

AMERICAN GIRL

by

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CHARCTERS:

NIKKI – *a transgender girl, 16; she’s thin and extroverted with a crackling current of emotion running through her.*

LISA - *Nikki’s mom, 45, a cisgender woman; caring and co-dependent, she’s beautiful, but somewhat weathered from years of hard living.*

KANE - *Nikki’s dad, 50, a cisgender man; he has a practiced, intimidating air of danger, but his vitality’s been sapped by his heart condition.*

CONRAD - *Nikki’s brother, 23, a cisgender man; he’s hotheaded, and worn down despite his youth.*

NICOLE - *Kane’s girlfriend, 22, a cisgender woman; young and thin, she’s finds life and those around her consistently disappointing.*

TIFFANY - *trap house operator, 27, a cisgender woman; she’s detached and easy going, gratified by the sense of control her position offers.*

Parts that can be doubled by actors playing Conrad and Kane:

MAN 1

MAN 2

MAN 3

SETTING:

Vancouver, WA and Portland, OR. There are three main settings: Lisa’s section 8 apartment, the home of Nicole’s boyfriend Derrick, and Tiffany’s trap house, where she sells meth. Additionally, there are two scenes in the cars of Nikki’s sex work clients, and a final scene in front of a funeral home. The three spaces are disheveled, their floors and surfaces cluttered with refuse and debris. In the home and trap house, the surfaces are caked, as well, with food and drink, and we sense the dank mix in the air of rotting garbage and the chemical bite of meth smoke.

TIME:

Present day over the course of 12-16 months.

Note: This play depicts real events, and is based on extensive interviews with the people depicted and those around them.

Scene 1

Lisa's apartment. NIKKI and her mom LISA talk as the latter gets ready for work. Nikki puts on makeup and snaps selfies. Lisa has an anxious, needy energy. Nikki is buoyant and has the manic energy of a meth user.

NIKKI

Mommy, I'm your favorite, right?

LISA

I'm not really supposed to –

NIKKI

But I am, aren't I?

LISA

Well . . . I mean, don't tell –

NIKKI

I knew it. I'm sure Conrad knows already,
so don't worry.

LISA

I try to not make it obvious.
(worried suddenly)
Nikki darling –

Nikki looks up, frightened, noticing Lisa's change in town

NIKKI

What is it?

LISA

You know how we –

NIKKI

Are you mad, mommy? Don't be –

LISA

Sweetie, please just let –

NIKKI

Okay.

LISA

Vince said you left your pipe and a bag of –

NIKKI

Mommy, I didn't mean to –

LISA

I know, sweetie, but Vince –

NIKKI

I'm sorry! Don't be mad –

LISA

I'm not mad, darling, but –

NIKKI

I won't do it again.

LISA

You took my van, too, and –

NIKKI

Are you angry at me, mommy? Please don't –

LISA

I'm not angry. I did miss a shift at work, though, but that's not what –

NIKKI

I just lost track of time, I swear. It –

LISA

Nikki.

NIKKI

Yes?

LISA

Sweetie, you know I don't like being, um, strict, or -

NIKKI

Are you angry?

LISA

No, honey. But Vince is in recovery, and when

you leave drugs and a pipe out like that,
it's dangerous for him. That's why –

NIKKI

I understand.

LISA

I don't mind, personally, but –

NIKKI

I was out with dada, and I just –

LISA

You dad kept you out using meth again?
That fucker shouldn't –

NIKKI

Mommy!

LISA

What? He's the reason we're having to
talk about all of –

NIKKI

I don't let dada talk bad about you, and
you don't get to talk bad about him, remember?

LISA

I know . . . This is serious, though. Vince
said if you leave drugs or your pipe around
around again, you won't be able to stay
here anymore.

NIKKI

Okay, mommy.

LISA

He seemed really serious about it, too. I
tried to tell him it wasn't a big deal, but –

NIKKI

It's okay. I won't do it again.

LISA

Okay . . . you know, you could go to
inpatient treatment, if you want. We could

get you a –

NIKKI

I know.

LISA

If you were clean, you . . . wouldn't steal,
and –

NIKKI

Dada's not clean, though, and he needs my
help.

LISA

But when you stay out for three days, and
you take money from me or Vince, it upsets
him, and –

NIKKI

I'm sorry, mommy.

LISA

It doesn't bother me, baby, but I get
worried about what he'll –

NIKKI

I know. Dada's sick, though, so I have to –

LISA

Okay. Just remember about leaving drugs
or your pipe around, though. Vince was
really firm about –

NIKKI

Why are you scared of Vince? You're –

LISA

(terrified)

Nikki! . . . He's not here now, but you
shouldn't talk about –

NIKKI

You're the one who works. He's just on
disability, and he –

LISA

Please just promise me you won't break his rules, Nikki, okay?

NIKKI

Okay.

LISA

Good . . . Did you design that sweatshirt? With all the tears and paint?

NIKKI

Yep.

LISA

It looks so good, sweetie.

NIKKI

Thanks. I made it today.

LISA

Oh, while you were at school?

NIKKI

I actually –

CONRAD enters. He crosses and kisses Lisa hello.

CONRAD

Hi mom.

LISA

Hi darling. Look at Nikki's sweatshirt. Doesn't it –

Conrad musses Nikki's hair. She turns and tries to punch him, but he eludes her.

NIKKI

You're a fool.

LISA

She designed it. Doesn't it look good?

CONRAD

Um, sure?

NIKKI

Conrad doesn't care about fashion, mommy?
He's an oaf.

CONRAD

I'm not – never mind. Shouldn't you be in
school? It's –

NIKKI

I didn't go.

(to Lisa)

I'm sorry. You're not upset, are –

LISA

(worried)

Well, no . . . is there a –

NIKKI

I know I should. I just never get myself to
go, you know?

CONRAD

(to Lisa, quietly)

It's because she's out with dad all night, like
I –

NIKKI

No, it isn't! Leave dada out –

CONRAD

Fine.

LISA

The other kids aren't being mean to you,
are they? Because you're –

(uncertain about language)

You know, transgender?

NIKKI

No!

LISA

Oh.

NIKKI

I'd fucking kick anyone's ass who tried to –

LISA

Okay.

NIKKI

I know I should go.

CONRAD

Yeah, you should. You're smart.

Nikki rolls her eyes. Conrad turns to Lisa.

CONRAD

There's a problem with the sink?

LISA

Yes! It's leaking and –

CONRAD

The one in –

LISA

I can't talk to the manager, because Vince threatened him, but –

CONRAD

Okay. I can –

LISA

Now every time Vince uses it, he yells. I'm afraid he'll punch the manager if it keeps –

CONRAD

Mom, it's fine.

LISA

Okay, good. Thank you.

Lisa hugs Conrad.

CONRAD

It's the sink in the bathroom, right?

LISA

Yes, right down there.

Conrad crosses to the hallway exit.

NIKKI
He knows where the bathroom is, mommy.

Conrad exits. Lisa packs up her things to go.

LISA
(childlike)
Sweetie, I start my shift in a half hour
... You'll text or call me before I -

NIKKI
Oh course.

LISA
Oh good ... I get so anxious.

NIKKI
I know.

LISA
I told Vince, "I think I'd have a panic
attack if Nikki didn't call or text me
before I start my shift."

Nikki hugs Lisa.

NIKKI
I'll text, mommy.

LISA
Thank you, darling.

Lisa crosses to the front door, before turning back nervously.

LISA
You'll remember what we said earlier,
right? About leaving things -

NIKKI
Don't worry. I'll -

LISA
Okay, good. Bye bye, sweetie.

NIKKI

Bye. I love you.

Lisa exits.

Scene 2

Tiffany's trap house. A few weeks have passed. KANE sits with TIFFANY who counts money and makes notes in a ledger. Kane appears gruff and has imposing look, despite his fragile health. Tiffany is laid back and amiable.

KANE

(seductive, dark)

Why don't you get us some more of that?

TIFFANY

Well . . . I could pay for mine. How will you pay for yours?

KANE

I'll let you treat.

TIFFANY

(playful, frowning)

Oh, sorry. You forgot I'm cheap.

KANE

(laughs)

Well, someone told me you've been talking to Conrad. Just collect from him the next time he visits.

TIFFANY

Ha. He came here looking for you.

KANE

(faux innocent)

I don't know why he'd do that.

TIFFANY

You texted him saying you were here.

KANE

(faux innocent)

I don't know why he'd do that.

TIFFANY

You texted him saying you were here.

KANE

Well, I was tired of him tailing me, so I threw him off my scent. Getting high's not a father son activity, you know?

TIFFANY

He doesn't sound like a reliable source of credit.

KANE

(feigning disappointment)

Shoot . . . I used to do what you do, you know? Deal. Run a house.

TIFFANY

Yeah. Kane Kuhnhausen. You were the shit.

KANE

Yeah . . . It's a fucking hassle, though . . . I just want to tune all of that out now.

TIFFANY

Conrad has a house.

KANE

(rolls eyes)

I know.

TIFFANY

Maybe he'll make a delivery for you.

KANE

Conrad? All he does is talk about what a piece of shit dad I was.

TIFFANY

You just said he wants to spend –

KANE

Yeah, I know . . . let's change the topic, okay?

TIFFANY