

OLD DYKES

Pilot

By Elise D'Haene

EPISODE 101: "Does my body need this?"

elise.dhaene@gmail.com

WGA Registered

**INT. CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING - UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH - NIGHT**

A massive, late-Gothic revival jaw-dropping space.

Tables filled with gussied up local dignitaries, terminal academics, administrators, and students.

A banner announces: "A Celebration of Helene Wright, poet and scholar."

At the podium, JAMES HANNIGAN, 60s, the university's white PRESIDENT -- an obsequious former Wall Streeter-- wraps up his remarks.

PRESIDENT

As the great Yankee's legend and American philosopher Yogi Berra, once said, "It ain't over 'til it's over."

HELENE WRIGHT, late 70s, white, completely transparent, endearingly brash, with a chic/androgynous style, growls under her breath, meets the gaze of her lover--

SHELBY, late 40s, white, devoted to Helene, guarded with everyone else, with an alluring combination of being part seductive, part out of reach.

(The vibe of these two is Holland Taylor and Sarah Paulson.)

HELENE

(hushed; to Shelby)  
Privileged cocksucker.

Also at their table, a protective throng of old dykes -- Helene and Shelby's queer family (to be properly introduced later.)

PRESIDENT

Or as the German philosopher, Hegel, once put it, "the owl of Minerva stretches its wings with the falling of the dusk."

Helene leans into Shelby.

HELENE

(whispers)  
Sounds like my eulogy.

Shelby slides her arm around her.

PRESIDENT

Dusk may be falling, Helene, but I can see your wings stretching out, embracing us all. Ladies and gentlemen...

Helene rolls her eyes.

HELENE

(whispers to Shelby)  
"Ladies and gentlemen?" Christ.

PRESIDENT

I give you the National Book award-winning poet and member of our faculty for over 30 years, Helene Wright.

The room bursts with APPLAUSE and CHEERS.

Shelby helps Helene, unsteady, up to her feet. Helene makes her way to the podium, carries a single sheet of paper.

She places the sheet down, grips the podium, steadying herself. She takes her time, her eyes sweep the faces of those gathered. Letting it all in.

HELENE

Hello, everyone.  
(beat)  
I'm going to read my latest poem.  
(beat)  
"Fat Ass."

A smattering of students (diverse undergrad and grad) and friends chuckle, snap their fingers.

As Helene reads, the faces of those she references are shown. Shock. Fake smiles. Angry. Amused.

HELENE (cont'd)

The president of the university where I work: fat ass. The chair of the English Department who asked me to tone down my language in class: fat ass. Me on my fourth cookie: fat ass. Shelby, my always mysterious lover: fat ass. The aggressive, racist cop-wannabe head of university security: fat ass.

We circle those at Helene's table as she names them.

HELENE (cont'd)  
 My queer family: Maya, Nikki, Scobie,  
 Parker: all fat asses.

They crack up.

Students get rowdier. Academics seethe.

HELENE (cont'd)  
 My psychiatrist: fat ass.  
 Neurologist: fat ass. My editor (if I  
 still have one): fat ass. The  
 employees at my publishing company -  
 every single one of them - a fat ass.  
 Famous poets Louise Gluck, Ted  
 Kooser, Charles Simic: fat ass, fat  
 ass, fat ass. Robert Pinsky, Rita  
 Dove, Eileen Myles: fat ass, fat ass,  
 really really fat ass. Jesus fat ass.  
 The devil fat ass. Fat Ass  
 Washington, D.C. The fat ass pope in  
 his extra big fat ass robe.  
 (beat)  
 Fat ass.

Long beat.

HELENE (cont'd)  
 Thank you.

Silence.

Then, the students, Helene's friends and a few of her  
 colleagues erupt with APPLAUSE and stand. Others clap weakly  
 or not at all.

Helene takes it in, lowers her trembling right hand and  
 grasps it with her left.

**INT. HELENE AND SHELBY'S HOUSE - KITCHEN/DINING AREA - DAY**

HELENE stands at the sink rubbing her pained right hand with  
 her left.

On the nearby stove, eggs boil furiously.

Looking out the window, she drifts into the past.

**BEGIN FLASHBACK:**

**INT. CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING - CLASSROOM - DAY**

Helene sits at a large table with a dozen undergraduate students of all manner of diversity -- young, eager, open, afflicted with self doubt, false bravado.

Projected on a screen are two images: a gorgeously decorated Christmas tree and James Merrill's shape poem "Christmas Tree."

HELENE

Alright! During spring break you will work on your original shape poems. Startle me. Surprise yourselves.

Students gather their belongings.

CAITLIN

Dr. H, can I do a poem shaped like a dildo?

HELENE

With or without a strap?

Students laugh.

HELENE (cont'd)

Yes, Caitlin, just make it the best goddamned dildo poem ever written.

**END FLASHBACK.**

**INT. HELENE'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Helene likes this memory.

Breaking the spell, the overcooked, cracked eggs CLACK NOISILY against the pan. She turns, sees.

HELENE

Shit.

**INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AA MEETING - DAY**

SHELBY takes a seat in an already crowded meeting.

At the front of the room MAYA, 60s, black, Helene's ex, a take-no-prisoners exterior shields her soft baby chick heart (think Alfre Woodard).

Surprised to see Shelby, Maya approaches her with a laminated card.

The surprise is def mutual and not altogether welcomed.

MAYA  
I must be trippin'.

SHELBY  
You run this meeting?

MAYA  
Gotta give it away to keep it, Baby Girl. I need someone to set up coffee next week.

SHELBY  
(slightly sarcastic)  
No. But thanks for asking.

MAYA  
Just glad you're in that chair.

Awkward silence.

MAYA (cont'd)  
Helene brought it last night.

SHELBY  
She sure did.

MAYA  
(beat)  
You been drinking?

SHELBY  
No, can't I--

MAYA  
You stopped coming to meetings years--

SHELBY  
Stay in your own lane.  
(softens a bit)  
I'm just getting a tune-up.

Maya hands Shelby the card. Ambush.

MAYA  
(re: card)  
Start with reading the promises. And get your hand up to share.

Maya steps away, not waiting for a response.

SHELBY

Fuck.

MAYA

(to packed meeting)

Alright, people, welcome to the Sunday Sunrise meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.

(beat)

Shelby will read the promises.

If Shelby's eyes could shoot bullets.

SHELBY

Shelby. Alcoholic.

GROUP

Hi, Shelby.

SHELBY

(reading)

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are half way through.

**INT. HELENE AND SHELBY'S KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS**

Helene stares down at the mess she's dropped on the floor -- cracked eggs, pan, water.

SHELBY (V.O.)

That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.

She shrugs, can't be bothered, moves to the stairs, carefully and haltingly slow she ascends.

SHELBY (V.O.) (cont'd)

We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.

**INT. CHURCH BASEMENT - AA MEETING - CONTINUOUS**

Shelby clears her throat, glances quick at Maya who watches her like a mother hawk.

SHELBY

Are these extravagant promises?

AA MEMBERS

We think not.

SHELBY

They are being fulfilled among us...  
sometimes quickly, sometimes  
slowly... They will always  
materialize if we work for them.

MAYA

Thank you, Shelby.

RANDY, 40s, white, a tight-jeaned bad boy with pot-soaked  
bedroom eyes, enters late, scans the room, sees Shelby,  
takes an empty seat behind her.

Mama Hawk sees all.

**INT. SCOBIE AND PARKER'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

SCOBIE, 50s, a white, curvy, keenly intuitive femme (think  
Patricia Arquette) with her wife PARKER, 50s, a super  
handsome jock of few words (think Jenny Shimizu), Asian-  
American.

Parker sits at the table watching YouTube highlights of NCAA  
women's basketball tournaments. Sheets of paper filled with  
basketball playbook diagrams. She eats Cheetos. Knee  
dribbles under the table.

Scobie holds a jar of vitamin D3 pills over her heart with  
her arm pressed against her chest and fingers locked.

SCOBIE

(to herself)

Does my body need this?

Testing the vitamins, she pulls at her fingers -- they stay  
locked in position.

SCOBIE (cont'd)

Wow, my D3 is low.

She opens the bottle, takes a pill.

PARKER

You making your guac for the thing?



SCOBIE  
 Sorry, boo. I just read this morning  
 that avocados are super high in  
 histamines. We can't have them  
 anymore.

PARKER  
 We always bring your guac!

Scobie picks up an avocado, tests it as she did above. Her  
 fingers, when pulled, fly apart.

SCOBIE  
 My body says nada.

Scobie chucks the avocado into the trash.

FOOTSTEPS LOUD as THUNDER shock the air.

Scobie's son, REECE, 16, white, lean, athletic, and pulsing  
 with monstrous, aggressive hormones, barrels down the steps.  
 TWO MALE FRIENDS, 16, with him. They beeline for the door.

SCOBIE (cont'd)  
 (sonic boom)  
HEY!

Reece, seething at the sound of her voice, turns to face  
 her. It's a stand-off. She zeros in on his face, tries to  
 psychically read him. A glacial chasm between them.

SCOBIE (cont'd)  
 (finally; soft)  
 Okay. Back by 10.

The boys charge out the front door.

Immediately, Scobie begins tapping her cheekbones.

SCOBIE (cont'd)  
 (mantra)  
 Even though Reece thinks he hates me,  
 I am a good enough mother.

She repeats the phrase a few times as she taps.

Parker, used to this domestic war, wraps her arms around  
 Scobie from behind. Locks her fingers.

PARKER  
 Does my body need this?

Parker lips journey across Scobie's neck to her lips. Scobie melts.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - DAY**

Helene, in a comfy, overstuffed chair, feet up on an ottoman. A well-worn flannel shirt in her lap. Piles of poetry books on every surface.

Rubbing her hand, she takes in the room, revisiting every object, memory. Photos of Helene at book signings, receiving literary awards, poetry readings.

Photos of Helene and Shelby at various ages. Pics of the queer posse at various ages.

She picks up a framed photo of them with two GAY MEN standing in front of the AIDS Memorial Quilt. Silence = Death posters. She traces her finger around the men's faces. Remembering.

Her foot spasms a bit, twitches. She ignores it.

**EXT. PITTSBURGH NEIGHBORHOOD - OLD CHURCH - DAY**

The last AA stragglers puff cigarettes in addicted unity.

**INT. BLACK PORCHE - OUTSIDE CHURCH - SAME**

A beat-up, 1980's black classic.

Shelby, hiding, is slouched low in the passenger seat.

Randy, smoking, behind the wheel. He watches as Maya leaves the church and crosses to her car, climbs in.

RANDY

Okay. Coast is clear.

Shelby scooches up, sees Maya's car pull away.

Randy blows out a stream of smoke.

SHELBY

Roll your window down.

He complies.

SHELBY (cont'd)  
Forgot how claustrophobic it is in  
this car.

RANDY  
Plenty of room for us back in the  
day. If I recall.

SHELBY  
Stop recalling.

RANDY  
Good times, girl.

SHELBY  
Drunk. Stupid. Dangerous.

He tosses the cigarette out the window, turns fully toward  
her.

RANDY  
Hey, c'mon.

She looks at him. He's still sexy as fuck.

RANDY (cont'd)  
So I'm not gonna ask. No questions.  
Cuz I promised you I wouldn't... but,  
you okay?

She reaches into her jacket, pulls out a wad of cash, hands  
it over. He takes it, but gently grasps her hand. She lets  
him.

RANDY (cont'd)  
(seductive)  
Drunk. Stupid. Dangerous.

He inspects her palm. Their fingers entwine. Flesh memory.  
She indulges him.

SHELBY  
Randy.

She pulls her hand away.

He reaches behind her seat, leans close. Faces inches apart.  
He rests one hand on her thigh. He's playing her -- knows  
the hook.

He slides his hand slowly between her legs.

Her body overrides her mind, thrums with instantaneous sexual heat, history.

He palms her groin, starts rubbing.

RANDY

Ow! Fuck.

She digs her nails into his wrist.

RANDY (cont'd)

Let go!

She does.

RANDY (cont'd)

Shit. That hurt.

He pulls up a satchel from behind her seat, puts it in his lap, opens it to reveal rows of illegal prescription meds.

He lifts an unmarked vial filled with pills, hands it to her. She stuffs it in her pocket.

RANDY (cont'd)

Careful with mixing this--

SHELBY

Got it.

She abruptly climbs out of the car, slams the door shut.

Dismayed, he watches her stride away.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - DAY**

Shelby enters. Listens for sound. Sees the egg mess on the kitchen floor.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S BEDROOM - DAY**

Shelby stands in the doorway watching Helene asleep in her chair. In her lap the framed photo and the flannel shirt. Shelby puts the photo back on the shelf, picks up the shirt.

Sensing her, Helene rouses, smiles, watches as Shelby strips off her bra, shirt and puts on the flannel.

HELENE

Our first time... you were wearing it...

Shelby does up a few buttons, sits on the ottoman facing Helene, massages her feet, legs.

HELENE (cont'd)  
Who knew I was such a pervy bottom?

SHELBY  
I did. Obviously.

HELENE  
How was the meeting? Everything work out?

Shelby nods, looks down.

SHELBY  
I saw you made me some eggs.

HELENE  
(sighs)  
I was gonna clean it up.

SHELBY  
I got it.

Helene cups Shelby's face.

HELENE  
Here we are then.

SHELBY  
Yeah... so....

HELENE  
So, it is as it should be. It's my one birthday wish. I'm ready.

Shelby rests in Helene's gaze.

SHELBY  
(finally)  
Applesauce or pudding?

Helene picks up a vial on the table next to her, opens it, pulls out a medicinal joint. Smiles.

HELENE  
First this. Happy birthday to me.

**EXT. MAYA & NIKKI'S HOUSE - DAY**

NIKKI, 60s, black, a Queen Latifah ferocity who is chill about almost everything, is up high on a ladder overseeing TWO YOUNG BLACK MEN repairing the roof.

MAYA (O.S.)  
You best get down off that ladder.

NIKKI  
Girl, please, let me be.

Below, Maya carries a few Giant Eagle grocery bags.

Four scraggly MUTTS congregate around her, watching Maya's every move. It's obvious she's the Big Dog in this pack.

MAYA  
(calling up)  
Saw Baby Girl at the meeting.

NIKKI  
(to herself)  
Here we go.

MAYA  
I'm smelling something. She's up to no good. She doesn't see that I see but I see. And it stank.

NIKKI  
What are we cooking to bring later?

MAYA  
What am I cooking?

NIKKI  
You making that corn dish?

Nikki climbs down.

MAYA  
I'm gonna talk to Helene about it.

NIKKI  
Make extra so we can have some this week.

Nikki reaches her. Takes the bags, sets them down, envelops Maya in big, hard hug.

MAYA

Now is not the time for Baby Girl to fuck up.

NIKKI

You don't see straight when it comes to Helene.

MAYA

I don't want to hear--

NIKKI

She was your first taste. Her pussy juice DNA molecules are all up inside you.

MAYA

A thousand years ago.

NIKKI

Don't matter.

MAYA

Stop with your nonsense.

NIKKI

If you're worried about Shelby's sobriety talk to *her* about it. Leave the Old One out of it.

MAYA

(sudden flood of emotion)

The "Old One" practically saved my life. I'm telling you right now -- if Shelby -- I will cut her.

Nikki pulls Maya in close.

NIKKI

C'mon, thug, put your weapons down, let's get ready.

(seductive)

We have some free time, y'know.

Nikki kisses Maya, who tries to wriggle free.

MAYA

You want my corn dish or what?

NIKKI

Oh, I want your corn dish...

**INT. HELENE AND SHELBY'S HOUSE - DAY****MONTAGE**

- 1) Shelby prepares a bath, pours fragrant oils into the steamy water.
- 2) Helene and Shelby submerged in the bathwater. Candles flicker, cast little bouncing lights on the walls. They share a joint. The vibe is bliss.
- 3) Shelby washes Helene's back.
- 4) Out of the water, Helene sits on the bathtub bent forward as Shelby spreads lotion on her back, buttocks, arms.
- 5) Shelby and Helene make love. We feel the deep reservoir of knowing and history.

**INT. HELENE AND SHELBY'S BEDROOM - DAY**

On the bed, Shelby straddles Helene. An after-sex drowsy intimacy. Fingers entwined.

HELENE

Tell me again... about James. When it happened.

Shelby sighs, her brain reaching for the words.

SHELBY

He was sitting up in the hospital bed. Wearing an oxygen mask. He kept looking past me, his eyes sweeping the room. He slipped the mask down then raised his arms like he was conducting a symphony, and he whispered, 'Quiet... slowly.' He wasn't talking to me. Some spirits were in the room, and he was directing them to be careful, to carry him off slowly. In his eyes, death didn't look like a fist anymore. There was something warm and soft calling to him. He dropped his arms, leaned back, drew in one last breath... and my brother was gone. I put my arms around his head and felt the heat of him - blood warm - drain away.

Helene gently brushes Shelby's cheek - wet from tears.



HELENE

Who was there, you think?

SHELBY

I don't know.

Pause.

HELENE

I'll come get you. When it's your  
time. I'll come for you.

**INT. MAYA & NIKKI'S HOUSE - KITCHEN**

Several pots simmering on the stove. The dogs sit obediently on the floor, eyes fixed on Maya's every move.

Maya takes a pan of cornbread out of the oven, places it on the counter to cool.

She steps over to the kitchen table where several books on ALS are prominent.

The ALS Association website is open on her computer to a page for "Stem Cell Research."

One of the books, "Navigating Life with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis," is filled with Post-it notes of various colors.

She finishes putting gift wrap on a copy of the same book, writes "For Shelby" on a small gift card that sticks to the package.

One of her dogs plants his snout on her lap.

Maya closes her eyes.

**BEGIN FLASHBACK:**

**EXT. MAYA AND NIKKI'S HOUSE - DAY**

July. Heat shimmers off the asphalt.

A younger (10ish years ago) and very drunk Maya, barefoot, in shorts and a ratty, stained t-shirt bolts out of the house. Stricken with terror she rushes toward her aging Ford Escort.

Beyond drop dead drunk, she hits the ground hard, crawls toward the car.

Lifting herself up, she pounds on the closed windows, scanning the inside.

She tries the passenger door. Locked. The back passenger side door. Locked.

She races to the other side of the car, trips, hits the pavement hard, scrapes her knees, legs, hands. Drooling, bloodied, face wet with tears.

From the ground, she reaches for the handle on the back driver's side door. It opens.

Inside, a dog is curled up on the floor of the car. Dead.

Sobbing. Hysterical. She pulls the lifeless dog into her lap. Rocks and cradles him in her arms.

A car pulls up. Door opens. A younger Helene jumps out, beelines to Maya. She drops to her knees, gently lifts the pup from Maya's arms, sets him on the ground, pulls Maya close.

**END FLASHBACK.**

**INT. MAYA AND NIKKI'S HOUSE - PRESENT**

Maya buries her face in her dog's fur. Murmurs love. The other dogs gather close, waiting their turn.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - DAY**

Soulful R&B music from upstairs fills the house.

Shelby opens dozens of red Seconal capsules from the medicine bottle she got from Randy and pours the contents into a mortar. With a pistil, she grinds the substance into a fine powder.

A jar of applesauce and bowl on the counter.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S BEDROOM - SAME**

A box of Christmas decorations is open on the floor. Helene has arranged strings of lights on the bed in the loose shape of a Christmas tree, similar to the shape poem from earlier. She flings strands of tinsel and garland here and there.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S KITCHEN - SAME**

Shelby swipes the empty capsules into her hand to throw away.

BAM! BAM! LOUD KNOCKS on the front door.

DOORBELL RINGS.

Startled, she drops the capsules, whacks the mortar onto its side, watches horrified as some of the powdery mixture spills partly on the counter partly on the floor.

SHELBY

Shit.

BAM! BAM! BAM! More KNOCKS. DOORBELL.

HELENE (O.S.)

You okay?

SHELBY

I got it!

Rattled, she unconsciously picks up the mortar and carries it to the front door, which she swings open.

JADA, late 30s, black, earnest, a warm sexy, upbeat vibe, wears a U.S. Postal Service uniform, stands holding a very large package adorned with Happy Birthday stickers.

Shelby is shell-shocked, clings to the bowl.

JADA

(relieved)

Am I glad you're home. I didn't want whoever is having a birthday --

(looks at name on package)

Helene.

(beat)

Happy Birthday, Helene. I didn't want to *not* get you this package on your special day. It's Sunday delivery. Priority express.

(beat)

I'm Jada, by the way. Your new mail carrier.

Jada looks at the mortar in Shelby's hands. Senses something's off with Shelby.

JADA (cont'd)  
 I can just set the package down for  
 you. It's heavy. Would that help?

Shelby backs up, Jada steps in, puts the package on the  
 floor.

JADA (cont'd)  
 (re: the mortar)  
 What do you got there?

SHELBY  
 (thinks fast)  
 Making popovers. They really puff up  
 nicely if you grind... the baking  
 powder until it's...  
 (beat)  
 ...super fine.

Jada smiles.

JADA  
 Hmm. I've never heard of that.

The music from upstairs gets louder.

JADA (cont'd)  
 You having a party?

Shelby, suddenly light-headed, braces herself against the  
 door.

Instinctively, Jada reaches out, holds Shelby's arm. Their  
 eyes meet, linger a bit too long as some wavy gravitational  
 vibe connects them.

SHELBY  
 Whew. Sorry.

JADA  
 You alright, Helene?

SHELBY  
 I forgot to eat. I'm not Helene.

JADA  
 Oh.

SHELBY  
 Shelby.

JADA  
 Shelby, do you need help?

SHELBY

No. No. No.

JADA

Get something to eat, and have a  
blessed day.

Jada leaves.

Shelby closes the door, leans back, collects herself.

**INT. PARKER'S PICK-UP TRUCK - DAY**

Parker drives. Scobie, all femmed out, sings loud and adorably off-key to the radio.

Parker lowers the volume.

PARKER

That dress is sick on you.

Scobie blossoms, eats it up.

SCOBIE

Let's stop at Whole Foods and get  
some of their guacamole? It's on our  
way.

Parker is happy, playfully slides her hand between Scobie's legs.

SCOBIE (cont'd)

Boo! Watch the road!

**EXT. MAYA'S AND NIKKI'S HOUSE/INT. SUV - DAY**

Nikki places a covered casserole dish in the backseat of their black SUV, which is covered with containers of prepared food. A bag of wrapped birthday gifts.

Maya, caught in worry, appears carrying one more covered bowl.

NIKKI

(re: casserole)

Keep that on your lap.

Nikki opens the passenger door for Maya. She gets in. Nikki leans down, kisses her cheek.

NIKKI (cont'd)  
When you stressed you sure do cook.

Maya's distant. Nikki climbs behind the wheel. Starts the engine.

MAYA  
I'd appreciate it if you would start taking this situation with Helene seriously.

NIKKI  
Wallow in it like you do? No thanks.

Maya turns away, stares out the window.

MAYA  
Drive.

NIKKI  
Stopping at your ma's on the way, right?

Maya doesn't answer. Nikki flicks on the radio - LOUD. Pulls away.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S BEDROOM - DAY**

It could be night. Curtains closed. Candles lit. The room is like a galaxy, glowing with twinkling Christmas lights draped on the bed (like the Christmas tree shape poem).

On it, Helene rests against pillows, wrapped in Shelby's flannel shirt. She's radiant -- washed in a kind of laser-focused acceptance.

Shelby, too, in this moment, is completely present. She feeds Helene the applesauce. The bowl is almost empty.

Helene caresses Shelby's face. Touches her eyes, nose, forehead.

Helene feels the meds. Woozy and warm.

Tears fill Shelby's eyes.

The drugs cause Helene to see a barely there aura of glowing light around Shelby.

Helene's eyes are alive in a blurry swirl of joy.

HELENE

(awe)  
Oh, Shelby, here it is, right here...  
it's the whole world...

Long emotion-filled beat. Then--

Peace shatters as a wave of awful nausea hits Helene hard.

SHELBY

What's wrong?

Helene bolts up, pushes Shelby aside. Panic.

HELENE

I've got to--

Her feet hit the floor. Knees give out. She reaches for a wastebasket, pulls it to her face.

Shocked, Shelby drops next to her. Helene bats her away as she vomits violently.

Shelby pulls Helene's hair out of the way and grabs tissues to wipe at Helene's face as she continues to retch.

Helene trembles, clings to the wastebasket.

SHELBY

(gentle)  
Breathe... try to breath...

Shelby rubs Helene's back.

HELENE

(overwrought)  
Goddammit to hell.

**DOORBELL. DOORBELL. DOORBELL.** Louder here as the chime box is in the hallway right outside the door.

SHELBY

Just breathe... Ignore it...

DOORBELL. DOORBELL.

SHELBY (cont'd)

Fuck.

HELENE

You go. Just go. Please. I need a minute.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - DAY**

Wrecked, Shelby swings open the front door.

ARLO, white, a gender-fluid BOY of 11, and his sister, TANNY, white, 13, both wearing their Girl Scout uniforms, stand holding six boxes of Girl Scout cookies.

ARLO  
Your wife ordered these. Boy, she sure does love Do-Si-Dos.

TANNY  
They're not married.

ARLO  
Why?

TANNY  
Because they don't believe in it.

ARLO  
Why?

TANNY  
Cuz why co-op a hetero-normative institution that subjugates women.

This flies over Arlo's head.

ARLO  
I like the Samoas best, Tanny hates them.

TANNY  
I do not. They're just not my fave. I like the --

Shelby grabs the boxes, closes the door without a word.

She haphazardly drops the cookies on the floor as she makes her way to the kitchen. She picks up her cellphone from the counter.

She grabs a glass, fills it with water, downs it.

She opens drawers, searching for something. Finally, sees what she wants. A hammer. She dials a number.

SHELBY  
Hey. I need another bottle. Don't ask.

(MORE)



SHELBY (cont'd)

(beat)

What? Fuck you. No! Wait. Wait.  
Randy.

(fuck)

Okay. I'll do it.

She hangs up.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S - BEDROOM HALLWAY - DAY**

Shelby reaches the landing in the hallway. She clutches the hammer. Box of cookies under her arm.

She enters the bedroom, where Helene, stunned and weak, is back on the bed.

SHELBY

Do-Si-Dos.

Shelby hands Helene the box, grabs the ottoman, carries it to the hallway, climbs up, SMASHES the doorbell chime box to bits. It whines a slow death.

She drops the hammer on the floor, climbs down, gets up onto the bed next to Helene, who shivers.

