OLD DYKES

Pilot

By Elise D'Haene

EPISODE 101: "Does my body need this?"

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WGA Registered
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)

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)


(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)

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


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.
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.

(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.

Hmmm. I've never heard of that.

The music from upstairs gets louder.

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.

Whew. Sorry.

You alright, Helene?

I forgot to eat. I'm not Helene.

Oh.

Shelby.

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)
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 sorrr--

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 Seconals. 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: