

Coping with Autumn

By

Megan Ann Jacobs

Dedicated to my incredibly loving and supportive husband,
Grant Nagel.

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Cast of Characters

<u>Autumn</u> :	A woman in her twenties haunted by emotions and feelings that does not understand.
<u>Dee**</u> :	Autumn's lost innocence. She is small, child-like, and silent. Can be played by someone over 18.
<u>Joy**</u> :	Autumn's adventurous side. She is gun, carefree, and impulsive.
<u>Vera**</u> :	Autumn's protector. She is powerful, fearless, and full of rage.
<u>Ensemble Member 1 (female)</u> :	Dakota, Kasey, Jury
<u>Ensemble Member 2 (male)</u> :	Father, Steven, Lawyer, Jury
<u>Ensemble Member 3 (female)</u> :	Mother, Jury
<u>Ensemble Member 4 (male)</u> :	Jake, The Monster, Alex, Jury
<u>Ensemble Member 5 (any*)</u> :	Dr. Weber, Judge (*can change pronouns as needed based on choice)
<u>**</u> :	Diversity of size, age, and ethnicity be explored for these roles, as they are not meant to look like Autumn.

Scene

A bare white stage.

Time

Present day.

ACT I

Scene 1

Lights come up on Autumn who is sitting on the floor center stage. The stage is white and bare.

AUTUMN

Yeah, I see you. Oh, what? This isn't one-sided glass, you know. You just gonna ignore me? Hey, heyyyyyy, you. Yeah, you! You in the second row. Oh, don't act so surprised. Of course I can see you. You can see me, can't you? First they send in troves of so-called doctors to interrogate me, and now they send you to sit and watch me? Oh, I'm sorry 'observe' me.

(Beat.)

I already told them that I don't know what happened. So, can you please stop staring at me? It's creeping me out!

(Beat.)

Fine, keep staring. See if I care.

Autumn gets up and scans the audience. She gets really close to an audience member.

AUTUMN

Don't worry. I'm not gonna bite.

She says her next line suddenly, and to a different audience member.

AUTUMN

Boo!

Depending on the reaction Autumn either laughs at the audience member, or she ad-libs about the audience member's nerves of steel.

AUTUMN

Sorry, I just couldn't help myself. Yeah, yeah, I bet you all think I'm just some punk asshole wasting your precious tax dollars, but it's not what you think. I didn't use to be this way. Hell, I didn't even start swearing until I got here. I guess I feel like I've already tried all the other words, and no one listened. Have you noticed that? You can say something a hundred times, and no one will notice. But you add in a few fucks, and suddenly the whole room is listening. Except, the funny thing is, they don't know what you said. All they heard was the curse. Maybe that's why I'm swearing at you. At least I know you're hearing something. I just don't want to be forgotten here. I know it's over for me. I can't take back what I did. I

AUTUMN

just...I wish that someone understood. Understood why I really ended up here. All anyone knows is that I killed my boyfriend. Stabbed him half a dozen times in the chest. One after the other after the other, until he wasn't him anymore...

Autumn feels the tension in the air and comes back to the audience.

AUTUMN

It feels like some of you may have pulled back a little bit. Sorry. I shouldn't have started with the whole 'killed my boyfriend' thing. I've got to stop doing that. Introductions are usually a better way to start. So here goes nothing...my name is Autumn. Kids at school used to ask me why my parents didn't name me Spring instead, since Autumn was the season of dying. "I don't know," I would say, "but at least they didn't name me Winter, because I'd rather be dying than dead." Thinking back on it now, they should have named me Winter. But at the time, Autumn fit me better. You see with Autumn you never know what color you're gonna to get. No one ever seemed to notice the tree in our yard, until the fall came, and the leaves changed colors. It was still the same tree, now just with a little extra. I loved watching the transition from my bedroom window. I related, somehow. Leaves are extensions of the tree, but at the same time not the tree. The tree nourishes the leaves, cares for them, and can either keep them going through the harsh cool of winter or let them go. It's pretty amazing if you think about it. I was always trying to figure out what kind of tree I was growing up. Never quite figured out the specifics though. I only knew that I was definitely one of the trees with the leaves that died.

Autumn goes stage left as the lights shift. Half of the room transforms into a child's bedroom. Autumn puts her hair in pigtails.

AUTUMN

I grew up in a loving home. Just a mom, a dad, and me.