Shelby opens the cookies, lifts one to Helene's mouth, who takes a bite. They share the cookie, then another. Sip water from a glass on the bedside table.

Both struggle to process what happened.

Finally, Shelby climbs up onto Helene's lap, straddling her. She holds Helene's face, gazes into her eyes.

HELENE

I do love Do-si-dos.

(beat)

I'm sorry. I didn't take the compazine, for nausea. I thought the weed--

SHELBY

What? We went through this over and--

HELENE

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

SHELBY

No. I should have asked you. Made sure. I should have fucking asked you. I fucked up.

HELENE  
Please Shelby... don't.

SHELBY  
You're shivering.

Shelby wraps her arms around her close.

HELENE  
Oh, Shelby. I'm sorr--

SHELBY  
Shhhh... shhhh... it's okay...

**INT. HELENE'S AND SHELBY'S BEDROOM - LATER**

Spent and sated with cookies, Helene sleeps.

Shelby slides quietly out of bed, puts on the flannel shirt, jeans, her boots.

**EXT. ALLEGHENY CEMETERY - MAUSOLEUM - DAY**

A small mausoleum tucked far away from easy access. Round and ancient with thick pillars.

Randy sits on the ground, leans up against a pillar, smokes a blunt.

He watches Shelby below, walking up the slope to him, weaving through a garden of graves back-lit by the dipping sun. She is a vision of melancholy.

Reaching Randy, she slides to the ground next to him. He offers her the blunt, she takes a deep, satisfying hit. Finally...

SHELBY  
No kissing.

He considers this.

RANDY  
Alright.

She pulls a condom from her pocket, hands it to him.

RANDY (cont'd)  
I got condoms.

She looks right through him.

RANDY (cont'd)  
Okay, I don't.

She casually unbuttons her shirt, exposing her breasts.

SHELBY  
(re: condom)  
Put it on.

He stamps out the blunt. Unzips his jeans. Gets the condom on.

She rises, straddles his legs, unzips her own jeans, pulls them down.

She reaches for his already hard cock.

SHELBY (cont'd)  
You're easy.

She maneuvers her body, slips him inside her. He gasps.

Shelby moves against his cock slow and deliberate. She's tired. A rough fuck is not in her.

Randy jerks fast, groans, cums quickly.

She lets him stay inside her, rests her head against his shoulder, closes her eyes for a moment.

RANDY  
Can I- y'know, do you?

She leans back, glares at him.

RANDY (cont'd)  
Dude, you're dripping.

SHELBY  
(mocking)  
Dude, you're CVS. I'm a customer. I paid you what you wanted. We're done.

He recoils, a bit aggressively pushes her off of him, stuffs himself back in his jeans.

RANDY  
Jesus, fuck. I thought you'd...

Shelby zips up, stays seated.

RANDY (cont'd)  
Fucking moody bitch.

He rises, rummages through his satchel, tosses a bottle of pills at her.

RANDY (cont'd)  
 FYI. It's enough to kill you.  
 (beat)  
 Or is it for grandma?

She doesn't take the bait.

RANDY (cont'd)  
 Go fuck yourself.

His injured ego stomps off, muttering obscenities.

Shelby looks at the bottle. Opens it. Stares at the red Secondals. She takes one out, rolls it around with her fingers.

She pulls the capsule apart, pours the powder onto her tongue. Faster delivery.

She watches the sunset, lets the drug seep into her body. Feels like God. Then sorrow punches her hard in the gut -- she lets the tears come.

**EXT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT**

Shelby climbs out of her old Mustang, spies Parker's truck and Nikki's black SUV.

The lights from inside the house pulse with warmth. Music plays.

She steps onto the porch, looks in the picture window.

Through the blinds, she sees Helene, adorned in tinsel and garlands, Maya, Nikki, Scobie, and Parker all gathered around the large dining table covered with food, wine, beer, empties, and birthday gifts, some still wrapped.

They're playing Scobie's game of "Does my body need this?" She grabs various items and hands them out. The vibe is loose, relaxed fun.

**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Shelby, a wee bit high still from the meds, enters quietly, watches as Scobie hands Helene the jar of applesauce.

SCOBIE  
Your body will tell the truth.

Helene holds the jar over her heart with her arm, locks her fingers together. Her hands visibly tremble.

HELENE  
Does my body need this?

She pulls her fingers -- they fly apart.

SCOBIE  
Aha! Applesauce, bad. Too much sugar  
and pesticides. Boo.  
(beat)  
Let's try--

Shelby approaches.

HELENE  
There you are.

