serious men with guns. Something strong, cornerstone worthy. If you know what I mean. Never imaged it as a flimsy million-dollar rectangle.

Leslie:
A flimsy 1.5 million dollar rectangle.

Detective:
1.5.

Leslie:
Good luck.

Detective:

Thanks. (beat)(beat) Who is this Klimt guy?

Leslie:

A painter. (Detective stares at her with a poker face.) A Viennese painter.

Detective:

Oh, yeah. A guy from Southeast Asia.

Leslie:

No, a painter from Vienna...Fucking with the art chick are we. I'm going to have keep an eye on you.

Detective:

Funny, I'm thinking it's the other way around.

Leslie:

Why do you say that?

Detective:

Yep.

Leslie:

What do you mean? (beat) Well, if we don't have it but find some info later, is there a way to reach you?

Detective:

Yeah, I got a card around here somewhere. (While he looks through his pockets it is revealed he carries a gun.)

Leslie:

Why do you have that?

Detective:

No worries.

Leslie:

Maybe I better call Charlie in Philly.

Carl:

(enter) Nope. No record.

Detective:

Bummer. (Hands Leslie his card and covers the gun with his coat)

Leslie:

Yeah, sorry. It'd be damn cool to have had a Klimt in our warehouse.

Carl:

You're looking for a Klimt?

Detective:

Yes I am.

Carl:

Wow. Got a picture?

Detective:

Yes actually.

Carl:

Well, lets have a look. (Ballwin shows picture) Wow, well yeah, I never saw that painting come through here.

Leslie

Let me see. (gets handed the picture) Nice. Shame we don't have it.

Detective:

Well, okay. Shit. Back to the grindstone. Damn. Damn, damn fuck. (regains composure)

Leslie:

Sorry.

Detective:

Yeah, me too. Alright, well, give me a call if you came up with anything.

Carl:

Sure. No problem. Bye.

Leslie:

Goodbye Mr. Ballwin. Good luck.

Detective:

Thanks. (exits)

Scene 2:

(Beat. The two look at each other)

Leslie:

What the hell took you so long?

Carl

Smoke. Plus I wanted to give you a chance to finish flirting.

Leslie:

I wasn't flirting.

Carl:

Fine. Doesn't mean we aren't in some deep shit.

Leslie:

Don't panic. In fact, don't even talk about. Let me handle it.

Carl:

What's your plan? You just going to keep flirting?.

Leslie:

I wasn't flirting. Let me handle it.

Carl:

Don't hang me out to dry. Hey, I got a novel idea. We could round up Mrs. Frankstein's paintings.

Leslie

I thought we weren't going to talk about it.

Carl

It's easy. I'll go home and get the ones I have, and you go get yours and we say we magically found them. One of us has to have the Klimt. Maybe there's a reward.

Leslie:

I'm pretty sure neither of us have it.

Carl

What makes you so sure?

Leslie:

I threw it in the river.

Carl

Oh. That makes sense. Are you a fucking moron?

Leslie

Please don't get mad. I'm sorry, so sorry.

Carl
Why?

Leslie
I don't know.

Carl
When?

Leslie
The night after I got engaged.

Carl
Why?

Leslie
I don't know

Carl
Did you think it'd be funny?

Leslie
No.

Carl
Did you tell any one? Does Will know? Did you two have a laugh while you reared back and chucked it in the water?

Leslie
Will doesn't know.

Carl
Where'd you do this?

Leslie
Why? You going to look for it?

Carl:
Just tell me okay.

Leslie
Right there on the riverfront trail. I drove up. Lugged it up a few yards and throw it in.

Carl
Did it float?

Leslie

Down stream for a second or two. Than it sank like a stone.

Carl

Damn

Leslie

I didn't know.

Carl

You didn't know it was a Klimt?

Leslie

I didn't know anyone would come looking for it. Neither did you. That's why we split them up, and you know it. It was your idea.

Carl

It wasn't my idea to throw them in the river, goddamn it. I just hung them on my wall. I didn't think that just because there wasn't a name on the crate or a record of the owner no one would ever come looking for.

Leslie

I did.

Carl

Oh, we are so screwed.

Leslie

Why? Ballwin doesn't know anything. Just stay calm. Please. I need your help. I didn't want to put you in this position, but we're in it. Please just stay calm and help me.

Carl

Why?

Leslie

You're my friend. Help me out. We won't get caught. I promise. It'll be okay.

Carl

Yeah, fine.

Leslie

Thank you.

Carl:

You're welcome I guess.

Leslie:
You feel like checking the toilet?

Carl
Now?

Leslie
Shit, if ever there was a time to check the toilet it's now. You got you're one hitter?

Carl
But you said I could only smoke it out in the car on my lunch.

Leslie
You got it?

Carl
Yeah.

Leslie
Okay then. Don't be stingy.

Carl
Ain't the time to pack light. I understand. (Carl wipes out his one hit and starts loading it.)

Leslie
This stuff any good?

Carl
No, just skunk weed, but it'll do the trick.

Leslie
I hope so. (goes into her desk and pulls out a can of air freshener.)

Carl
You're the best boss I ever had. (takes a hit and passes) Besides the whole destroying a priceless work of art thing.

Leslie
Thank you (takes a hit) Oh boy, that is harsh. (sprays AF)

William:
(enter) Hey, guys.

Leslie:
Will? (She goes over to Will and gives him a hug.)

Will:

Well, okay. Good to see you to. (kisses Leslie then looks at her funny)

Carl:

Damn good to see ya.

Will:

Yeah, good to see you too. How, you doing?

Carl:

Doing good, and yourself?

William:

Doing okay.

Carl:

Good.

William:

Yeah.

Carl:

Yeah.(beat) Okay. Hey, boss, I'm going to take a break.

Leslie:

Fine. (Carl exit) Well, hello baby. (kisses him) What brings you down here?

Will:

Everything alright?

Leslie:

Yeah, no worries.

Will:

You're not usually that excited when I stop by.

Leslie:

What? I'm always happy to see you. What brings you down this way at this hour?

Will:

Presents.

Leslie:

I like presents. Watcha got?

Will:

I bring wine and ambrosia. (hands bag to Leslie)

Leslie:

(looks in the bag) Why yes, yes you do. (reaches into the bag and pulls out gummy worms and Diet Coke.) Yes you do.

Will:

You seemed in need of a pick-me up this morning.

Leslie:

I'm sorry about that. But thank you very much. This feast might do the trick.

Will:

That would be nice.

(awkward beat)

Leslie:

Did you come all the way down here to deliver this picnic to little ol me?

Will:

Yes. (Leslie looks at him with a smile) No, I had a meeting with Doug this morning at the Noonday club. I told you that.

Leslie:

I know. I just wanted to hear you try to lie. How's Doug?

Will:

Fine. He and Marie have another kid on the way. A boy this time.

Leslie:

Holy crap another one. A boy. I bet there breathing a sigh of relief. Four girls might be too much for one household. What's in the other bag?

Will:

I stopped by Star Clipper and got some Spider Man.

Leslie:

It is Wednesday isn't it.

Will:

Yeah. Okay (kisses Leslie) I got to take off. Doug's waiting. I'll stop by after the meeting, okay?

Leslie:

Sounds good. I love you.

Will:

Love you too.(Will exits. Leslie goes back to writing at the desk. A young woman enters. She's in her early twenties)

Julie:

Hello.

Leslie:

Hi. Can I help you?

Julie:

I was hoping to talk to the owner.

Leslie:

That might be a little hard. They're in Philly.

Julie:

In where?

Leslie:

Philadelphia. The owners are in Philadelphia.

Julie:

(laughs) Sorry. I had no idea what you were saying. Well, maybe I can come back.

Leslie:

I'm the manager; can I help you?