Mother and Father come on stage and begin a loving dance in the glow of a spotlight that follows them.

AUTUMN

My parents loved each other. Every memory I had of them they were laughing, dancing, hugging, or kissing until one day my dad lost his job. They started fighting a lot.

Their dance mirrors the story.

AUTUMN

I was six when their relationship became about dollar signs, or lack thereof, and that's when he started drinking. Then it became a routine. Mom would come home, they'd fight, he'd drink, and then, he'd pass out on the couch. Fight, drink, out. Fight, drink, out. Fight, drink, out. Night after night, until one night, dad didn't pass out.

Mother is spun off stage and Father walks slowly towards Autumn. While saying her next lines, Autumn tucks herself into bed.

AUTUMN

He came into my room. I remember the burning smell of liquor waking me up. I froze. He came up real close and whispered in my ear.

FATHER

Shhh, everything's gonna be all right. Daddy just needs a little something.

He lifts the covers and crawls into bed with her.

AUTUMN

Then I don't know. Something crazy happened.

Dee enters and offers her hand to Autumn, who takes it. Dee then takes her place in the bed with her father.

AUTUMN

I wasn't there anymore. I don't know what happened. Dee does though. Oh, that's Dee. This was the first time we met. Dee knows what happened, but she won't tell me. She never tells me what happens when I go away. Actually, Dee never says anything at all. You see whenever Dee comes around, my mind goes blank. I have a lot blanks from that time in my life. My parents ended up getting a divorce the following year. My mom and I moved out of Wisconsin and to Indiana. I didn't experience another blank for a long time.

Autumn removes her pigtails as the lights shift. The scene transforms into a high school classroom. The ensemble fill the desks.

AUTUMN

This is my old high school. That's Jake. I had the biggest crush on Jake.

Autumn sits at the open desk.

AUTUMN

I would sit and watch him flirt with the other girls and make believe he was talking to me. Pathetic right? I was pretty shy back then, actually I was pretty shy always. Between that and Dee not talking, I don't think I would have learned a single social skill if it wasn't for this one act of kindness. Well, that and Joy, but we'll talk about her later.

A bell goes off and Dakota approaches Autumn from one of the other desks as everyone else disperses.

DAKOTA

Hey, you're Autumn right?

Autumn looks up at her, almost afraid. She is incredibly shy and almost unrecognizable from how she was during her opening monologue.

AUTUMN

Uh, yeah.

DAKOTA

Hi, I'm Dakota. I don't think we've talked before. You're new here, right?

AUTUMN

Uh...Yeah.

DAKOTA

How are you adjusting to the new school?

AUTUMN

Okay...

DAKOTA

I wanted to ask if you were going to the dance this weekend.

AUTUMN

Oh, uh, no.

DAKOTA

What? Why not?

AUTUMN

I don't know.

DAKOTA

Well, could you tell me who would know?
(Awkward silence.)

DAKOTA

That was a joke.

AUTUMN

Oh.

DAKOTA

Come on. Why aren't you going?

AUTUMN

Uh... I don't know...no one to go with, I guess.

DAKOTA

That's a dumb reason not to go.

AUTUMN

Sorry.

DAKOTA

No reason to be sorry, I was just gonna to invite you to a party at my house after. My parents are out of town, and we have a pool.

AUTUMN

That sounds nice.

DAKOTA

It should be a blast! And hey, I have an extra ticket. One of my friends can't go, because a cousin is getting married or something. I can give you hers, if you want.

AUTUMN

Uh, I don't think so...

DAKOTA

Seriously, it's no problem. And hey, when you get to the dance, feel free to come find me, or I could come get you or something. Either way, I promise you won't have to dance alone.

Another bell rings.

DAKOTA

Shoot, I gotta go. If I'm late again, I'm gonna get detention. I'll give you the ticket tomorrow in class. See ya!

Lights shift as the scene changes back to Autumn's bedroom.

AUTUMN

At first, I thought it was some mean prank, but the next day she gave me the ticket. I couldn't believe it.

AUTUMN

Neither could my mother. She was thrilled that I was going to do something normal.

Mother enters carrying a beautiful dress.

MOTHER

Your first dance! Are you excited?

AUTUMN

I don't know.

MOTHER

Come on, you have to be excited. Look at this dress. It's beautiful and it's going on an even more beautiful young woman. Come on, smile, you're gonna look great!