SCOBIE  
Shel-bell! Surprise!

PARKER  
Bet you weren't expecting us.

HELENE  
(to Shelby)  
C'mere you.

Shelby, in shock, sits in the chair next to Helene.

MAYA  
I know Helene hates to celebrate her  
birthday, but sometimes friends know  
better.

HELENE  
(whispers to Shelby)  
Forgive them. Please.

NIKKI  
The Old One came down the stairs  
looking like a disco ball. Ready to  
par-tay.

HELENE  
(to Nikki)  
Thank you, Princess.

SCOBIE  
 (super excited)  
 And now that you're here, Helene can  
 open the big box!

The "big box" that Jada delivered sits on the floor by the table.

Maya picks up an empty plate, fills it with food, hands it to Shelby. Peace offering.

SHELBY  
 Thanks.

Parker rises, steps into the kitchen, opens the fridge, grabs two PBRs, tosses one to Nikki, then grabs a knife.

Maya gives Nikki the hairy eyeball. Nikki cracks open the beer anyway.

Parker slices the tape on the big box, opens it.

Helene reaches for the opened bottle of red wine, it slips slightly from her hand, Shelby steadies it, pours the wine for her.

HELENE  
 Eat up, love.

SCOBIE  
 Can we pul-lease show you what's in  
 the box?

Parker reaches in, pulls out a huge birthday card. Something graphic and silly.

HELENE  
 Open it for me.

Parker takes the card from the envelope, holds it open for Helene to read.

HELENE (cont'd)  
 (suspicious)  
 What are you fat asses up to?

Parker reaches in the box, pulls out a sand bucket beach toy set. The bucket is filled with sand. She puts it on the table in front of Helene.

HELENE (cont'd)  
 (playing along)  
 We're going to the beach?

Parker pulls out several large beautiful conch shells, puts them on the table. Sticking out of one shell are plane tickets.

Helene reads them. Puzzled.

HELENE (cont'd)  
Boston? July?

In another conch shell are theater tickets. Helene reads them, smiles.

HELENE (cont'd)  
P-town.  
(to Shelby)  
The premiere of your play.

Shelby's eyes go wide.

SHELBY  
(not happy)  
What?!

SCOBIE  
(can't contain  
herself)  
We got an Airbnb on the beach for a week. All of us. And tixs for opening night.

MAYA  
(to Helene)  
We're gonna stay positive and carry you through this. It's just a few months away.

Helene forces a smile, takes a big sip of wine, looks at her friends who stare back at her like eager puppies, except for Shelby.

**EXT. BACK PORCH - LATER**

Shelby smokes a cigarette. Exhausted, utterly spent.

Nikki steps out. They share the smoke.

NIKKI  
Baby Girl, you think I want to sit on the beach gettin' sand up my black ass for five days with you all? Hell no. But I will. If Helene can.

SHELBY  
Someone should have asked me.

MAYA (O.S.)  
Then it wouldn't have been a  
surprise.

Nikki quickly hands Shelby the cigarette. Maya approaches,  
holding the gift-wrapped book on ALS.

MAYA  
You need our support too.

On cue, Nikki heads back in as Maya steps up beside Shelby.  
A long beat. Maya hands Shelby the gift-wrapped book.

MAYA (cont'd)  
For you.  
(beat)  
Open it later.

SHELBY  
Thanks?

MAYA  
I smelled weed on you. And your  
eyes--

SHELBY  
I'm fucking sober.

MAYA  
You're not clean and sober.

Shelby can't with Maya right now.

SHELBY  
How's the view?

MAYA  
What?

SHELBY  
Up my ass. How's the view?

LOUD LAUGHTER from inside..

MAYA  
I'm going in for cake.

Maya (this isn't over) heads inside. Shelby pulls in a few  
deep breaths.



**INT. HELENE & SHELBY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS**

Maya steps up behind Helene, who holds a sizable, sparkling purple dildo with a ribbon on it over her heart with her arm, fingers locked.

HELENE

Does my body need this?

She play-acts trying to pull her fingers apart. They stay locked.

Shelby appears.

HELENE (cont'd)

(re: dildo)

It might not be big enough. What do you say, Shelby?

SHELBY

Purple looks good in you.

Scobie squeals. They all laugh. Parker carries a cake to the table. The candles shimmer and dance with light.

Helene takes the dildo and plants it fully erect into the bucket of sand as Shelby wends her arms around her from behind.

HELENE

(softly)

It ain't over till it's over.

Their faces love-lit by the candles.

Helene takes in a breath and blows.

FADE OUT: