

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 / say that

NIKKI

But I am, aren't I?

LISA

Well . . . I mean, don't tell / your brother

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 / there's something

Nikki looks up, frightened, noticing Lisa's change in tone.

NIKKI

What is it?

LISA

You know how we / talked about

NIKKI

Are you mad, mommy? Don't be / mad at me

LISA

Sweetie, please just let / finish what I'm

NIKKI

Okay.

LISA

Vince said you left your pipe and a bag of / meth

NIKKI

Mommy, I didn't mean to, / I swear

LISA

I know, sweetie, but Vince / made it really clear

NIKKI

I'm sorry! Don't be mad, / please

LISA

I'm not mad, darling, but / I'm trying to

NIKKI

I won't do it again.

LISA

You took my van, too, and / kept it out

NIKKI

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

LISA

I'm not angry. I did miss a shift at work, though, but that's not what / I wanted to talk about

NIKKI

I just lost track of time, I swear. It / was a mistake

LISA

Nikki.

NIKKI

Yes?

LISA

Sweetie, you know I don't like being, um, strict, or / mean, right?

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 / I brought it up before

NIKKI

I understand.

LISA

I don't mind, personally, but / Vince is really serious

NIKKI

I was out with dada, and I just / forgot

LISA

You dad kept you out using meth again? That dumbass shouldn't / be doing that

NIKKI

Mommy!

LISA

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

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 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 / he wouldn't listen

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 / spot

NIKKI

I know.

LISA

If you were clean, you . . . wouldn't steal, and / there wouldn't be problems

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 / now he's given you this warning

NIKKI

I'm sorry, mommy.

LISA

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

NIKKI

I know. Dada's sick, though, so I have to / help him

LISA

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

NIKKI

Why are you scared of Vince? You're / paying all the bills

LISA

(terrified)

Nikki! . . . He's not here now, but you shouldn't talk about / him like that

NIKKI

You're the one who works. He's just on disability, and he / barely helps with anything

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 / didn't go

CONRAD enters. He crosses and kisses Lisa hello.

CONRAD

Hi mom.

LISA

Hi darling. Look at Nikki's sweatshirt. Doesn't it / look good

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. Isn't it cool?

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 / only one o'clock

NIKKI

I didn't go.

(to Lisa)

I'm sorry. You're not upset, are / you, mommy?

LISA

(worried)

Well, no . . . is there a / reason

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 /  
told you

NIKKI

No, it isn't! Leave dada out / of this

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 kick anyone's ass who tried to / bully me

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 / I'm worried to death

CONRAD

The one in / the bathroom

LISA

I can't talk to the manager, because Vince threatened him, / and he hates us

CONRAD

Okay. I can / take a look

LISA

But now every time Vince uses it, he yells. I'm afraid he'll punch the manager if it doesn't / get fixed

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 / start, right?

NIKKI

Of 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 / around?

NIKKI

Don't worry. I'll / remember

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

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 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 / time with you

KANE

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

TIFFANY

Of course. He's moody, too, you know?

KANE

Har har.

Kane's phone pings. He checks it.

KANE

Oh, Nicole's coming.

(gestures to drug stash)

She'll cover me.

TIFFANY

Oh yeah?

KANE

Sure. She loves to see me happy.

Tiffany debates, before somewhat reluctantly getting Kane some meth and bringing it back.

TIFFANY

You must know some secret.

Kane takes the drugs from her.

KANE

Me? What's that mean?

TIFFANY

People give you whatever you need, don't they?

KANE

(scoffs)

All people give me is a hard time.

Kane sits on a couch, taking out his pipe. He packs and then smokes some, sitting back enveloped in pleasure. He gestures for Tiffany to join him.

TIFFANY

You like that?

KANE

(nods)

If I could figure out how to make it last, I'd like it even more.

TIFFANY

But then I wouldn't get to see you.

(Kane laughs)

Are you dating Nicole now?

KANE  
(annoyed)

I suppose.

TIFFANY  
(laughs)

Such a romantic.

The front door of the house opens and Nikki enters. Seeing Kane, she lights up and crosses to him, giving him a hug and a kiss.

NIKKI

Hi dada!

KANE  
(hiding annoyance)

Hi darling. How did you find me?

(points)

Do you know Tiffany?

NIKKI

Of course. I was here last week.

TIFFANY

Hi Nikki.

KANE

Did Conrad tell you I was here?

NIKKI

You know he can never find you. I'm smarter than him.

KANE

I guess that's true.

(to Tiffany)

Do you want to get her some?

TIFFANY  
(skeptical)

Nicole's paying for that, too?

KANE

I wouldn't ask if she wasn't.

Against her better judgment, Tiffany stands and crosses to her drug stash again.

NIKKI  
(concerned)  
Nicole's coming, dada? The Nicole I know?

KANE  
Yes, "the Nicole you know" is coming.

NIKKI  
Nicole's an addict, you know? Like, a meth addict.

KANE  
Yeah, well . . .

Kane gestures around, indicating where they are.

NIKKI  
I just meant –

Tiffany hands Nikki a small package. She looks at it with intense craving.

TIFFANY  
(to Nikki)  
Enjoy yourself.  
(to Kane)  
The last I heard, Nicole had a three year old son and no job. Did I miss her winning the lottery recently, or something?

KANE  
Nope.

TIFFANY  
Right. I'm guess I'm curious how she's underwriting this evening of joy for you all then.

Nikki loads her pipe and smokes, with no hesitation or unfamiliarity.

KANE  
She's got a dipshit boyfriend in Clackamas with a trap house she gets money from.

TIFFANY  
Ahh . . . gotcha.

Nikki takes out her phone and types a text.

TIFFANY  
You doing alright, Nikki?

NIKKI  
Yeah, I'm great.  
(to Kane)  
How are you, dada?

KANE  
I'm okay. I watched that video you sent me.

NIKKI  
Which one? Nikki Minaj?

KANE  
(to Tiffany)  
Like there's any way I would know / that

Nikki pushes him playfully.

NIKKI  
Dada!

KANE  
Yes, if that's the one / whose video you sent

NIKKI  
It's Nikki Minaj!  
(to Tiffany, theatrical)  
She's the person I'm going to do makeup  
for professionally someday.  
(to Kane)  
She has the same name as me. It's not that  
hard to / remember

KANE  
Fine.

NIKKI  
Did you like it?

KANE  
Let's just say I watched it.

Kane laughs, before lapsing into a violent cough that betrays his heart's frailty. Nikki looks on concerned. After a beat, she checks her phone, becoming excited.

NIKKI  
Conrad's coming!

KANE  
(annoyed)  
What?

NIKKI  
Conrad. I invited him.

Kane stands, upset, and paces. Nikki stands, following him and worried.

NIKKI  
Dada, are you mad?

KANE  
No, I'm not / mad

NIKKI  
I didn't do it to / upset you

KANE  
It's fine, Nikki.

NIKKI  
Okay. You promise / you're not upset

KANE  
Yes. It's all okay.

Cooling off, he puts his arm around her.

KANE  
Here, look at me . . . I'm easy to get along with.  
(holds up pipe)  
As long as you don't get between me and this,  
right?  
(to Tiffany)  
I'm going to use the loo.

Kane crosses to the hallway and exits. Nikki sits again, loads and smokes her pipe.

NIKKI

How did you get this house?

TIFFANY

My mom left it to me when she died.

NIKKI

Oh, I'm sorry.

TIFFANY

It's fine. We weren't close, like you and your /  
parents

NIKKI

You were sad, though, weren't / you?

TIFFANY

When I was little I was sad.

NIKKI

Huh?

TIFFANY

They weren't very nice people.

NIKKI

Oh, but did you love them? They were your  
parents, right?

TIFFANY

Yes, they were, but I – wow, this conversation  
is getting heavy. Do / you want any more

NIKKI

Sorry. I didn't mean / to upset you

TIFFANY

It's cool.

NIKKI

It's just, my parents are my best friends, so I  
guess / I just figured

TIFFANY

(detached)

That's nice . . . it doesn't seem like Conrad feels

the same way, though.

Kane reenters, crosses back to Nikki and sits.

NIKKI  
(to Tiffany)  
Conrad loves them, too. He's just grumpy.

Kane packs his pipe and smokes.

NIKKI  
(private, to Kane)  
Are you seeing Nicole a lot now, dada?

KANE  
Why do you ask?

NIKKI  
(nervous)  
Well, it's just, I remember when you were clean you said you didn't want to be around addicts, because it wasn't healthy for you.

KANE  
(annoyed, hiding shame)  
Alright, but you might have noticed neither I, nor anyone else here is "clean." Isn't that so?

NIKKI  
Yes.

KANE  
In fact, no one / we know is clean

NIKKI  
I know, dada, but / I just thought

KANE  
You yourself just invited your brother, who operates his own trap house, here, didn't / you?

NIKKI  
Yes, but your heart is bad, and / I want to help you

KANE

(angry)  
Nikki, you can / let me worry about myself, okay?

Conrad enters, alarmed at the disagreement, and rushes to the pair.

CONRAD  
(to Nikki)  
What's going on? Is he / trying to scare you

NIKKI  
Nothing's / going on

Kane stands, squaring off with Conrad.

KANE  
You settle down.

CONRAD  
(to Nikki)  
He was yelling at you. Why's he / doing that?

NIKKI  
We were just / talking

KANE  
Sit down and cool it, would you?

Pause. Tempers lessen.

CONRAD  
Fine.  
(to Nikki)  
You're sure you're okay?

NIKKI  
Yes, Conrad. Just sit, like dada asked, alright?

Kane sits again. Conrad crosses to Tiffany.

TIFFANY  
Look who's here.

CONRAD  
(sheepish)  
Sorry about the commotion.

TIFFANY

That's fine. I love it when people who don't buy from me come and yell at my customers.

CONRAD

Right . . . say, you're not selling to –  
(to Kane)  
You're not giving Nikki / drugs, are you

KANE

What are you talking about? Nikki, I didn't give you any / meth, did I?

NIKKI

(frightened)

No.

(to Conrad)

Leave dada alone, Conrad.

Pause. Conrad looks suspicious.

TIFFANY

Sounds like you don't need to worry, huh?  
Why don't you / let the subject go?

CONRAD

Okay, sorry . . . that is important to me, though –  
her not / using, I mean

TIFFANY

I get it. The “concerned older brother” look is sweet.

CONRAD

Oh, um, is that / a joke, or . . .

TIFFANY

Why don't you go have some family time?

CONRAD

Yeah, alright.

Conrad, confused and titillated, crosses back to the pair.

NIKKI

Sit with us, Conrad.

Conrad sits.

NIKKI

Dada, do you remember when / Conrad and I

KANE

Just a second, Nikki

(to Conrad)

Nicole says you called / looking for me

CONRAD

I / just called because

KANE

She said / you wanted to talk

NIKKI

But dada, do you remember / when Conrad and I

KANE

Just a minute –

(to Conrad)

She said you called her looking for me. Did / you  
have something specific

CONRAD

I just wanted – we haven't seen each other for /  
a while, so I

KANE

Okay. Just making sure nothing's wrong, or /  
you aren't having trouble

CONRAD

No, nothing like that.

KANE

Good.

(to Nikki)

What were you going to / say?

NIKKI

Huh? Oh, I / was asking if

CONRAD

I mean, it / does seem like a problem

NIKKI

Conrad, dada asked / me what I was saying

CONRAD

It's – don't you think having your sixteen year  
old / here is a problem

KANE

(impatient)

Listen, I don't want / hear a lecture about

CONRAD

It's 3 am and she's here / in a trap house

NIKKI

Be quiet, Conrad!

KANE

Why don't you drop it, alright?

Pause. Conrad fumes.

NIKKI

It's okay, dada . . . do you remember when we'd  
all / play on the trampoline?

KANE

(to Conrad)

She followed me.

NIKKI

Dada?

KANE

It's not like I texted her at 2:30 and / said, "Hey,  
why don't you come join me?"

NIKKI

It's okay that I'm here, right?

(privately)

You're not upset, are / you?

KANE

It's fine. It's just your brother's acting like I'm /  
a cretin because you're here

CONRAD

Forget I said it.

(mutters)

What better place is there for a teenage / girl  
than wherever you're smoking meth?

KANE

You just don't quit, do you?

A tense beat passes.

NIKKI

Don't be mad at Conrad, dada. Conrad,  
remember when we'd / play on the trampoline  
together?

The door opens and Nicole enters. She crosses seductively to Kane, who seems pleased by her arrival. Nikki, by contrast, appears unsettled.

NICOLE

Hi baby. Are you happy to see me?

KANE

Huh? Oh, sure.

The two kiss.

KANE

Listen, I told Tiffany you're covering tonight,  
okay?

TIFFANY

(uncomfortable)

Um, yeah. No problem.

KANE

You know Nikki.

NICOLE

Sure.

(to Nikki)

Hi.

NIKKI  
(wary)

Hello.

KANE

This is my boy, Conrad.

NICOLE

Hi, I'm / Nicole.

CONRAD  
(to Kane)

When we were younger, you wouldn't have let a sixteen year old in the houses you ran, would you? But / it's alright for Nikki to sit here while

KANE

You're really starting to get on my / nerves

NICOLE  
(to Kane)

What's wrong? Is / something the matter?

NIKKI

Conrad, you're making dada / upset

KANE  
(to Nicole, loudly)

My son, who runs a trap house, thinks I'm horrible for / spending time with Nikki

CONRAD

She's sixteen! Do you know what I do when I hear someone's sold Nikki meth? I / reach behind my back and

NIKKI

Shut up, Conrad! No one wants to / hear you.

CONRAD

I put a gun in their fucking mouth!

Kane and Conrad both jump up, squaring off again. Nikki leaps between them, unintimidated. Tiffany comes over, taking Conrad by the arm, and leads him away.

TIFFANY

Why don't you stand over here for a minute,  
okay?

Kane struggles to catch his breath after the exchange.

NICOLE

Are you alright, baby?

NIKKI

Do you want to sit down, dada?

KANE

I'm fine.

(to Tiffany)

Let's visit your stash, okay?

TIFFANY

Sure.

KANE

(to Conrad)

Could you just lay off?

Kane and Tiffany cross to the stash. Nikki crosses to Conrad.

NIKKI

Why are you making dada mad?

CONRAD

I'm trying to take care of you.

Nicole crosses to the pair.

NICOLE

Kane cares about you, Conrad. You don't have /  
to tangle him

CONRAD

Why does everyone think I'm "arguing" with dad?

NICOLE

You two almost had a fistfight one minute / ago

NIKKI

That's our family's business, Nicole.

NICOLE

Nikki, I'm dating Kane. We're / a couple now.

NIKKI

If you care about him, you should help him get clean.

NICOLE

What? Kane's / not interested in that.

NIKKI

He's sick. He shouldn't be around some skank addict, like / you.

NICOLE

Don't call me / a "skank."

NIKKI

I mean it.

NICOLE

I'm Kane's girlfriend! He's with me, Nikki, and he's tired of you following him everywhere.

NIKKI

Fuck you!

Nikki flies at Nicole, knocking her over, and hurls punches at her. Kane rushes back over to the others.

KANE

Hey! You stop that, Nikki!

Conrad grabs Nikki, and, after a few seconds, peels her off Nicole. He restrains her, and tempers slowly cool. Nicole, stunned, painfully stands, massaging the places she was struck, as Kane comforts her. Conrad guides Nikki away from Nicole.

NICOLE

(to Nikki)

What the fuck is wrong with you?!

NIKKI

You don't know anything about me!

KANE

(to Nikki)

What did I just say?

Conrad leads Nikki out of earshot.

CONRAD

What got you so mad?

NIKKI

She acts like she's dada's family. She isn't.

CONRAD

You know dad always has a girl like that.

NIKKI

(insistent)

Not when he was clean. He lived in the Oxford house.

CONRAD

Now he doesn't live anywhere, does he?

NIKKI

(hurt, upset)

You may not care, but I do, Conrad.

Kane has sat down with his pipe in a chair. Nicole sits on the couch by Tiffany.

TIFFANY

(wry)

How's your night going?

NICOLE

I don't believe her. I was trying to be nice, for Kane's sake, but you saw what just happened.

TIFFANY

(nods, detached)

So are you Kane getting serious?

NICOLE

(happy)

Yeah. I mean, I'm still staying with Derrick in Clackamas, but Kane and I are pretty serious.

TIFFANY

Cool.

NICOLE

He used to run this town, you know? When he was / younger.

TIFFANY

Totally ...

(serious)

Listen, I don't mean to be a dick, but when he was talking about you treating tonight, he wasn't joking.

NICOLE

Oh ... right.

TIFFANY

It's a hundred twenty.

NICOLE

Right.

(takes money out of pocket, counts)

Here.

TIFFANY

Thanks. Just let me know if you want more.

Focus shifts to Conrad and Nikki.

CONRAD

(cautious)

Listen, it's a school night, isn't / it?

NIKKI

Conrad, I don't want to talk about / that, okay?

CONRAD

I know, but / I'm worried

NIKKI

I'm helping dada. I already / told you that.

CONRAD

Nikki, mom said Vince gave you an ultimatum. Shouldn't you / take that seriously?

NIKKI

You don't know anything about mommy and dada! I'm the one who loves them. You just came here to make him angry again.

CONRAD

I'm here to protect you, Nikki. Mom says she's worried Vince / is going to kick you out.

NIKKI

I don't care about Vince, Conrad. Just leave me alone.

Nicole stands and approaches Nikki and Conrad.

NICOLE

Nikki.

NIKKI

Yeah?

NICOLE

Nikki, I'm dating your dad now, and you need to start showing me respect, okay?

NIKKI

No, I don't. You're not "dating" dada. You're young and you're around.

Kane stands, upset.

KANE

Hey, you don't talk like that to her! Do you understand?

NIKKI

(angry, looking down)

Yes.

Nicole crosses to Kane.

NICOLE

(softly, to Kane)

Thank you, baby.

Kane sits again.

KANE  
 (to no one)  
 Well, this has been a really fun night.

Nikki kneels by Kane.

NIKKI  
 You're happy to see me, right?

Kane stands, upset, and paces away. Nikki stands, worried.

NIKKI  
 Dada? What's wrong?

She starts to follow him.

KANE  
 "What's wrong"? . . . I came here to get high!  
 What's mysterious about that?  
 (to Conrad)  
 That one wants to fight me! You want to  
 play house -  
 (to Nicole)  
 She wants to "go steady."  
 (to Tiffany)  
 At least you're honest about wanting money.  
 That's fair.

NICOLE  
 You're making Kane mad, Nikki. You should go.

NIKKI  
 (crying)  
 I'm sorry. You're not mad, / are you?

Conrad crosses to Kane, heated.

CONRAD  
 You leave her alone!

KANE  
 Would you stay out of it!

CONRAD  
 I mean it!

Tiffany takes Conrad's arm and leads him away from Kane.

TIFFANY

You're sweet, but you're very disruptive, okay?

CONRAD

Is this funny to you, or something?

TIFFANY

Listen, you're cute, but you're not buying anything.

CONRAD

(emotional)

He'd do this all the while we were growing up - get high, take off for a week. Come home and start fights.

Focus shifts to Nicole, Kane and Nikki.

NICOLE

I think you should ask them to leave, baby.

KANE

(upset)

Do you have any more money?

NICOLE

(surprised, uncomfortable)

Um, I think so.

She looks in her pockets again.

NIKKI

(childlike)

You don't want me to go, do / you?

KANE

No, you're fine. Just don't / cause any arguments, okay?

NICOLE

I want her to go, Kane! / Do you hear?

NIKKI

(to Nicole)  
I wasn't talking to you! I was asking / him.

Nicole shoves money in Kane's hand.

NICOLE  
There!  
(emphatically)  
She beat me up! She called me a "skank"!  
Can you please just tell her to go?

KANE  
(looking away)  
Nikki, maybe you can . . . you know . . .

NIKKI  
(hurt, forlorn)  
Okay . . . I can text you tomorrow, right?

KANE  
(still looking down, impatient)  
Yeah, whatever . . . just text.

Kane crosses to Tiffany with the cash. Conrad crosses to Nikki.

CONRAD  
Are you alright?

NIKKI  
Leave me alone, Conrad!

She turns to the door. He tries to catch her arm, but she breaks away and exits.

Scene 3

Lisa's apartment. A few weeks have passed. Conrad, agitated, stands with Lisa. Both appear to be waiting uncomfortably.

LISA  
Please don't argue with me, Conrad. I told you  
I don't have a choice.

CONRAD  
Mom, you do.

LISA

(looking away)  
It'll be fine. We'll just . . .

CONRAD  
You asked for my help, and I'm saying this  
is a mistake.

LISA  
(frightened, confidential)  
You know Vince. When he / puts his foot down

CONRAD  
She's your daughter!

LISA  
Yeah, I'm aware of that, Conrad.

CONRAD  
Well, what do you think will happen if -

The front door opens and Nikki enters. Worried, she notices the tension in the room.

NIKKI  
Hi . . . is everything okay?

LISA  
(looking away)  
Hi baby . . . everything's / fine

Nikki crosses to Conrad.

NIKKI  
What's happening? Why's / mommy acting  
strange?

LISA  
(to Conrad)  
You said you'd / tell her

CONRAD  
Mom, please don't / do this, okay?

NIKKI  
What are you two talking -  
(to Lisa)  
Mommy!

Lisa crosses and hugs Nikki.

