

**ANJA:** Early twenties. She is a gravedigger.

**RUBY:** Early twenties. She is in a mental institution. Optionally played with a slight Southern accent.

**MATTHIAS:** Early thirties. Childhood friends with Anja. Assistant at Anja's business. He manages the taxes.

[ ] refers to anything that a character is thinking but goes unsaid.

**LOCATION:** Somewhere cold.

**TIME:** Now-ish.

## **PRELUDE:**

*(Anja is alone on stage. She holds a journal)*

ANJA: *(reading from the journal)* I buried Cece yesterday. The ground was hard, almost frozen from the frost, but I had to. Anja has been crying all day. I don't know how to help her without Cece here.

I put her next to where the snowdrop patch blooms in early spring, it's always where we saw the first flowers. She'd like it. I wanted to plant chrysanthemums over her grave but it's too early, they'd just freeze overnight... I don't know what to do. How am I supposed to go back and lie in our bed and keep going? I don't know what to do with Anja or how to raise her or how to be a good dad. None of this is fair. None of this is fucking fair.

The air is stifling here. I feel like I'm being buried alive in the open air. I feel like I've died with her.

## **SCENE ONE:**

*(Ruby enters)*

*(Two women, one sitting on a stone wall, the other knelt on the ground as she weeds a garden)*

*(the garden is an eclectic collection, vegetables and flowers alike, all mixed up)*

ANJA: Institute girls aren't allowed here.

RUBY: *(ignoring her)* There's lots of rumors about you, you know.

ANJA: Rumors?

RUBY: I wanted to see if the rumors were true. Okay, so, somebody thinks ya might be a ghost.

Or that you're cursed to stay on the institute grounds. Somebody else thinks you're in love with

one of the girls and that's why you won't leave, but I think that's silly. The ghost one though...

Are you corporeal?

ANJA: Can't you all get punished for being outside without a chaperone?

RUBY: Whatever.

*(She throws a pebble and hits Anja square in the forehead)*

RUBY: Yup, you're corporeal.

ANJA: I don't care about any rumors. Can you go?

*(Ruby jumps from the wall with a flourish)*

RUBY: You're not as fun as I thought you'd be.

ANJA: Why would I be?

RUBY: Because you seem interesting. Because I don't know anything about you. Because I've made up a million fantasies about you.

ANJA: Fantasies?

RUBY: The pretty girl in the ghost house.

ANJA: Is that what the rumors are? Ghost stories?

RUBY: No—

*(As she's speaking, Ruby steps into a certain patch and Anja quickly stands)*

ANJA: Don't step there!

RUBY: Sorry... What is it?

ANJA: Violets. Don't step on the plants.

RUBY: Alright, I won't...

*(Awkward pause)*

RUBY: So why *do* you live out here then?

ANJA: Listen to your little rumors, they'll tell you more than I will.

RUBY: Well, obviously I have and they've told me nothin' so I've come to you. Honestly, what harm can it do to tell me?

ANJA: Probably more harm to you than to me, so I don't get why you're out here.

RUBY: I really don't give a shit about any of that. I've been here for years, there's nothing they can do that they haven't done before. Sooooo...

ANJA: (*giving in a little*) I live here by myself. It's not that interesting.

RUBY: But you can't have been alone for forever? I mean, you can't be any older than me.

Twenty-one? Twenty-two? And I know you've lived here a long time.

ANJA: My father lived with me once.

RUBY: Ah! Your father! Where is he now? Left or dead?

ANJA: I— um— dead. A couple years back.

RUBY: Did you dig his grave too?

ANJA: (*startled*) What?

RUBY: That's your job isn't it? Gravedigger. Kinda morbid but also cool. I always imagine gravediggers looking like men on *their* deathbeds, barely strong enough to lift a shovel, not...

[*not somebody like you; pretty, young, Like Me*] But that's your business.

ANJA: Yeah. That's my business. So you should keep your nose out of it.

RUBY: Oh, but where's the fun in that?

ANJA: ... Not there, I guess. I'm not very fun anyway.

RUBY: I think you're fun.

ANJA: You'd be the first. I think.

RUBY: Did you love your father?

ANJA: Don't ask me that.

RUBY: Why not? It's not a hard question—

ANJA: Don't ask me that.

RUBY: Okay (*pause*) You're real strange, y'know?

ANJA: I've been told... What's your name?

RUBY: Ruby.

*(pause)*

I'm gonna go now.

*(Ruby leaves. Anja kneels in the garden again but she doesn't take up her task again. She clasps her hands to her chest. She may be praying. She may not)*

## **SCENE TWO:**

*(A note: the scene should change **around** Anja— she does not move)*

*(Interior of a small house; this is Anja's home. It's simple and quaint but if you were to look close, you'd see small markers of a personality— dried flowers on the windowsill, antique glassware, lace draped over the furniture)*

*(Anja is sitting cross legged in the center of the room, flipping through a book, in her pajamas)*

*(Matthias enters through the front door, toting a couple of heavy grocery bags)*

MATTHIAS: You're up late.

ANJA: You're here late.

MATTHIAS: I came by to drop off food. Mrs. Murry sent over a couple casseroles and a bag of apples from her tree. The Littlefield's sent a whole ass pie. And I think there are a couple muffins or something.

ANJA: God... that feels ridiculous. So much food and for what?

MATTHIAS: Your dad had friends, what can I say?

ANJA: Still hard to believe. He wasn't exactly the most... [nice]... you know.

*(He goes and starts putting the food on the counter and in the fridge)*

MATTHIAS: Whatcha reading?

*(Anja doesn't reply, too engrossed in her book)*

MATTHIAS: Anja? What are you reading? Anja??

ANJA: A girl came by the house today.

MATTHIAS: What?

ANJA: One of the institute girls. Came by today while I was gardening.

MATTHIAS: And did she run away? She'd freeze before she got to the train station.

ANJA: No, she went back in. She just left and went right back inside the institute.

MATTHIAS: Huh. Weird. Never seen that before.

ANJA: Me neither.

MATTHIAS: She's probably just one of the crazies. Not really aware of what's going on around her.

ANJA: She didn't seem... *crazy*. Just odd.

MATTHIAS: You're odd. What are you reading?

ANJA: A book.

MATTHIAS: I fucking know that, you smartass. What book?

ANJA: My dad's old journal. Okay? It's his. I'm not a smartass, I just knew you'd look at me like that.

MATTHIAS: That's not a good idea, Anja, and you know it. Don't be stupid—

ANJA: I'm not *stupid*. It's been four years, I can look at his old shit. I'm allowed to do that. I'm fucking next of kin. I kept it here for a reason, and I can look at it whenever I want. You don't tell me what to do, Matthias, you don't have the fucking right. You *weren't here*. I'm allowed to. Fuck off.

(*pause*)

ANJA: Sorry.

MATTHIAS: It's not a good idea to read that. It's just gonna upset you.

ANJA: You don't know that for sure.

MATTHIAS: I don't, you're right. But I know that you're better than this. Don't be stupid and torture yourself until you end up like him. You'll drive yourself as insane as one of those girls.

ANJA: At least we're close by, if I were to snap.

MATTHIAS: That's not funny.

ANJA: You wouldn't have to come around as much. I know it's a hassle for you.

MATTHIAS: It's not a hassle to me. It makes me feel better seeing you alive once a week.

Everyone in town worries about you.

ANJA: I just know you're exaggerating that. Nobody has actually seen me since I was, like, ten.

They'd be disappointed if they saw me now.

MATTHIAS: They keep sending casseroles, though. Four years worth of casseroles sounds like a lot of love to me.

ANJA: It was his dying wish in his letter. That's not *love*, that's *debt*. He saddled them with taking care of me and now they have to see it through.

MATTHIAS: They're all stubborn as all hell; you have to give them that.

ANJA: Fine. I'll give them that.

*(She flips a page of the journal)*

MATTHIAS: So what does it say then?

ANJA: Not much. He kept it up for a long time. This is the second one I've read, actually.

MATTHIAS: Anja—

ANJA: Don't get on my ass about it, I don't have to ask your permission... The first one's pretty boring, there wasn't a lot interesting to find in it. In the last entry, he mentions meeting a woman named Celia.

MATTHIAS: Your mom.

ANJA: Yeah. My mom.

MATTHIAS: And? Anything else?

ANJA: *(shrugs)* Not really. He talks a lot about his chores and work and boring thoughts. He didn't have much to say, my dad.

MATTHIAS: Sounds like him. He always said his head echoed like a cathedral.

*(Anja laughs at that. The jaggedness between them has healed somewhat)*

*(Matthias walks over and kneels beside Anja, pulling her into his side. They embrace for a few short moments)*

MATTHIAS: I've gotta go soon, I'm meeting Daisy for dinner.

ANJA: Have fun. Use protection.

MATTHIAS: Don't be gross. *(he kisses the side of her head)* I'll be back next week. Don't be dumb, dumbass.

*(He leaves and Anja is alone again, the journal in front of her. She goes back to reading. She flips the page, reads some more... flips the page... reads some more... until she begins to read aloud:)*

ANJA: Cece told me she's pregnant this morning. I should've known it would happen. She's been acting odd for weeks and I kept asking her what was wrong but she brushed me off every time. Now I know. She's having a baby. *We're* having a baby. Three months along, according to the doctor's report she brought home. She said that she didn't want to tell me until she had seen a doctor and knew for sure. But I kind of wished that she'd told me the moment she suspected it. I kind of wanted to hold her hand at the doctor's office and find out together. Is that selfish? It doesn't matter. *We're* having a baby. How is a kid supposed to grow up in this godforsaken cabin in the middle of nowhere? We have to move after the baby is born and Cece's in good condition. I can't raise a baby here; it'd be cruel and unusual punishment.

*(Anja closes the journal and puts her face in her hands)*

### **SCENE THREE:**

*(Again: the scene changes around Anja, she does not exit the stage)*

*(Ruby enters)*



*(The garden again. Ruby is standing amongst the plants and Anja is standing near her, but not too near. Anja is looking at Ruby, Ruby is looking at the ground)*

RUBY: And what's this?

ANJA: Lettuce.

RUBY: And this?

ANJA: Carrots.

RUBY: And this?

ANJA: Marigolds.

RUBY: I like them. They're pretty.

ANJA: Yeah, they are. *(she's not talking about the Marigolds)*

*(Long pause. Eventually, Ruby folds her legs under her and sits)*

RUBY: I'm going to leave.

ANJA: What?

RUBY: I'm going to leave.

ANJA: I heard you. I was hoping you'd elaborate.

RUBY: I can't stand it here anymore. I've been in the institute since I was eighteen. I'm twenty-three, Anja, did you know that? Did you know that? Did you know I'm a grown fuckin' adult who's never lived a day in her life?

ANJA: The train station's too far, you can't go on foot. Wait for the summer at least.

RUBY: No. I gotta go now.

ANJA: It's dangerous.

RUBY: I know. Don't you think I know that?

ANJA: You can't go.

RUBY: Can't I? I want to. I haven't wanted anything in so long. I forgot what it felt like, to actually *want* something. I thought you'd like that for me. I thought you'd want that for me.

ANJA: *(an admittance)* I don't want you to go.

RUBY: I don't change anything for you, Anja. If I go, life will be the same.

ANJA: No, it won't.

RUBY: You'll keep your garden and you'll dig your graves and you'll read your books and life will keep on moving on and nothing will change. You'll stay here. It won't be any worse.

ANJA: Yes it will.

RUBY: Don't be stupid. You can't do this. It's *selfish*.

ANJA: But I love you. I want you here. I want you with me.

RUBY: That's so... emotional. Can't you be logical for once? Can't you just use your head and think through this? If I left, you wouldn't be any worse off. It'd just be a bit quieter, maybe. That wouldn't be so bad, would it?

ANJA: I'd miss you.

(*Quiet*)

RUBY: We haven't even kissed. You can't miss me, let alone love me. That doesn't make sense.

ANJA: It does to me. It does.

RUBY: Okay. It doesn't to me. I'm going to leave, whether you like it or not.

ANJA: (*new idea!*) Let me go with you. I can come with and we— we can share body heat at night so we don't freeze and I can bake us bread.

RUBY: No. No, no, no, that won't work. You have your work here and your father's legacy and everything. You wouldn't actually leave.

ANJA: I would! I would come with you and we'd be happy together.

RUBY: I don't believe you.

ANJA: Well, that's not my fault. Let me try. Isn't that fair?

RUBY: I don't want you to come with me.

(*Oh. That hurt.*)

ANJA: Why?

RUBY: I'll ruin you if you do. What would you have if you left? No garden to go back to, no family friends bringing you dinner, no warm house to sleep in. You wouldn't be happy and that would ruin you and it would ruin me. It would ruin *us*. Better to just say... goodbye right now.

ANJA: I don't like that.

RUBY: You don't like anything that hurts your feelings.

ANJA: That's mean.

RUBY: I know. I'm sorry.

ANJA: I don't want you to go.

RUBY: I know.

*(Anja kneels and they embrace)*

ANJA: Let me come.

*(Ruby stares, and pauses for a long time. She knows that if she refuses, this whole argument will start over again)*

RUBY: Do you really mean it? You want to come with me?

ANJA: Yes. I mean it more than anything. I want to be with you. Please, let me.

RUBY: *(a not-so-convincing lie)*... Okay.

ANJA: *(surprised)* Really?

RUBY: Yeah. You're right. I'd probably get hypothermia halfway to the train station without you.

ANJA: Right. And I can pack our food. I'll make us both sandwiches tonight so we have lunch prepared. Will you come in the morning? Before dawn? We can see the sunrise.

RUBY: *(close to tears but Anja is so overjoyed at them going together that she does not see it)*

Sure. Tomorrow morning. We'll go together.

*(Anja takes Ruby's hand and holds it)*

ANJA: Tomorrow morning.

*(Ruby exits)*

#### **SCENE FOUR:**

*Anja alone. She waits. Crickets sing but they slowly grow quieter and quieter and are replaced by birdsong. The light also changes, from dim before dawn light, to sunrise glows, and then full morning light.*

*Anja is alone.*

*Lights down.*

#### **SCENE FIVE:**

*(Lights up. Anja is not on the stage for the first time)*

*(The stage is completely bare. Ruby sits alone, cross legged on the floor. She holds Anja's journal)*

RUBY: *(reading from the journal)* I met a woman named Celia. She had the prettiest eyes, it made everything seem dull in comparison. You know? Everything. We were in the grocer's and I nearly dropped the tomato I was holding. I kept thinking to myself *dear God, this is the prettiest woman I've ever seen, I cannot make a fool of myself, I cannot ruin my chance*. But she left the store before I could get the courage to go up and ask her name. I thought I'd lost my chance for good but when I left— there she was. Prettiest woman in the world. I swear to God. She was sitting on the bench next to the pot of Zinnia flowers and I said to myself, *okay, this is your chance, now, go talk to her now*. So I did. Her name is Celia. She's coming by for dinner tomorrow night. I have to clean up this dinky ass cabin before she comes by. What a shit hole.

**END OF PLAY**