Julie: Oh, great. Yes, maybe you can. I'm Julie Sullivan, and I represent the Klaines-Dawson...

Leslie:

Another law firm.

Julie:

What? Oh, no,no. I'm with Klaines-Dawson the office supply company. Actually we're more along the lines of a sanitary supple company. We can take care of all your sanitary needs.

Leslie:

Do I have a lot of sanitary needs?

Julie:

Well, you have your toilet needs – toilet paper, paper towels, anti-bacterial hand gel...

Leslie:
Anti-bacterial what?

Julie:
Hand gel.

Leslie:
Hand gel.

Julie:
Yes. Toilet brush...

Leslie:
Is that the same as soap?

Julie:
Yes.

Leslie:
Okay, good to know.

Julie:
Look, I know what I'm selling, so please, stop mocking me.

Leslie:
I'm not...sorry.

Julie:
You've been doing it since you found out what I sell.

Leslie:
I'm sorry.

Julie:
Good for you. Look, thanks for your time. I'll just leave my card.

Carl:
(Carl enters) Card for what?

Julie:
Jesus, you scared me. I didn't know there was anyone else here.

Carl:
I was just in the Void.

Julie:

Oh, well, good for you. Is it as empty as they say it is?

Carl:

What?

Leslie:

Carl means he was in the warehouse.

Carl:

Right. Sorry, I forgot. We speak in code around these parts. Keeps Hoover off out trail.

Leslie:

Hoover was the head of the FBI when...

Julie:

I know who Hoover was. I get the reference.

Leslie:

Sorry.

Julie:

So, I'm just going to leave this card. If you need toilet paper call me, or just burn the damn thing. (walks toward the door)

Carl:

(taking the card away from Leslie) You sell sanitary supplies?

Julie:

Yeah, yeah, I know. Thanks for the time.

Carl:

I sold sanitary supplies once.

Julie:

Great fun isn't it.

Carl:

Oh, a blast. I lasted a week. Which is longer than my stint at MoPirg.

Julie:

You shilled for MoPirg? So did I.

Carl:

I knew it. You have that "Hi, may I take a moment of your time to inform you about a very important issue," smile line. Right there. (points to the middle of Julie's brow.)

Julie:
(laughs) That fake smile is brutal isn't it.

Leslie:
I'm going to sweep up the Void.

Carl:
Okay. (Les exits) Who you working for?

Julie:
Klaines-Dawson.

Carl:
Never heard of them. I was with Emery.

Julie:
Oh, a friend of mine is with them. He makes so much money. That's why I thought I'd give it a try. But I wasn't hired by Emery. I ended up at K-D. They suck.

Carl:
You on commission.

Julie:
Now, I am. When I started they said they'd pay me \$200 a week for three months. Until I build up my client base.

Carl:
They stopped that salary shit around week three, right?

Julie:
Yes. "Low sales are causing budget cuts."

Carl:
Cocks.

Julie:
Yeah.

Carl:
Hey, do want to get lunch later?

Julie:
Today? Yeah, sure. I'm going to hit the rest of the businesses around here anyway. Is there a place to eat lunch around here?

Carl:

You have come to the right man, I will take you to the best dive you've ever been at.
How's noon?

Julie:

Sounds good. See you then. (exits)

Leslie:

(enters) You get the date?

Carl:

Yep. Lunch.

Leslie:

What? Are you slipping? Used to be able to get dinner.

Carl:

Didn't want to wait. I'm old. I don't have much time left. Can't put things off like I used to. Plus, I'm bored and nervous as all hell.

Leslie

She makes you nervous?

Carl

God no. The idea of jail time makes me nervous.

Leslie

She ain't that young.

Carl

You know what I'm talking about.

Leslie

Yeah.

Carl

Let me get on the web.

Leslie:

Fine. (She gets up from behind the desk, and Carl sits in her seat. Leslie starts pacing.)
Let me have another hit.

Carl:

Any other rules you can break? (flips his pack, so one juts its filtered head above the rest. Leslie takes it.) Hey, there's always that big one about protecting the paintings.

Leslie:

(Leslie takes a hit and hands back the pot) Hand me my coffee cup.

Carl:

(Carl, put the coffee cup up on the desk) It's empty.

Leslie:

I know. Let me have a cigarette.

Carl:

You're going crazy today. (hands over a fag)

Leslie

Lets hope not.(she uses the cup as an astray and keeps pacing.)

(beat)

Carl:

(still looking at the computer screen) You said you'd be late today.

Leslie:

I know. The thing I had to do, well something came up, and I didn't do it.

Carl:

Well, that's why I was late.

Leslie:

I didn't ask.

Carl:

But I feel stupid or guilty or something. I mean you should be able to count on a person when she says she'll be late. Especially if she's management. Middle management is the backbone of our economic system. If you can't trust middle management, we might as well surrender to the Soviets right now. (beat)(looks up) Betrayed. (back to the computer) That's what I feel. A deep sense of betrayal. (Beat) What got cancelled?

Leslie:

Nothing got cancelled. Something just came up, that's all, and I didn't feel like doing it. The Soviets haven't been around for over a decade you know.

Carl:

Oh, yeah, Reagan beat them didn't he? (beat) When you going to let me finish painting you?

Leslie:

Let's make sure this Ballwin guy is done snooping around.

Carl:

I didn't mean today. We don't even have to do it here. There's always my apartment again.

Leslie:

Your apartment is a mess. Will might get suspicious. I don't know. I don't look very portrait worthy right now.

Carl:

You feeling bloated or something.

Leslie:

Why? Do I look bloated?

Carl:

You look fine.

Leslie:

Thanks.

Carl:

Does Will think you look bloated?

Leslie:

God, no. He hasn't said anything. (a little unsure) But he wouldn't.

Carl:

Have I mentioned lately that Will is quite the putz?

Leslie:

That's the man I'm going to marry in 7 months.

Carl:

Putz.

Leslie:

He makes me feel secure.

Carl:

Since when?

Leslie:

Since IU.

Carl:

Did you fuck him in lab?

Leslie:
Jesus, Carl.

Carl:
Did he see your tits, at least?

Leslie:
He'd be the only one who hadn't. (beat, then a smile.) Never mentioned whether he had or not.

Carl
I'm bored.

Leslie:
You're always bored.

Carl:
And you're not?

Leslie:
Yes, I am too.

Carl:
What should we do?

Leslie:
Find other jobs, and leave these to the monkeys.

Carl:
Can't do it.

Leslie:
Why not?

Carl:
What do you mean why not? You know why not.

Leslie:
Because you have a family to support.

Carl:
Don't being a smart ass. Why don't you quit?

Leslie:

I have a wedding to pay for.

Carl:

I see. You'll pay for the wedding, become Mrs. William Bennet, and then you'll quit this job and spend you time pooping out babies and cleaning the house.

Leslie:

No. I'll go back to school.

Carl:

And Will doesn't want kids?

Leslie:

I'm sure he does sometime, but it can wait until after school.

Carl:

Did he say that? You two are getting up there in age. I bet Will can't wait to slide in and make a baby.

Leslie:

Don't get vulgar.

Carl:

It's all I got really. Here, look at this. (Leslie goes behind the desk and looks at the monitor)

Leslie:

Jesus, Carl. You know that's an abuse of the internet privileges.

Carl:

I call it an abuse of the asshole. So what do we do until lunch? (takes a hit)

(Detective enters)

Carl:

(surprised) Back again. (he furiously tries turning the monitor off and hiding the pot)

Detective:

Yep.

Leslie:

Looking for something else we don't have.

Detective:

Just a few questions.

Leslie:
Please make it quick. We're busy.

Detective:
I'll try. (to Carl) Why would you have seen the painting?

Carl:
What?

Detective:
You said you hadn't seen it pass through here?

Carl:
I didn't.

Detective:
You did say it.

Carl:
No, I mean I didn't see it come through here.

Detective:
But why would you? You guys just house the stuff. Isn't it mostly in boxes or crates.

Carl:
Yeah.

Detective:
So, why would you have the possibility of seeing it.

Leslie:
Mr. Ballwin. I assure you, Carl, the talk monster, just misspoke. What he meant to say was that we never had the painting at this location.

Detective:
Did he?

Leslie:
Yes. There's no way he could have seen the painting, and if he did see it, it would reflect badly on me. Wouldn't it?

Detective:
Yeah, I suppose so, but the guy I saw in Philly was sure he shipped it here.

Carl:
The main office said that?

Detective:

Yep.

Carl:

You've been to the main office?

Detective:

It is in Philly, right?

Carl:

Right, yeah, I forgot that's where you said you just came from.

Leslie:

Then you know what a cluster-fuck it is.

Detective:

Yep. Wha..Um...yeah.

Leslie:

Charlie in the Philadelphia office was probably trying to cover his ass. They couldn't find a bear cub in a ...(beat) That was going to be something witty.

Detective:

He was positive he sent it here.

Leslie:

If he sent it here, it'd be on this clip board under Frankstein, with a list of all the paintings she stored with us.

Detective:

Can I see that clip board?

Leslie:

Sure.

Detective:

(Ballwin takes the clipboard and looks it over) There's nothing on this clipboard.

Carl:

See.

Detective:

No. I don't. There's nothing on the clipboard. What, you just don't write anything down? It's all on computer? There isn't anyway you could have forgotten to put her down, is there?

Carl:

Nope. We're very professional. Every Thursday is inventory day.

Detective:

I see. No way you got lazy one day and didn't check the stacks.

Leslie:

Mr. Ballwin, we do know how to do our job here.

Detective:

Wasn't questioning that. Was questioning if maybe you didn't want to do your job one particular Thursday and let a box worth 1.5 slip through your fingers. Because if you haven't noticed there's nothing on the damn clipboard.

Leslie:

Nothing slipped through our fingers. We are always professional.

Carl:

Always.

Ballwin:

Always. Well, okay. I get it. It isn't here. Too bad for me. Oh, well. Why start being responsible now, hey Stan?

Leslie:

Look Mr. Ball...

Detective:

Look could it just be a big unmarked box. Could it be mislabeled. The guy in Philly said he sent it here.

Leslie:

Carl. Do Mr. Ballwin a favor and check to see if there's a box sitting in the Void that isn't marked.

Carl:

All right, but it isn't back there.

Leslie:

Maybe a miracle just happened, and St. Sabastion placed it in a corner five minutes ago.

Carl:

Okay (exits)

Leslie:

He's looking Mr. Ballwin. I can't say I'm giving him very good odds.

Detective:

The guy from Philly said...

Leslie:

Jesus Christ Almighty. How many ways do you want it explained to you? It is not here and never was here.

Detective:

I think you're lying.

Leslie:

Well good for you.

Detective:

Look, please, help me out. I am so fucked if I don't find this thing.

Leslie:

I'm sorry about that, but I can't help.

Detective:

Why not? Just tell me where it's at. I won't get you in trouble I swear. I owe so much to Matilda.

Leslie:

Whose Matilda?

Detective:

My daughter.

Leslie:

Why do you owe her money?

Detective:

Child support.

Leslie

You owe child support. You. You track down dead-beat dads, and you owe child support. That's rich.

Detective

Well, I'm not and she's got the lawyers on me.

Leslie:

Good. What an ass you are. Damn. Wow.

Detective:
You're not helping.

Leslie:
Am I suppose to?

Detective:
Don't you think I feel bad enough?

Leslie:
Probably not.

Detective:
God damn, you're a heartless bitch.

Leslie:
Fuck you. You don't know me.

Detective:
Bullshit. You're an unhappy selfish cunt who can never be satisfied. You...

Carl:
(enters)
You just described all women. What's going on out here?

Detective:
Did you find it?

Carl:
No luck, buckaroo.

Detective:
Are you sure?

Leslie:
Look, go back and check yourself. Go help Carl.

Detective:
Really, you'll let me do that.

Carl:
Really, you'll let him do that?

Leslie:
Sure.

Detective:
Alright.

Carl:
Yeah, alright. Come on I'll give you the tour.(Both exit)

Leslie:
(picks up the phone begins to dial. Stan enters in run)

Detective:
There's nothing back there.

Leslie:
(In a very loud whisper) That's why I was pretty sure we didn't have it.

Detective:
Nothing. Not one crate or box or anything. Just a big vast vo... with just a huge ring of cigarette butts in the middle of it all.

Leslie:
(still whispering) Shhhh. Not so loud. Charlie's on the phone.

Detective:
Who?

Leslie:
Charlie, he runs the Philly office.

Detective:
Oh, right Charlie. Yeah. I remember him. Let me talk to him.

Leslie:
Don't tell him our warehouse is empty okay. Could affect my job. Okay. (Stan nods in confusion)(She picks up the phone) Hey, Charlie. Charlie? Hello? God damn it. (Slams the phone down.) Hold on a second. (redials) Jesus, I just called you fuckers. Somebody pick up.

Detective:
What's going on?

Leslie:
Oh, shut up.

Detective:
What?

Leslie:

Calm down. I didn't mean it. (puts the phone down and calms herself.) I'll just try back later.

Detective:

You don't have anything back there.

Leslie:

Yep, you got it. No art here. The closest thing we got is that water stain on the ceiling.

Detective:

What do you two do all day?

Leslie:

Wait for Philly to figure out we don't have anything here and close us down.

Detective:

Don't you sent reports or inventory thing-a-majigs.

Leslie:

Every month.

Detective:

But you don't have anything.

Leslie:

Don't I know it. We just sent the last box out to them, yesterday. The Lubbock box I believe it was. You should have heard Charlie praying we had it. I could literally hear his hands being folded.

Detective:

Now what?

Leslie:

I don't know. You can go in the back and continue looking for something that isn't there.

Detective:

It's not there.

Leslie:

Yeah, I know. So, why don't you go home, and I'll call you if it turns up.

Detective:

I don't think so.

Leslie:

I'm not trying to keep you from your money Mr. Ballwin. Trust me. If I had the painting, I'd turn it over to you.

Detective:

You want to go to lunch.

Leslie:

With you?

Detective:

Why not?

Leslie:

Sure, why not?

Detective:

Some place good. I'll pay.

Leslie

You sure.

Detective:

Lunch is a drop in the bucket with debt I got.

Leslie:

Okay, we'll have to drive.

Detective:

Okay. Lets take your car.

Leslie:

Shit. Alright, but let me go clean it out.

Detective:

I don't mind a little mess.

Leslie:

I still need to clean it out. I'll be right back.

Detective:

Okay. (Leslie exits)

Carl:

(enters)

Where's Lez?

Detective:
Cleaning out her car.

Carl:
It's about time. That thing is a pig...Why?

Detective:
Pigsty.

Carl:
I know what I said. Why is she cleaning out her car?

Detective:
We're going to lunch.

Carl:
I already have a lunch date.

Detective:
No, just me and her.

Carl:
Why?

Detective:
Just to talk.

Carl:
About what?

Detective:
Stuff.

Carl:
She's engaged you know. So stay out of trouble.

Detective:
(With a smile) Right. You too.

Carl:
Why wouldn't I?

Detective:
You're not really acting like a man who wants to stay out of trouble.

Carl:

Do I look like I stay out of trouble?

Detective:

This is a whole new hemisphere of trouble, Carl. Something you ain't going to put in your duffel bag marked experiences and save for prosperity. There won't be any fond remembrances of Johnny "the Titan" cornering you in the prison shower and shoving his dick up your ass.

Carl:

No need to get stupid.

Detective:

You'd know about stupid.

Carl:

Why are you still here? We don't have the damn paintings.

Detective:

Maybe.

Carl:

Jesus Christ.

Detective:

Maybe.

Carl:

Jesus Christ

Leslie:

(enters)

Our lord and savior. What's up?

Detective:

Nothing. I'll meet you at your car. I need to get something out of mine.

Leslie:

Okay. (Detective exits)

Carl:

Are you going lunch with that guy?

Leslie:

Yeah, so what? Just going to smooth things over.

Carl:
What's with all the flirting?

Leslie:
What flirting?

Carl:
Don't be coy with me. You're practically fucking him. (Leslie laughs) What's so funny?

Leslie:
Did you just use the word coy? Jesus, Carl, do you even know what that means or did you hear that somewhere?

Carl:
You know what I'm talking about.

Leslie:
I might, but you have no idea what you're talking about. So what if I'm flirting? You never complain when I'm doing it with you. What? You jealous?

Carl:
No. I don't want you cozying up to this Ballwin guy. I got a feeling I'm getting fucking screwed.

Leslie:
Oh, isn't that cute. Mr. Carl Johnson is jealous about his boss, who he got to stick his dick into one lonely night.

Carl:
Jesus. Now you're just getting mean.

Leslie:
Don't cry. It'll be okay. There's someone out there for you. I promise. Fish in the sea bullshit and all that.

Carl:
Shut up.

Leslie:
Can't take a little competition?

Carl:
Just stop it.

Leslie:

Maybe I'm just head-over-heels in love with Ballwin, and you won't be needed any more. You've been replaced. We'll be making hot love in the warehouse in less than a half an hour, so if you don't mind not being around...

Carl:
Shut up.

Leslie:
He's hot and damaged. God, I just get all wet for that type of guy.

Carl:
Shut the fuck up.

Leslie:
Take the rest of the day off. I don't want you walking in...

Carl:
What if I just fucked you now?

Leslie:
What?

Carl:
Right there, with you bent over the desk.

Leslie:
I'm pretty sure it wouldn't go that easy.

Carl:
Bullshit. I wouldn't even ask. You'd just see it in my eyes. It'd excite you. Fuck the courteous, polite guys. I'd just come at you with a look. You wouldn't even say no, not even think about saying no. You might even put up a fight, but "no" would never cross your mind.

Leslie:
You think you want to try it?

Carl:
Look at you. You're getting wet just thinking about it. It's all you got. Sexual intrigue. Your life ain't hard. It's a pain sometimes but never really hard. No drama in everyday life. It's just flat. A good rough fuck always livens things up. Makes the world a more interesting place. Doesn't it?

Leslie:
Maybe some of us don't want a more interesting place.

Carl:

Come on. Look who you're talking to. I know what you've done, what we've done. These are not the acts of people satisfied with life.

Leslie:

(a shadow appears at the door.)

Don't say anything. Don't you go there. What the fuck are you thinking? We got this damn Ballwin fuck right outside, and you want to go there.

Carl:

I don't want to, but it's going there. Time is about up.

Leslie:

Stop being a pussy. He doesn't even know what the fuck he's looking at, and you want to go crying to him and ask forgiveness. All that talk about a good rough fuck and you aren't anything but a pussy. Shit, you couldn't fuck me if I was passed out sorority girl on a Saturday night.

Carl:

I'd watch it.

Leslie:

Even if you do fuck me, what the hell will I care? That cock of yours isn't even big enough to register. Pound away stud, It'd be like nothing happened, again.

Carl:

I said watch it.

Leslie:

Lets do it. (she walks to the desk, pulls her panties off and climbs onto the desk) Fuck me up, big boy.

Carl:

(walks to the desk and undoes his belt and starts to unzip his fly. Stops. Leslie throws her underwear at him)

Cunt.

(LIGHTS DOWN)

ACT 2