LISA  
Oh, my precious darling. Mommy loves you  
so much.

NIKKI  
(confused)  
I love you, too, / mommy

LISA  
(to Conrad, upset)  
You said you'd / help me with this

Nikki breaks off and turns to him.

NIKKI  
What's she saying?

CONRAD  
(reluctant, upset)  
Mom says you have to move out.

Nikki rushes to Lisa.

NIKKI  
Mommy! No. Please.

Lisa crosses away, crying.

LISA  
I'm sorry, sweetie. It's Vince. You left that  
bag and pipe in the bathroom again.

NIKKI  
I'm sorry! Please.

Lisa holds her again.

LISA  
I love you so much, darling.  
(pleading)  
Tell her, Conrad!

CONRAD

(groans)

Vince says he gave you a warning, but you still left drugs around.

NIKKI

(crying)

Don't do this!

Lisa breaks off, as though helpless.

LISA

We talked about this darling, over and over.

Nikki runs and exits to the hallway.

LISA

Nikki seems so upset.

CONRAD

Mom, please. She's only sixteen.

LISA

I know that . . . but Vince / made his decision.

CONRAD

Forget about Vince. She's only a kid, and she's . . . different.

LISA

Do you think I don't know that?! I'm the one who bought her the clothes she wanted, and called her "Nikki" when she asked.

CONRAD

You're her mother. You need to protect her, not / kick her out.

LISA

(helpless)

I told you what Vince said! You're not here . . . She's gone for days. I sleep with my keys in my underwear so she doesn't take the van.

CONRAD

I'll talk to Vince.

LISA

No – don't say that. He'd / be mad if he heard you.

CONRAD

Mom.

LISA

(pained)

Conrad. I don't want her to go. God sent me Nikki. She's the only one who really loves me and -

Nikki enters, her eyes puffy.

LISA

(looking away)

Hi sweetie. Are you feeling better?

NIKKI

I guess.

(to Conrad)

Do I really have to leave?

Conrad nods, frowning. Lisa holds her arms out, looking down.

LISA

Come here.

(Nikki crosses, they hug)

Mommy loves you. You know that, right?

NIKKI

(confused, crying)

I love you, too.

Lisa breaks off.

LISA

(anxious)

Good. And we'll still call and text every day?

NIKKI

Of course, mommy.

LISA

(crossing away)

Right. It will be fine. We'll still be best friends.  
 (quickly)  
 Conrad, don't you think she should get, um –  
 (to Nikki)  
 If there's stuff you . . .

Nikki looks confused.

CONRAD  
 (reluctant)  
 Mom's asking / you to pack

NIKKI  
 What?

LISA  
 Do you, maybe, want to pack a bag? For the  
 night, or . . .

Nikki, sad, exits to the hallway again.

LISA  
 (hiding worry)  
 Nikki's smart. I'm sure she'll be okay.

CONRAD  
 This is a bad idea.

LISA  
 I ran away when I was sixteen, Conrad. Nikki  
 will be fine.

CONRAD  
 I thought you wanted her to get clean. How is  
 not living here going to help that?

LISA  
 You run a trap house and I'm sober. You're not  
 in any position / to talk to me about that.

CONRAD  
 I'm a piece of shit! I know that. But I'm also the  
 one who took care of her when I was twelve and  
 she was six and you and him would leave us waiting  
 by the window for weeks at a –

LISA  
Not now, Conrad. Please.

Nikki enters with a packed duffle bag.

LISA  
Did you get everything you need?

NIKKI  
I think so.

LISA  
Okay. Give mommy a hug.

Nikki crosses and the two hug. Both cry, with Lisa letting out a brief, pained howl, then quickly breaking off and turning away.

NIKKI  
Are you okay?

LISA  
I'm fine, honey . . . Now you'll call tonight  
so mommy knows you're okay, right?

NIKKI  
Yes.

LISA  
(turns away)  
That's good . . . I love you.

NIKKI  
I love you, too.

Nikki crosses to exit. Conrad crosses intercepting her.

CONRAD  
Do you know where you're staying now? Do / you  
need a place

NIKKI  
Probably with friends, or wherever dada is.

CONRAD  
I want you to stay with me.

NIKKI  
(uncomfortable)

Oh, I mean maybe.

CONRAD

You'd have to stay . . . clean, but / if you do that,  
you can

NIKKI  
(scoffs)

Goodbye, Conrad.

CONRAD

You're not going to be safe. You're only sixteen  
and / you don't have any money

Nikki pushes him aside and crosses to the door.

NIKKI

Leave me alone.

Nikki exits.

Scene 4

Tiffany's trap house. A week or so has passed. Tiffany sits on the couch in her house counting the inventory of her stash. Nikki opens the front door and enters. She looks around expectantly, her face quickly betraying disappointment.

NIKKI

Kane isn't here?

TIFFANY

No. I haven't seen him tonight.

Nikki sighs, dejected, and sits near Tiffany, looking at her phone. A few beats pass.

TIFFANY

He told you he'd be here?

NIKKI

Yeah. I'm so mad. I can tell it's Nicole who's  
behind it.

TIFFANY

I mean, they're dating, right? Maybe she just /

wants some time with him

NIKKI

What?

TIFFANY

I was saying, she probably wants him all to / herself

NIKKI

You don't understand.

Nikki goes back to her phone. Tiffany looks bemused, but softens.

TIFFANY

Why don't you explain it?

NIKKI

(vulnerable)

Really?

TIFFANY

Yes, help me see / what I'm not "understanding"

NIKKI

Well, dada needs my help.

TIFFANY

In what way?

NIKKI

Huh? I mean, his heart is bad, and he used to go to meetings and take care of himself. But his mom died, and since then he's / been using and staying out

TIFFANY

He was always kind of a wild guy, right?

NIKKI

Not always. People talk about, "Oh, Kane Kuhnhausen, meth king," like / he's some movie character

TIFFANY

I just meant / he likes to have his fun

NIKKI



NIKKI

My parents are my best friends! I just want to make them happy.

TIFFANY

Right . . . I understand.

(pause)

Are you still seeing your mom? Conrad said you don't live with her now.

NIKKI

(looks down)

Yes. I visit her on breaks at work, or sometimes I'll text and tell her where I'm staying and she'll come over.

Pause.

TIFFANY

Say, Nikki, have you ever been in the game?

Pause.

NIKKI

(nervous)

Yeah . . . when I was younger. Why?

TIFFANY

I just thought of it, because of what you said about your dad, that / you wished you could

NIKKI

My dad?

TIFFANY

Right. You said you wanted to help him, but he won't let you come around.

NIKKI

What does that mean?

TIFFANY

Well - and this isn't a judgment - you're both kind of homeless now, and he doesn't have any money for drugs. If you were in the game, you

could help him out that way, right?

NIKKI

(nervous)

Do you mean, like, at the Compound?

TIFFANY

Maybe. Girls use Snapchat now, too. They share hashtags like, "In Vancouver now," or, "Yes, a prostitute," or "Yes, a stripper."

Pause, Nikki gives a barely perceptible nod.

NIKKI

When I was twelve, I'd use the money I made to buy food and stuff for my friends at the shelter, or in Tent City.

(looking away)

This one guy who picked me up, took me back to his place, and he hit my head with a pipe, and raped me.

TIFFANY

Oh damn, I'm sorry.

NIKKI

It's okay.

TIFFANY

Was that because . . . you're transgender?

NIKKI

I don't want you to call me that.

TIFFANY

Right. My bad.

NIKKI

I'm a girl.

TIFFANY

Cool . . . Well, damn, if that happened to you, I could see why you might not want to try it again.

NIKKI

(hiding fear)

I was little then.

TIFFANY

Yeah, that makes sense.

Nikki stands and nervously paces.

NIKKI

If I do this, you can't tell anyone, okay?  
Especially Conrad.

TIFFANY

No worries.

(laughs)

Families are the last people you tell things  
to, right?

NIKKI

(emotional)

I tell my mommy everything . . . I mean,  
I guess I wouldn't tell her this.

TIFFANY

Right. I just brought it up because it can be  
a way to make money . . . if you're not  
comfortable, though, you shouldn't do it.

NIKKI

(fighting sadness)

I want to help my dada.

## Scene 5

Man 1's car. Nikki approaches the car of MAN 1, who sits in the driver's seat. In his 30s, he's driven by nervous energy and lust. She gestures to ask whether she should open the door and enter. He nods with impatient frustration, and she enters and sits.

NIKKI

Hi. It's Monty, right?

MAN 1

"Monty"? Like we use our real names. You  
look good, though.

(holds up phone)

This picture's actually real, huh? A lot of girls,  
it's like, "Whose photo was that? Because it's

definitely not yours!”

NIKKI

I know.

MAN 1

(rolls eyes)

You don’t have to pretend I’m funny. If girls really liked me, I wouldn’t be paying you, right?

NIKKI

Oh, um –

MAN 1

You’re fucking good looking, you know? Like, actually. Sometimes I have to lie to myself when I hire a girl, like, “No, she’s pretty. If you look at her just right,” so I don’t feel ripped off. You get me hard just looking at you, though.

NIKKI

Oh, good.

MAN 1

Look how nervous you are! Don’t worry, “Vanessa,” I’m a pervert, but I’m harmless. I promise.

NIKKI

No, I’m fine. I just / meant I’m glad I look like my

MAN 1

(laughs)

You looked confused just then! Did you forget your name is “Vanessa”? . . . Anyway, you probably have a bunch of cocks to get to, so we can get started

NIKKI

Monty – I mean, I know that’s not your name, but / can we talk about . . .

MAN 1

Yeah? What?

NIKKI

When we messaged, you said . . . I mean,

we agreed you'd . . .

MAN 1

Oh, the money!

Man 1 pulls money from his pocket and sets it out for Nikki. She picks it up and quickly counts it, while trying to seem as though she's not doing so, then puts it in her pocket.

MAN 1

Well, you got what you want, so I guess –

(pause)

You must be so disgusted by the men you meet, huh?

NIKKI

(worried)

Huh? No, I'm / not disgusted

MAN 1

I would be! "Here's some money – now suck me off."

(unbuckles belt)

Pigs.

Action indicates Man 1 opening his fly to prepare for oral sex.

MAN 1

I like, you know, *some* teeth, like, for sensation. I'm not a masochist, though, so don't get bite-y.

NIKKI

Right. I won't.

MAN 1

My god, you look young. Don't get me wrong, it's sexy. But some girls are so green, it's like I'm teaching Sex Ed while they're down there.

NIKKI

(nervous)

I'm eighteen.

MAN 1

(laughs)

Of course you are. You're supposed to tell me my cock is massive, too.

NIKKI

Oh, yeah. I mean, / it, um, is

MAN 1

That was a joke. About how guys always – you know what, never mind.

NIKKI

(feigning cool)

Totally.

MAN 1

Well, “Vanessa.” It’s time to go to work.

NIKKI

(hiding nerves and disgust)

Yeah, let’s go.

Man 1 leans back, and gently guides Nikki’s head as she leans down toward his lap to begin performing oral sex.

MAN 1

You must be thinking I’m filthy, filthy, filthy.

## Scene 6

Nicole’s boyfriend’s house. A few weeks have passed. Kane sits in the living room dozing off. Nicole enters in a tight dress and heels.

NICOLE

Aren’t you going to get ready?

KANE

“Ready”?

NICOLE

Kane. We said we were going out, remember?

KANE

Oh, right . . . what if, instead of / doing that, we . . .

NICOLE

Kane.

KANE

Why don't you sit, okay?

Nicole, frustrated, sits by Kane.

NICOLE

I want to bring something up, and I don't want you to argue with me.

KANE

(defensive, exasperated)

Let me guess: it's Nikki.

NICOLE

I said I don't want to / get into an

KANE

Who's arguing? I just don't know what there is to discuss.

NICOLE

She came home at three am last night.

KANE

(softly, guilty)

I know, but for her that's not, um, unusual.

NICOLE

Kane, she's a teenager. She / needs to follow

KANE

Nikki just does / what she wants

NICOLE

Last week, the neighbors called the police, because she was blasting her car stereo at two in the morning in our driveway, and now CPS is looking into Sammy. It's / not alright

KANE

I thought you wanted to have a date tonight.

NICOLE

I do. This is serious, though. You should talk to / her

Kane massages the back of Nicole's head.

KANE

Shh. Let's drop that subject.

NICOLE

Okay . . .

(suddenly anxious)

Derrick's asking questions, you know? It was hard enough convincing him you're "just a customer" when you're here all the time. Now Nikki's practically moved in, too.

KANE

He's a fool.

NICOLE

I know he is. What I'm saying – never mind . . . Are we going out tonight?

KANE

I'd like to, but I'm just tired. Sorry.

NICOLE

Okay, but you were tired two nights ago, and that's why we rescheduled it for / tonight

KANE

We'll go out Friday. It'll be / fun, alright?

NICOLE

Kane.

KANE

What?

NICOLE

The reason I stopped caring about Derrick is that he started spending all his money on coke and partying with sluts.

KANE

I'm not doing that. We're here right now, aren't we?

NICOLE

Yes.

KANE

See?

NICOLE

We won't be for long, though. Derrick hasn't paid his rent for months.

KANE

Idiot.

NICOLE

Laugh all you want. We'll need to find a new place, won't we?

KANE

There's a lot of places. Don't worry. Besides, Nikki's helping with money now.

NICOLE

"Helping."

KANE

(defensive)

What?

NICOLE

Kane, did you talk to her about the stealing yet?

KANE

I don't think that has to be a big deal.

NICOLE

Not "a big deal"? Kane / she's robbing from me

Nikki enters. She crosses to them and kisses Kane's cheek.

NIKKI

Hi dada.

(coldly, to Nicole)

Hi.

(to Kane)

What's going on?

NICOLE

Kane, if we're all here . . . can you / please do what I just

NIKKI

What's she / talking about

KANE

Let's just / you know, all settle down

NICOLE

(upset)

Fine. I guess I'll / just do it then

NIKKI

What are you getting angry / about

NICOLE

Nikki, the police brought you home last weekend.

NIKKI

Yeah, it's no big deal. They did a sweep at the compound, but / it's not even on my record

NICOLE

What? How is that not / a "big deal"

NIKKI

Oh my god! I wasn't arrested. They / just brought me back here

KANE

Hey! Be respectful.

Nikki looks down, upset. Nicole tries to calm herself.

NICOLE

Nikki, we're being investigated by CPS now about Sammy. It's important / that things are okay here

NIKKI

I know. God.

KANE

See? She understands. Let's / just drop it

NICOLE  
(incredulous)

Really?

NIKKI  
Dada, why are we / wasting time on this

NICOLE  
Nikki, you steal from my purse. Don't deny it.  
The stereo from this house disappeared, / along  
with who knows what else

NIKKI  
(to Kane, scared)  
I'm sorry, dada.

NICOLE  
I'm the one talking to you, Nikki!

NIKKI  
(to Kane)  
Are you mad at me?

KANE  
(to Nicole)  
See? She's / sorry, alright

NICOLE  
We haven't / even talked about everything

KANE  
What?  
(to Nikki)  
You're sorry, aren't / you?

NICOLE  
Kane, we're the adults. We're supposed to / be  
making rules

NIKKI  
Bitch, you're twenty-one! Stop acting like  
you're my mama.

KANE  
Hey! Don't speak to -

Nicole, furious and humiliated, crosses away to grab her bag and jacket.

KANE

Nicole. Come on, / don't

NICOLE

This was supposed to our date night.

Kane stands and crosses to her.

KANE

Come sit down again. Nikki's back, right?  
That means there's, / you know . . .

NICOLE

Did you hear how she just / talked to me

KANE

She's, you know, a teenager. Don't / get upset

Nicole crosses to the door.

NICOLE

I'm going to my aunt's to get Sammy. Goodbye.

Nicole exits. Kane crosses to Nikki. Both sit on the couch.

KANE

How did your evening go?

NIKKI

(uncomfortable)

It was fine.

KANE

Right.

Pause. Nikki's confused, then realizes what Kane's asking, digs in her purse, pulls out a small plastic bag and hands it to him. He inspects it, and nods, pulling out a pipe and filling it with meth from the bag.

KANE

Good work.

NIKKI

Dada, / I . . .

KANE

You can have some, too.

Nikki reaches for a pipe, then stops.

NIKKI

(cautiously)

Dada?

KANE

Nikki, I really hope you're not going to bring up the topic I / think you are

NIKKI

I mean, I don't have to.

KANE

Good. I don't tell you how to live your life, do I?

NIKKI

No.

KANE

Or Conrad, or your / mom

NIKKI

I know.

KANE

If you want to smoke – there's a pipe.

NIKKI

Okay.

She reaches for the pipe, then pulls back.

NIKKI

(summoning courage)

Dada, when you were clean, you were on the front on the newspaper. You were helping people in meetings, and at the drug court. I still have that article.

KANE

(restraining self)

Nikki, didn't I ask you fifteen seconds ago  
not / to talk to me about this

NIKKI  
(nervous)

I know when grandma died it made you sad,  
but / you don't have to use

Kane stands, boiling over.

KANE

Dammit, Nikki!

NIKKI

Dada, wait. / Please

KANE

Tell me, do I bring up every fucking thing you  
don't want to think about each time we talk?!

NIKKI  
(looking away)

No.

KANE

"How's getting kicked out by your mom?!"  
"How's dropping out of school?!" "How's  
having a cock between your legs?!"

NIKKI  
(upset, pleading)

Dada.

KANE

No! I don't!

Kane sits again, still fuming.

KANE  
(annoyed)

Are you going to smoke, or what?

Kane repacks his pipe and smokes again.

NIKKI

I don't want to fight, dada.

KANE

Well, that's good.

(muttering)

It seems like fighting me is your brother's one joy in life.

NIKKI

(firmly)

Conrad loves you, too, dada.

KANE

You're deluded. His mind is one long list of my failings as a –

(pause, rueful)

He thinks I went to jail and ran houses so I could be an outlaw, or something. If hating myself and feeling like shit made me “an outlaw,” then he was dead on.

NIKKI

Don't say that, dada.

KANE

It's true.

Kane lights his pipe and smokes.

NIKKI

When you were in prison last time, it broke my heart, dada. I just wanted to be close to you and make you love me.

KANE

(guilty, uncomfortable)

Oh, well, um . . .

NIKKI

(childlike)

You could change, dada. You / could go back to meetings

KANE

What?!

NIKKI

If we were both clean, you'd be healthier,  
and / we could be happy

Kane stands, upset.

KANE

I want you to forget the word "clean" when  
it comes to me, Nikki?! Do you understand?

NIKKI

Yes, dada. I'm sorry.

KANE

Why do you think you're invited to stay here?  
(holds up drugs and pipe)  
You like "taking care of" me? This is taking care  
of me.

NIKKI

(crying)

Please don't say that, dada.

KANE

You can leave now. I mean it.

NIKKI

(shakes head)

I don't want to leave, dada.

KANE

(calming down)

Okay . . . You can stay and have some, if you  
want. Otherwise, I'm done talking tonight.

Nikki picks up a pipe, packs it with drugs and smokes it.

Scene 7

Tiffany's trap house. A few days have passed. Conrad and Tiffany sit on the couch  
passionately kissing, before the former breaks off, looking pensive.

TIFFANY

Uh-oh. You must be thinking.

CONRAD

What does that mean?

TIFFANY

Well, based on my experience, it means you're about to share some sad memory about Nikki or / your parents

Conrad stands, hurt.

CONRAD

Why are you making fun of me?

TIFFANY

I'm not. Here, sit back down.

Conrad sits, warily. Tiffany strokes his hair.

CONRAD

I actually was thinking about something that happened when Nikki was / little

TIFFANY

(hiding annoyance)

Didn't I just say . . .

CONRAD

Yeah, I guess.

(vulnerable)

Can I share it / with you

TIFFANY

Alright, if you want.

CONRAD

Are you sure? You sound / a little . . .

TIFFANY

It's fine.

CONRAD

(uncertain)

Okay . . . well, do you remember I told you when –

Tiffany loads her pipe and goes to smoke.

TIFFANY

What? Why'd you stop?

CONRAD

I just asked you if I could / share about

TIFFANY

It's fine. I'm listening. I just feel like smoking.  
Go ahead.

Tiffany smokes.

CONRAD

Okay. Well, I was thinking about when Nikki was eleven. We thought dad was clean, so she was living with him, and his girlfriend. She's the one who would have Nikki break into dad's room to get his drugs, and that's when she first used, you know? When I remembered that, I thought, "Fuck, why didn't we know?" If we'd known, we could have / moved her out

TIFFANY

(feigning listening)

Right. Totally.

CONRAD

What?

TIFFANY

Huh? I said / I agreed

CONRAD

You weren't even listening, were you?

TIFFANY

Of course, I was.

CONRAD

Really? Then what / was I

TIFFANY

(playful)

You're going to ask me what you were saying.

CONRAD

(insistent)

Yes. What / was I saying

TIFFANY

That's easy.

She runs her hands through his hair.

TIFFANY

You were saying –

She drapes her arms around his neck and begins kissing him. He reciprocates. As they continue, Nikki emerges from the hallway.

NIKKI

Shoot, I planned to wake up an hour ago. I'm –  
(confused)

Conrad?

CONRAD

(to Tiffany, worried)

What's she doing here?

(to Nikki)

Why / were you sleeping here

TIFFANY

She asked if she could take a nap, Conrad.  
Calm down.

CONRAD

“A nap”?

NIKKI

Were you two kissing?

TIFFANY

(to Conrad, laughs)

We're busted.

CONRAD

(to Tiffany)

You're not selling to her, are you?

NIKKI

Knock it off, Conrad.

Conrad stands, upset.

TIFFANY  
(as though to a child)  
You can sit back down.

CONRAD  
You didn't answer my question.

TIFFANY  
You need to have money to buy drugs, right?  
Well –  
(to Nikki)  
No offense –  
(to Conrad)  
Nikki doesn't have money, does she? ...  
And since I'm not running a charity ...

CONRAD  
What if she comes here with my dad and Nicole?

NIKKI  
Leave me alone, Conrad!

CONRAD  
(to Tiffany)  
Have you given her drugs then?

TIFFANY  
(smiling)  
Such a good older brother.

NIKKI  
It makes dada angry when you do this, Conrad.

CONRAD  
"Makes dada angry"? Why do you want to  
use the same drug that stole our parents  
from us, Nikki?

Conrad's phone dings. He checks it and grumbles.

CONRAD  
I need to run.

TIFFANY  
Have you got some drug dealer business?

Pause. Conrad frowns.

CONRAD  
(to Tiffany)  
I mean it. Don't give her anything.

TIFFANY  
(smiling, placating)  
I promise.

Conrad crosses to Nikki and kisses her goodbye. She reacts in annoyance. He exits. Nikki crosses to Tiffany, and gives her some money. Tiffany goes to her stash.

NIKKI  
Are you dating Conrad?

Tiffany crosses back.

TIFFANY  
We're friends.

NIKKI  
You haven't told him about . . .

TIFFANY  
(momentarily confused)  
Oh, no . . . he's a little . . . prudish. I wouldn't /  
want him to worry

NIKKI  
You can't tell him! Or my mom.

TIFFANY  
It's okay Nikki.

NIKKI  
I'm serious.  
(emotional, ashamed)  
They can't know.

TIFFANY  
(slightly annoyed)  
I promise. Okay?

Nikki nods. She hands her the drugs.

TIFFANY

How's your dad? I heard their losing that place.

NIKKI

Yeah, Nicole's boyfriend stopped paying rent.

TIFFANY

I'm sorry. I bet I'll be hearing from Kane soon about it. He's good at walking between the raindrops, right?

NIKKI

What does that mean?

TIFFANY

It means he knows how to arrange things the way he likes them. Like those drugs. Did he ask you to bring them to him?

NIKKI

No.

TIFFANY

See? Cats always land on their feet.

NIKKI

(objecting)

Dada's sick.

TIFFANY

Sure. And he's one of my favorite customers. I'm just saying, I expect to be seeing more of him soon.

Nikki stares for a beat, confused, then crosses and exits.

## Scene 8

Lisa's apartment. A few weeks have passed. Lisa paces, fretting. A knock sounds and she crosses anxiously and opens the door. She ushers Nikki in, closing the door quickly.

LISA

Hi sweetie. No one saw you, did they?

NIKKI

(confused)

I don't think so, mommy.

LISA

That's good.

(kisses her)

I'm glad you're here, baby. I'm just a little worried is all, because of Vince.

NIKKI

(nervous)

Is he here?

LISA

(upset)

No. That jerk – do you know what he did last night?

NIKKI

No mommy, what?

LISA

We were at the recovery hall, and this tramp Sandy says to him, "You're still with this bitch," meaning me, and he just laughs.

NIKKI

That's awful.

LISA

He just laughs. So I say, "You're going to stand there and let her call me a bitch? Your fucking wife?"

NIKKI

What did he say?

LISA

(dumb guy voice)

"Come on! She was joking."

NIKKI

Fuck him!

LISA

(nervous)

You probably shouldn't say that, sweetie

... Anyway, I say, "Fine! You can stay around here and joke with that bitch! I'm going home," and I left. Does he call or text? No. He didn't come home all night.

NIKKI

I'm sorry, mommy.

LISA

I was here alone. It spun me out. Well, he finally calls me at ten thirty -  
(dumb voice again)  
"I'll be home at five." Screw you, dude!

NIKKI

I'm glad you called me.

LISA

Me, too, sweetie.

NIKKI

Just a second.

Nikki takes out her phone and types for a beat or two and smiles.

NIKKI

Check your Facebook, mommy.

Lisa takes out her phone, opens an app, and beams.

LISA

"Everyone listen up: I love my mommy more than anything in the world."  
(eyes welling)  
Darling, thank you.

Lisa and Nikki hug.

NIKKI

It's true.

LISA

How have you been?

NIKKI

(looks away)

Oh, I've been fine . . . I'm mostly helping dada,  
you know?

LISA  
Right. Is he still with Nicole?

NIKKI  
Yes, I can't stand her.

LISA  
Is her son staying with them?

NIKKI  
For now. CPS isn't blind, though, and she's  
an addict, so . . .

LISA  
(scoffs)  
Right . . . how's your dad's heart?

NIKKI  
(worried)  
Not great. He won't do anything he's supposed  
to, though, and he gets angry when I talk to him  
about it.

LISA  
Well, he's lucky you care about him.

NIKKI  
I guess.

LISA  
Is he cheating on Nicole?

NIKKI  
What?

LISA  
I bet his heart doesn't stop / him from that

NIKKI  
Mommy.

LISA  
He was always running around when we were /

together

NIKKI

Mommy, you're / not supposed to

LISA

(nervous, looking away)

I know. I shouldn't talk bad about your dad.

Pause.

NIKKI

(childlike)

Did you talk to Vince, mommy?

LISA

About what, baby?

NIKKI

About me moving back in . . . to my old room?

LISA

Oh . . . no, I'm sorry. You're still using,  
right, darling?

(nervous)

Vince was really clear about / that

NIKKI

(looking down, ashamed)

I understand.

LISA

You know if it was up to me, I wouldn't care,  
but Vince – he gets really serious about / his  
sobriety

NIKKI

(upset)

It's fine.

LISA

Are you doing okay now? Do you need any  
money?

NIKKI

(quiet, ashamed)

No. I don't.

LISA

Really? Are you sure?

Nikki crosses away.

NIKKI

I'm sorry Vince is being mean.

LISA

I'm sick of it, you know?

(checks phone, frightened)

Oh, it's getting close to five.

NIKKI

(checks phone, confused)

It's three thirty.

LISA

I don't want him to come home and / find you here

NIKKI

Okay.

Lisa, distracted, crosses to front door. Nikki follows.

LISA

You know mommy loves you more than anything, right honey?

NIKKI

(sad)

Yes, mommy.

LISA

(kisses Nikki)

Be safe, darling.

(childlike)

Text me tonight before work, okay?

NIKKI

I will.

LISA

Bye, sweetie.

Nikki exits.

Scene 9

Man 2's car. A few weeks have passed. Nikki sits in the passenger seat next to MAN 2. In his mid-20s, the latter seems adrenalized and aggressive, and speaks with an unconscious intensity.

MAN 2

I could pretend like we're negotiating how things will go, but, honestly, we both know I'm paying, right?

(laughs)

This isn't, like, couple's therapy, you know?

NIKKI

(laughs, hiding discomfort)

Right.

MAN 2

I mean, I'm not "hoping to get lucky" tonight.

(laughs)

So anyway, have you been doing this for a while?

NIKKI

Yeah, a while.

MAN 2

(annoyed)

I wasn't asking that to "get to know you." I – never mind.

NIKKI

Are you mad?

MAN 2

(exasperated)

I hired you, right? . . . I was trying to find out if you're experienced?

NIKKI

(bluffing)

Oh, yeah. I'm experienced.

MAN 2

(skeptical)

Alright.

Man 2 reaches into his backseat and pulls out a small case, which he opens, excited.

MAN 2

Fuck yeah!

He pulls out drugs and works, which he starts preparing.

MAN 2

(not looking at her)

Do you like meth?

NIKKI

(conflicted, but yearning)

Yeah. I smoke it, like, every day.

MAN 2

“Smoking.” Pssh. I mean, okay, I used to smoke. But once I started shooting – it’s all I do now.

(businesslike)

So this is the plan. I’m going to shoot this eight ball, let it kick in a little, and then you can do what we talked about.

NIKKI

Yeah, sounds good.

MAN 2

(annoyed, sardonic)

I’m glad you approve.

Man 2 ties off his arm, and prepares to inject.

MAN 2

(annoyed, guilty)

Look, I’m not going to share any of this with you.

NIKKI

(hiding disappointment)

That’s cool.

MAN 2

I did that a couple of times, and the whole while I'm thinking: I'm paying for drugs. I'm paying the prostitute, and I'm giving the drugs I paid for to the fucking - you get it. Anyway, if you want, I can sell you some, or we can work out a trade, although, to be honest, these are some pretty fucking good drugs, so they're expensive.

NIKKI

It's okay. I'm good.

MAN 2

Cool.

(excited)

I'm going to do this now, so just, like, sit there, right?

Man 2 injects the eight ball, and sits back, experiencing a euphoric rush.

MAN 2

(indicating groin)

Okay . . . you can start now.

Action indicates Nikki opening Man 2's pants, and beginning to give him a hand job.

NIKKI

(performing pleasure)

Is that good?

MAN 2

(annoyed)

No.

(guides her hand with his)

Like this . . . and this.

NIKKI

(rattled)

Right . . . is this better?

MAN 2

Yeah . . . that's pretty good.

(pause)

Let me see your pussy.

NIKKI

(shocked)

What? . . No.

MAN 2

Yeah, come on. It'll be good. Just let me see it.

NIKKI

No. A hand job. Fifty dollars. We agreed.

MAN 2

We'll make it seventy five! Just fucking –

Man 2 grabs at Nikki's groin. She backs against the door.

NIKKI

(frightened)

You can keep the money, okay? I'll just leave.

MAN 2

What?! You're not "leaving"!

Nikki struggles, trying to open the door. Man 2 grabs at her groin, starting back, shocked.

MAN 2

What the fuck?!

Nikki opens the door. Man 2 pulls a gun from under his seat.

MAN 2

You fucking freak!

He shoots Nikki several times. She rolls out of the door.

NIKKI

No!

MAN 2

Fucking die!

He fires several more times. She stands and runs to the exit.

NIKKI

Help! Help!

Nikki exits.

Scene 10

Tiffany's trap house. Four or five days have passed. The front door opens, and Nikki bounds in. Her crop top reveals bandages where she was shot, but she's healthy and buoyant. Conrad follows a beat or two behind, looking concerned.

CONRAD

Nikki, be careful.

NIKKI

"Be careful"?

CONRAD

Yes. You were just released from the hospital.

NIKKI

I know I was. They told me, "Nikki, we're letting you go, because your test results show that you're bulletproof!" Remember?

CONRAD

(rolls eyes)

I just mean you should take it easy. Are you in any pain?

Nikki jumps up and down in triumph as she answers.

NIKKI

Are people who are shot six times usually in pain? I guess I'm different, because I'm immortal!

Conrad shakes his head, crosses to a chair and sits. Nikki follows and sits opposite.

CONRAD

Mom was worried to death, you know?

NIKKI

(guilty)

I know.

(laughs)

When she came to the hospital, she said she expected to see me all hooked up to machines unconscious, and instead I was like, "What's up? You got a cigarette?"

Conrad laughs, then frowns again.

CONRAD

Who did this to you?

NIKKI

(looking away)

I told you already.

CONRAD

(skeptical)

Someone you were dating?

NIKKI

Yeah, like I said.

CONRAD

Why would someone you were dating  
shoot you six times?

NIKKI

(angry, emotional)

Because he was a fucking druggie, or an asshole!  
I don't know. If I thought he was going to shoot  
me, I / wouldn't have gone out with him

CONRAD

Then what's his name?!

NIKKI

(looking away)

I'm not telling you. If I do, you and mommy  
will go kill him and go to jail forever, and  
I won't see you again.

Pause. Conrad cools off.

CONRAD

Tiffany said you, dad and Nicole are basically  
living here now. Is that true?

NIKKI

Pretty much.

CONRAD

Dad's got you staying in a trap house?

NIKKI

I'm staying with dada, Conrad . . . and when that loser Derrick we were staying with got evicted, dada got Tiffany to invite us here. She likes having people around.

CONRAD

How heartwarming.

NIKKI

Whatever. You just like to judge.

Pause.

CONRAD

Do you think they're around now?

NIKKI

I texted dada earlier and he said he was out. I don't care where stupid Nicole is.

CONRAD

(feigning casualness)

How about Tiffany? . . . Do you know if / she's around

NIKKI

(mock Conrad)

"How about Tiffany? I'd really like to have sex with / Tiffany"

CONRAD

That's not what I / said

NIKKI

"I hate everyone who has anything to do with meth, including myself, but I really like / Tiffany"

Conrad stands, annoyed.

CONRAD

Forget I asked.

He paces.

NIKKI

Don't be mad . . . I was just joking.

CONRAD  
(guarded)

I don't hate dad . . . when we were young,  
I just had to take care of us, and protect you  
from him a lot, and it was because of all the  
drugs that were always around.

NIKKI  
(defensive)

What do you mean, "protect me from him?"

CONRAD  
(surprised)

He would get mad. Like, when you would talk  
back, or not listen. You don't remember that?  
It was / pretty intense

NIKKI  
Everyone gets mad, Conrad.

CONRAD  
I know everyone gets mad, Nikki. Do you  
remember when he tried to break down  
your door and I defended us with an axe?

Pause. Nikki looks frightened for an instant, then returns to disbelief.

NIKKI  
No.

CONRAD  
A lot things like that happened, Nikki. There  
were guns, too, and / some serious fights

NIKKI  
Dada wasn't a monster, Conrad.

CONRAD  
I'm not saying he was a monster. Things  
happened when you were little, though, that  
probably scared you, and / was usually when  
people were using

Tiffany enters.

TIFFANY

(smiling)

Look who's home . . . Did you let this guy give you a ride?

CONRAD

Hey. I wondered if you were here.

TIFFANY

It's my house isn't it?

CONRAD

I guess, if you feel like a trap house is "your house."

TIFFANY

Oh, is working from home, smoking all day, and following my customer's lives like a soap opera supposed to fill me with misery? I must be doing it wrong.

(faux embarrassed)

Oops, I probably shouldn't have said the soap opera part out loud.

CONRAD

I'm glad we're entertaining to you.

TIFFANY

(flirty)

I said "customers." You're just a pesky trespasser.

CONRAD

You said living in your parents' house is difficult for you now, because of all the memories from when you were little.

TIFFANY

(annoyed)

Yes, I did. Thanks for bringing that up.

CONRAD

When I twelve, and our parents were away, tweakers would bang on our door in the middle of the night. I'd have to chase them / away

NIKKI

Knock it off, Conrad! No one wants to hear about that.

TIFFANY

(wryly)

If only I had some popcorn.

CONRAD

Har har.

NIKKI

(jumps up, suddenly)

I feel like everything's new now. Like I've got a second chance.

TIFFANY

Cool. That's great.

CONRAD

What do you want to do?

NIKKI

What do you mean?

CONRAD

With your second chance? What do you want to do differently?

NIKKI

(emotional)

I don't want to do anything differently. I want to help dada and mommy.

CONRAD

(serious, quiet)

If you wanted to start somewhere else, like, if you want to go someplace that feels more safe, you can do that. I'll / help you

NIKKI

(terrified)

No! . . . Why are you saying that?

CONRAD

Okay, I was just offering, / in case

NIKKI

I'm the one who kept the family together when you were in JDH, Conrad! When dada was in prison, or mommy and I were homeless. You're the one who just criticizes or starts arguments! I don't need that now, when we're trying to get dada / better

CONRAD

Why do you think dad's sick, Nikki?! It's because he did so many fucking drugs his heart doesn't work!

Nikki shoves Conrad and storms to the front door.

NIKKI

You can keep your help!

Nikki exits.

Scene 11

Tiffany's trap house. Three or four weeks have passed. Tiffany sits on the couch, drinking coffee. The place is disheveled, as usual, and there are no decorations or presents to indicate it's Christmas morning. Kane enters and sits opposite her.

TIFFANY

Looks like someone's up. How are you?

KANE

(ironic)

Just delightful . . . What about you? Did the tweakers give you a hard time last night?

TIFFANY

They tried, but I don't take hard times. Only cash.

Kane laughs.

TIFFANY

Nikki seems excited for today, huh?

KANE

(groans)

Very much so.

TIFFANY  
(ironic)

Is Kane not in the Christmas spirit?

KANE

Sure. Who wouldn't want to spend  
Christmas morning with his ex-wife?

(probing)

I heard Conrad might be stopping by, as well.

TIFFANY  
(detached)

Christmas is for families, right?

KANE

So they say . . . I guess you're playing that  
card close to the vest, huh?

TIFFANY

It's easier that way.

Kane chuckles, impressed, then grows agitated.

KANE

I remember, when I got out of prison,  
the first time, to see my mom on the  
holidays, I had to spend time with my  
stepfather, Arthur, who was the son of a  
bitch who sent me there in the first place.

TIFFANY

Oh, damn. How was that?

KANE

It was fucking tense is how it was. "Say  
Kane, could you pass me the potatoes?"  
"Sure, I could do that, or I could slit your  
throat here at the table with this carving  
knife. Let me weigh my options."

Nikki enters, excited, and kisses Kane.

NIKKI

Hi dada! Merry Christmas!

KANE  
(hiding annoyance)  
Good morning, honey.

NIKKI  
You remember Mommy's coming today, right?

KANE  
(weary)  
Yes, I remember, / darling

NIKKI  
Dada. I want this to be a special day for our family. You said you'd be nice to her.

KANE  
(annoyed)  
Everything will be nice, Nikki.

NIKKI  
Good.  
(to Tiffany)  
Conrad's coming, too, you know?

TIFFANY  
I just heard.

NIKKI  
(to Kane)  
Tiffany's pretending not to care, dada.

KANE  
Are you sure she's pretending?

NIKKI  
About Conrad?  
(to Tiffany)  
I thought / you and him liked each other

TIFFANY  
Conrad's always welcome.

NIKKI  
(confused)  
Oh, okay.  
(suddenly, excited)

Do we have any cocoa? For when people come?

TIFFANY

No. Sorry, darling. I don't get a lot of requests for cocoa, so we don't really keep that stocked.

NIKKI

(disappointed)

Okay.

KANE

Do you have a few bucks? You could run to the convenience store, and while you're there you could get me some cigarettes.

NIKKI

I don't want to be gone when people come, dada.  
(quickly)  
I'll have money for you later, though.

Nicole enters looking unkempt and distractedly kisses Kane.

TIFFANY

(to Nicole)

Late night?

NICOLE

I feel awful.

NIKKI

You remember mommy's coming today, right?

NICOLE

What?

KANE

(annoyed)

I told you about that.

NICOLE

No you didn't. You said she was coming on /  
Christmas

NIKKI

(upset)

Dada! We / agreed

KANE  
(to Nicole)  
It "is" / Christmas

NICOLE  
(annoyed)  
Shit.  
(muttering)  
Well, this morning keeps / getting worse

KANE  
(to Nicole, private)  
I explained it. Nikki wants to see her mom, but  
Vince won't let her in / the apartment

NICOLE  
I know.

Kane kisses Nicole.

KANE  
It'll be a short visit.

NIKKI  
Not that short.

Nicole crosses and sits, sulking.

NICOLE  
It's supposed to be "our" first Christmas, and  
Sammy's not even here, because CPS took him.

Pause. Kane fidgets guiltily. After a beat, the front door opens and Conrad enters. He crosses to the others.

CONRAD  
Merry Christmas.

Nikki crosses and kisses him.

NIKKI  
Merry Christmas.  
(privately)  
Try not to make dada angry.

CONRAD

(private)

I don't make dad angry.

NIKKI

(private)

Just be nice.

(to the group)

Look, Conrad's here.

KANE

(defensive)

Are you going to complain that we don't have any presents?

CONRAD

No. Why / would I do that

KANE

You're always complaining about / something, aren't you

NIKKI

Dada, Conrad just got / here

CONRAD

I don't "always" / complain

KANE

Sure.

(to Nicole)

The first thing he does, anytime he's / around me is start complaining

CONRAD

(upset)

That's not true!

(to Nicole)

I / don't complain all the time

Nikki jumps in front of her brother.

NIKKI

Conrad.

CONRAD

(still upset)  
 Huh?  
 (to Nicole)  
 It's not true. I'm / telling you, I don't

NIKKI  
 Conrad, Conrad.

She maneuvers him over to Tiffany.

NIKKI  
 Look, Tiffany's here.

Conrad and Tiffany share a chilly glance.

TIFFANY  
 Merry Christmas.

CONRAD  
 Hello.

NIKKI  
 Is something wrong?  
 (to Tiffany)  
 I thought you / and Conrad

CONRAD  
 Tiffany and I have different ideas about / what  
 we . . .

TIFFANY  
 It's fine.  
 (to Nikki)  
 Enjoy your holiday with your family.

Nikki's phone pings, and she checks it, beaming.

NIKKI  
 Mommy will be here soon!

CONRAD  
 (agitated)  
 Oh, good

Tiffany crosses to Kane and Nicole.

NIKKI

(confused)

Are you and Tiffany not / together

CONRAD

We're fine. I don't want to talk about / it

NIKKI

Okay. It seemed like you really, you know / liked  
each other

CONRAD

I wanted – it doesn't matter.

(pause, serious)

How are you feeling? Like, where you were  
shot?

NIKKI

What? Oh, I barely even feel / bad any more

CONRAD

Mom said you told her you were afraid, and  
that you've been getting shakes and / are afraid  
a lot

NIKKI

(looking away)

I'm fine. That's only when something . . .  
reminds me of it happening.

CONRAD

What would remind you of getting shot six times?

NIKKI

I don't know. Why are you asking me this  
when we're all here for Christmas, Conrad?

Nikki crosses toward the others, but Conrad catches her arm, stopping her.

CONRAD

I'm asking because / I'm worried about you

NIKKI

Let me / go

KANE

(to Conrad)  
Hey, why are you / bothering her?

CONRAD  
(to Nikki, privately)  
You told mom you were / using more.

Nikki breaks free, upset.

NIKKI  
Stop pestering me!

CONRAD  
Mom's scared / for you

KANE  
You heard her! Stop causing a / problem

CONRAD  
No!  
(to Nikki)  
I don't think you've been telling the truth.  
(to Tiffany)  
She told our mom she's been using more ever  
since she was shot. I thought that was / "strange"

Nikki shoves Conrad.

NIKKI  
Be quiet!

CONRAD  
(to Tiffany)  
I said, I thought that seemed strange, since you  
said you never see Nikki using or high.

Tiffany takes his hand, seductively.

TIFFANY  
I confess . . . I'm not tracking Nikki's every action.

Pause. Conrad looks briefly confounded, then recovers.

CONRAD  
Are you giving her meth?

TIFFANY

Let's make it a nice day, okay? Your mom's coming.

CONRAD

Tiffany . . . you didn't answer my question. Is Nikki /  
using meth here

Nicole stands, exasperated.

NICOLE

Oh my god! Are you kidding?

(points to Nikki)

She's an addict -

(points to Tiffany)

And she's a dealer . . . I mean, Jesus Christ.

Pause. Conrad stares, heartbroken, at Tiffany for a beat.

CONRAD

You lied to me all this time?

TIFFANY

(slightly pitying)

I just knew it was important to you to believe  
it wasn't happening.

CONRAD

(to Kane, furious)

You moved her in here?! She's sixteen!

KANE

That's none of your / fucking business

CONRAD

Shut up!

(to everyone)

Can we stop pretending this isn't happening,  
please?

TIFFANY

(to Conrad, private)

If you're going to scream at all my customers,  
I might have to ask / you to go

CONRAD

(to Tiffany, in disbelief)

This is why you didn't want to / be together

TIFFANY

Do you want to talk in back? We can cool down.

CONRAD

I asked you to get clean with me, and / and start fresh/

TIFFANY

We both run trap houses, Conrad. Asking me if I / "want to get clean"

CONRAD

(hurt)

Never mind.

(to Kane)

You're her father. Doesn't that mean anything to you?

KANE

You better shut your mouth!

A knock sounds at the door. All look anxious.

NIKKI

It's mommy.

Nikki, both frightened and excited, crosses and opens the door. Lisa enters, holding a bag of packages. Nikki kisses her.

NIKKI

(to the group)

It's mommy everyone.

(to Lisa)

Merry Christmas mommy.

LISA

Merry Christmas, baby.

CONRAD

(to Kane)

Do you want to tell her, too?

KANE

(angry, cold)

I already warned you.

Nikki crosses between them.

NIKKI

Stop it!

(to Conrad)

Knock it off, or else.

Lisa crosses to Nikki.

LISA

(privately, nervous)

What's happening, darling?

NIKKI

(pointed)

Conrad's being dumb, and / making dada upset

CONRAD

(angry, to Lisa)

Dad's got Nikki / living here and

KANE

(furious)

That's it! You're / gonna shut your lip

NIKKI

Just leave, Conrad! Get out!

Conrad crosses to Kane, standing over him.

CONRAD

(emotional)

You fucked my life up, don't fuck hers up, too.

KANE

You want Conrad to go, right, Nikki?

Nikki, crying, nods. Conrad, embarrassed and angry crosses to Lisa, and kisses her head.

CONRAD

Goodbye.

He crosses and exits, slamming the door. Nikki crosses to Lisa, and points to a chair.

NIKKI

Sit here, mommy.

Lisa, confused and slightly agitated, sits, and Nikki sits on her lap.

LISA

What was Conrad saying?

KANE

He was talking shit about me, like he always /  
does

LISA

Why did you ask him to leave, honey?

NIKKI

(anxious)

I'm so happy you're here, mommy!

(to everyone)

Aren't you glad mommy's here?

All nod, slightly perplexed.

LISA

(to Nikki)

How have you been, sweetie?

NIKKI

(looks away)

I'm okay, mommy.

LISA

Oh, good. Have you been seeing your friends?

NIKKI

Not really. They're in school or working most  
of the time, you know?

LISA

You could think about getting a job, too.

You're old enough now, aren't you?

KANE

Why are you pressuring her? She's fine,  
aren't you, Nikki?

NIKKI

I'm just glad we're all / here together

LISA

Well, I hope you're fine, sweetie.

KANE

What do you mean, "hope"? Why / wouldn't  
she be?

LISA

Kane.

NIKKI

Mommy, don't worry / about me

LISA

I'm not worried. You've just shared some things /  
with me lately

NIKKI

I know.

KANE

Lisa.

NIKKI

It's okay, dada.

LISA

(worried)

And I see how / anxious you look

KANE

Are you going to turn today into another one  
of / obsessions

LISA

This isn't about us. I'm / asking Nikki how she's  
feeling

KANE

(to Nicole)

Every time we were together, she'd / go on and  
on about

LISA

(exasperated)

I said we you were cheating, and you were, Kane!  
That wasn't about "me" being / "obsessed," it was  
you fucking around

NIKKI

Mommy, dada, it's / Christmas

KANE

(to Lisa)

Just drop it, would / you

LISA

Look how sad and upset she is. Something's  
going / on with her

KANE

If she was upset, she'd / say, alright?

NIKKI

Mommy, I'm fine. Don't / worry, okay?

LISA

Darling, I / can't pretend I'm blind

KANE

See? She just / just said she's fine

Lisa stands.

LISA

You're honestly going to sit there and say  
you haven't noticed -

(to Nikki)

Mommy loves you, sweetie. I just have to say /  
this

KANE

Sit back down.

LISA

No. Something's going on. She can't look people  
in the eye anymore. She's always lying.

NICOLE

Lisa, we took her in, didn't we? I think we'd /  
know if something was wrong

Nikki cries.

KANE

It's okay. Your mom's just worried.

Lisa hugs Nikki. She sits back down, and Nikki sits on her lap again.

LISA

It's fine, darling. Don't worry . . . I liked your  
new video.

(to the others)

Did you all watch it? . . . No?

NIKKI

I'm glad you liked it.

LISA

It was great.

(to others)

Why didn't / you look at it

NIKKI

It's okay.

LISA

Should we all watch it together?

Lisa pulls out her phone.

KANE

(to Nikki)

You sent it to me, right?

Nikki nods.

KANE

(to Lisa)

We'll . . . get to it later.

LISA

(confused)

Oh, okay.

(to Nikki)

I thought you looked so good.

NIKKI

Thank you, mommy.

KANE

(guilty)

I just don't always have time, you know . . .  
to watch them.

NIKKI

I know, dada.

LISA

Those other makeup people better watch out.

Lisa kisses Nikki.

KANE

I heard you were at Faith's bail hearing.

LISA

What? Oh, yeah. Vince used to date her  
mama . . . I saw that girl Jamie Lynn there.

NIKKI

Who's Jamie Lynn?

LISA

(rolls eyes)

She's this girl who was in the front of the  
court room wearing nothing but her underwear.  
I couldn't believe it. I stared at her, and she said,  
"Do you have a problem?" I said, "Yes, this is a  
court room and -"

KANE

(laughs)

You got in her face?

LISA

I did. I said, "You're not wearing any clothes."  
She said, "I have just as much right to be here  
as you." I said, "Fine, then sit in the back, where  
the judge can't see your naked body!" Well, she  
moves, and I ask Vince, "Who was that?" He

says, "Jamie Lynn." I say, "Who's Jamie Lynn?"  
He says, "She's a prostitute who's dating Faith's  
brother." I said, "What?! You're telling me /"

NIKKI

Mommy! You're being mean.

LISA

I'm just telling a story, darling. I said, "You're  
telling me this girl who comes to court naked  
and sells her body for money is dating / Faith's  
brother?"

Nikki, crying, stands and runs to the hallway, exiting.

LISA

(shocked)

What's going on?

(to Kane, accusatory)

Why is Nikki acting strange?

KANE

(hiding worry)

Who knows? She's a teenager.

LISA

I mean it!

(to the others)

You saw that. Do you know why -

NICOLE

Lisa, I called you when she first started staying  
with us, saying Nikki stayed out, talked back,  
and stole, and you didn't care. Do you remember  
that?

LISA

I cared. I just said I didn't think she was going  
to change.

(fretting)

Well, I should go get her. I made her mad.

KANE

(hiding fear)

You just got here. Let Nicole get her.

(to Nicole, insistent)

You can get Nikki, right, and bring her out?

Lisa stands.

LISA

Nicole? No, I can / go

Kane stands, blocking Lisa, his manner charming and slightly threatening.

KANE

Nicole's got it. It'll give us a chance to visit away from the youngsters.

LISA

(against her judgment)

Okay.

Nicole, slightly insulted, glares at Kane and exits to the hallway. Lisa sits again, and Kane sits close to her.

LISA

(to Tiffany)

So you're letting Kane and Nicole stay with you now?

TIFFANY

I've got the space and they're friendly enough.

KANE

So are you and Conrad no longer an item?

TIFFANY

He's fine. He was just -

(to Lisa)

Do you want anything? There's coffee, if / you'd like some

LISA

(to Kane)

What was he talking about earlier? He said something about / you moving Nikki in

KANE

Why are you talking about him, when I'm right here in front of you?

LISA

(scoffs)

Oh, is this when you try and seduce me?

KANE

No, this is when I wring your neck.

LISA

This isn't the time for that, Kane.

KANE

Guess what? That's my favorite time.

Lisa freezes, drawn in by Kane for a beat. Nicole and Nikki reenter, breaking the spell. Nikki, a little more fragile and withdrawn, crosses and sits on Lisa's lap again.

LISA

(concerned)

How are you, sweetie? Do you feel okay?

NIKKI

Yes, mommy.

LISA

Do you want to say what bothered you?

NIKKI

(looking away)

It was nothing.

LISA

Okay.

(private)

The last time we talked you said you were scared because you needed drugs to leave the house or talk on the phone. Are you feeling any better?

NIKKI

(soft, despairing)

No, I'm not.

LISA

I don't understand what's wrong. What do you think it is, Nikki?

NIKKI

I think it's because I got shot, mommy.  
I just feel afraid now.

LISA

Oh, but you're not seeing that guy anymore  
are you?

NIKKI

No, mommy. I'm not.

LISA

(to the others)

You're not letting her see that guy anymore,  
are you? The "boyfriend"?

KANE

Huh? Who are you talking about?

LISA

Hello?!

NIKKI

(to Kane, urgent)

The boyfriend who shot me, dada. Remember?  
I / told you

KANE

Oh, right!

(feigning outrage)

No, she knows better than to do that again.  
Right, Nikki?

Nikki nods.

LISA

(private, worried)

Okay. I don't know what would be causing  
your fear, then.

NIKKI

(sad)

It's okay, mommy. I'm just glad you're here now.

LISA

Me, too.

KANE

Is Vince picking you up?

LISA

Yeah. He needed the van.

(checks watch)

Oh, he'll be coming in a little bit.

NIKKI

You're going soon?

LISA

I have to, sweetie. I'm sorry.

NIKKI

Can you call him and say you're staying longer?

LISA

(terrified)

Call him? No, sweetie. It's Vince, and you know how he gets, right?

NIKKI

I know, mommy.

LISA

Oh, I almost forgot your presents. Should we open those now?

NIKKI

(feigning cheer)

Okay.

LISA

(worried, surprised)

We don't have to if you don't / want

NIKKI

I do.

KANE

She's been excited all week about it. You should have / seen her

NICOLE

It's all she talked / about

The door opens and Conrad reenters. He crosses to the others.

CONRAD

I won't argue or yell. I / just wanted to come  
see everyone

LISA

Oh good. You're back.

CONRAD

I'm sorry about before.

KANE

(wary)

Alright. If you want to sit, go ahead.

LISA

Nikki's about to open her presents.

Conrad sits uneasily on the couch by Tiffany. Lisa hands a wrapped package to Nikki.

LISA

Here's the first one, darling.

Nikki opens it, still suffused in sadness.

NIKKI

It's makeup.

LISA

Right. For the videos you like to post.

NIKKI

(fighting back tears)

Thank you, mommy.

LISA

What's wrong, honey?

(to Kane)

I think something's the matter.

NIKKI

(composing self)

I'm sorry. It's nothing.

CONRAD

Has Nikki been sad? Nikki, are / you okay

NIKKI

It's nothing. I just said / so

LISA

Okay. That's fine. Here's / the next one

TIFFANY

Do you have any presents for Conrad, Lisa?

Pause. Lisa freezes with guilt.

CONRAD

It's alright, mom.

KANE

I wonder who her favorite is, haha. Right, Nikki?

Nikki forces a laugh. Lisa hands her the other package.

LISA

Here's your other gift.

(to Conrad)

I'm sorry honey. I'll get / you something later

CONRAD

Don't worry about it.

NIKKI

Thank you, mommy.

Nikki opens the package, revealing jeans and top.

NIKKI

It's clothes.

LISA

It's a new outfit I got you from work. You can design it, or redo it, if you want.

NIKKI

(distant, sad)

It's nice. Thank you.

LISA

You're welcome, honey. Mommy needs to go now, though.

Nikki stands, followed by Lisa. They move to the door. Nikki bursts out crying, her sobs heavy and loud.

LISA

Nikki?! What is it? What's wrong, sweetie?

Kane stands and crosses quickly, nervous. The others follow close behind.

NIKKI

I'm just afraid.

CONRAD

(to Kane, upset)

Why's she afraid?

LISA

Conrad, honey. Don't / upset your dad

KANE

She's fine.

NIKKI

(to Lisa)

I'm afraid we'll never see each other again.

Lisa kisses her.

LISA

You don't have to be afraid of that. Mommy loves you, right?

NIKKI

(distant, sad)

I think it's just because . . . of what happened before.

LISA

Oh, right. I know that was scary. You're feeling better, though, right?

CONRAD

If there's anything you want to tell mom or  
I, you know you / can, right?

KANE

She's just emotional, because / of Christmas

NIKKI

You're right, mommy.

KANE

Of course she is.

CONRAD

(to Nikki)

Are you sure? We can / help you

NIKKI

(upset)

You said you wouldn't argue.

CONRAD

I'm not / arguing

KANE

Lisa needs to go.

(to Lisa)

Nikki's really glad you stopped by.

LISA

So am I.

(to Nikki)

She's mommy's angel, right?

Nikki nods, and the two hug goodbye. Lisa opens the door. Conrad moves toward the door, frustrated and glum.

CONRAD

I guess I'll go, too.

LISA

Alright, well merry Christmas everyone.

NIKKI

Merry Christmas.

KANE

(laughs)

Now you're Vince's problem again, Lisa, right?

LISA

(laughs)

Oh, screw you, Kane.

(to Nikki)

Did you hear that?

(to Kane, joking)

She's always saying she has to help you.

I try and tell her you don't deserve it.

NIKKI

That's not true, dada.

CONRAD

Bye everyone.

All wave goodbye to Conrad, who exits.

NIKKI

I love you, mommy.

LISA

Goodbye, baby. Mommy loves you, too.

Lisa exits.

## Scene 12

Man 3's car. A week or two have passed. MAN 3 sits in a pickup truck in a parking lot, looking agitated. Nikki approaches and points to the passenger door. Man 3 gestures that she should enter. She climbs into the passenger seat. Man 3 looks away from her, still angry and uneasy.

NIKKI

Hey. How are you doing?

MAN 3

Fine . . . How are you?

NIKKI

(confused, uncomfortable)

I'm okay.

MAN 3

That's good.

Pause.

NIKKI

(performing nonchalance)

So, you wanna have some fun?

MAN 3

(rueful)

Right.

Pause. Nikki looks around uncomfortably.

NIKKI

Yeah, so . . . I was surprised you messaged me again. It didn't seem like you had a good time earlier tonight.

MAN 3

(pause, upset)

It didn't? How did I seem to you earlier?

NIKKI

(anxious)

Um . . . you were quiet. You didn't say what you wanted. You seemed angry when you dropped me off.

MAN 3

(awkward)

Well, I messaged again, huh? So I must have wanted to see you.

NIKKI

(nervous)

I guess.

MAN 3

Do you remember what we agreed to in our messages?

NIKKI

(guarded)

What?

MAN 3  
On the app? What did we say?

NIKKI  
(confused)  
Are you a cop or something?

MAN 3  
No! . . . We said a hand job, right?! For  
fifty dollars?

Nikki looks around, nervously, then nods. Man 3 doesn't see her as he's looking down in front of him.

MAN 3  
(frustrated)  
Is that right?

NIKKI  
(frightened, exasperated)  
Hey. Look at me.

Man 3 turns, pained, and looks as Nikki nods. He looks away, his expression angry.

MAN 3  
Okay. And you think that's okay for you to do?

NIKKI  
What?

MAN 3  
(ashamed)  
You want to touch my dick?

NIKKI  
(worried, nervous)  
Hey – are you sure you're okay?

MAN 3  
Yes! I'm *okay* . . . Let me ask you a question –  
(turns to her, vicious)  
Are you a fucking man?!

NIKKI

What?!

MAN 3  
(points)

Is that a fucking cock?!

NIKKI  
(alarmed)

No!

MAN 3  
It's not?! So I don't have fucking eyes,  
is that what you're saying?!

NIKKI  
I'm a girl!

Nikki, panicked, turns to open the door. The man grabs her arm.

MAN 3  
I'll fucking kill you!

Nikki thrashes, trying to get free.

NIKKI  
(screaming)

Argh! Help!

Man 3 hits her in the head with a fist.

MAN 3  
Shut up!

Enraged, he maneuvers around and grabs her throat with both hands, choking her. Nikki gasps for air, attempting to pry his hands from her neck, and fight back.

MAN  
You're going to fucking die now!

The choking continues for several beats. Nikki's energy lessens and lessens, until her body goes completely limp. After a few beats, Man 3 releases his grip, and Nikki, now dead, slumps down. Man 3 pulls back, horrified, as Nikki lies deceased.

Scene 13

Funeral home. A week has passed. Lisa and Conrad stand on the left side of the stage. Upstage from them in the center is a podium. Lisa looks distraught and furious.

LISA

Is Kane not even coming to Nikki's funeral?  
I left a million voicemails with the address  
and time.

CONRAD

He's probably just late, mom. Are you doing,  
okay?

LISA

(cries)

No. I need Nikki.

Conrad comforts her. After a beat, Kane, Nicole and Tiffany enter and stand on the right side of the stage. Lisa collects herself.

LISA

(to Conrad)

Can you start things?

Conrad nods and walks to the podium.

CONRAD

Hi everyone. This is Nikki's memorial. We'll  
each, you know, come and / talk

LISA

No! I want Nikki back.

All turn to Lisa, who sobs violently. As she calms, attention returns to Conrad.

CONRAD

We'll each, um, come and speak up here  
about Nikki. I guess I'll go first . . . I shouldn't  
have let this happen. If I'd protected Nikki,  
she'd still be alive.

LISA

No, sweetie. That's not true.

CONRAD

I just didn't know what was happening.  
(laughs)

She hated it when I wanted to help her. “Shut up, Conrad. Just go away” . . .

(dark, angry)

When I was little, people told me to take care of her –

(to Kane)

But those same people were the ones who were hurting both of us . . . I can’t believe that fucker killed her. There’s a hole in me where she used to be.

Conrad walks back to where Lisa stands. Kane, agitated by Conrad’s speech, glares at him, then walks to the podium, where he pauses, reflectively.

KANE

Nicole can tell you, I haven’t been too well since I found out about Nikki’s death. I don’t like talking like this when I might cry, but since it’s Nikki’s funeral, I guess I will . . . I never thought one of my kids would die before me –

(chokes up)

Especially not Nikki, because she was so smart and tough.

LISA

(to Conrad)

Really? The police told me he’s the one who was trafficking her, so maybe he should have thought it.

Pause. Kane glares at Lisa, who looks chastened.

KANE

When my mom died it was like all the light went out inside me, and Nikki saw that. She helped me as best as she could.

(fighting tears)

I just miss my baby.

Emotional, Kane walks back to Nicole and Tiffany. After a beat, Lisa walks to the podium, looking shaky.

LISA

Nikki’s my angel. I don’t believe she’s gone. I know this is her funeral, but inside

I don't accept it, because I don't want to be alive without Nikki here. I'll never forgive myself for choosing Vince over her. She'd be alive if I hadn't done that.

CONRAD

No, mom. Don't say that.

LISA

It's true! You can't tell me it isn't.

(to Kane, Nicole and Tiffany)

And you three should be in jail! She was a child and / you sent her out to that man

KANE

Watch it.

LISA

(looking away)

I don't care what you say. It's true . . . I sleep with my phone, hoping she'll call or text. I watch the videos she made over and over. Why would someone hurt my beautiful, brave girl?

(cries)

I just want her back.

End of play.