AUTUMN

I don't think I should go.

MOTHER

Nonsense. You're going.

AUTUMN

Why?

MOTHER

Well, for starters bailing on your new friend and her party would be rude. If you do, you may never get invited to anything ever again.

AUTUMN

If I go, I may never get invited to anything ever again.

MOTHER

Oh, would you stop being dramatic?

(Mother looks at her and softens and comes to comfort her.)

You're going to be great, honey. It's normal to get nervous. New people, first dance, new school...it's a lot to take in. If you really don't want to go, we can just order in take out and watch movies. But it would be an awful shame to waste such a pretty dress.

AUTUMN

Okay...I'll go.

MOTHER

That's my girl! Remember, you can call me at any time and I'll come get you. No questions asked.

AUTUMN

Promise?

MOTHER

I promise. Now, what do you say, do we have a deal?

AUTUMN

Deal.

MOTHER

Good. Now quick, go get changed so you won't be late.

Lights shift and Autumn and Mother leave the stage. The ensemble rushes in and starts dancing as dance music begins to play and lights begin to illuminate a dance floor. Dakota is talking and dancing in a small group. Autumn enters slowly.

AUTUMN

I wanted so badly to join her. It looked fun, but I was way out of my element, and Dee was just as confused as I was. The more I watched the more anxious I became. I thought I was going to throw up. I was about to call it a night and run home with my tail between my legs and a full-blown panic attack when-

Joy jumps out from backstage and rushes to join the party. She is wearing a very sexy dress, and her hair is beautifully done.

DAKOTA

Autumn! I'm so glad you came! I was worried you might not show.

JOY

Of course I was coming! Ever hear of fashionably late?

DAKOTA

I have, but definitely not from you.

JOY

I think you'll find I'm full of surprises tonight.

Joy walks straight to Jake and kisses him long and hard. Jake is shocked, but pleasantly so. Dakota stares in awe. Autumn and Dee watch the group dance.

AUTUMN

And that's how I met Joy. She was fun, carefree, and impulsive. She found the strength to act on every secret desire I had and be who I was supposed to be. How everyone else was! She kissed Jake for crying out

AUTUMN

loud! Jake! The quarter back! I mean, this chick had some balls! We danced until the school shut the gym down. It was wild!

Music shuts off and everyone starts leaving. Dakota walks over to Joy who is hanging all over Jake.

DAKOTA

Hey, Autumn, you ready to go to my place? And before you ask, yes, you can bring your little boy toy.

JOY

What do you say Jake, wanna join me?

JAKE

I'm not sure-

DAKOTA

Come on, it'll be fun. Practically half the school is going to make an appearance.

JOY

Yeah, Jake, besides, if it turns out to be boring I'm sure we can find something to do.

Joy gives him a deep long kiss.

JAKE

You make a good point. I'm in!

Scene shifts to Dakota's home. People are talking, playing games, and drinking. During Autumn's monologue the scene plays out with Jake and Joy getting closer until they end up alone.

AUTUMN

I'd never drank before. There was so much going on. I remember the noise all around us. It was overwhelming...but I also remember Jake. Him smiling at me. Listening to me. Caring for me. I wanted that moment to last forever. So, even though I didn't really want Joy to drink, I didn't say a word. I mean, Jake was having a great time and so was I...so, why not? It started with a beer. Then it was some mixed drink, which I loved. It tasted like fruit and sugar! That's where I wanted to stop. But Joy just kept going. Another drink then a shot, and before I knew it, we were alone. I began to panic. Where was everyone? I kept telling Joy that I wanted to go home, but she kept looking at Jake. Sweet-eyed Jake. Jake that I had been swooning over ever since I saw him in Algebra. Jake who

AUTUMN

came to this party because of me, to be by *me*. How could we leave?

JAKE

You look so pretty right now.

JOY

You're not looking too bad yourself.

JAKE

You know, I've always thought you were cute.

JOY

Yeah, right. I bet you never knew who I was until I laid that killer kiss on those lips of yours.

JAKE

I mean, that may have gotten my attention in a more direct way, but seriously, I've always thought you were beautiful.

Autumn turns to the audience gleefully.

AUTUMN

Did you hear that, he thinks I'm beautiful!

Jake leans in and starts kissing Joy deeply, passionately. He starts to rub her legs, and then higher.

AUTUMN

Oh, no. No, no, this is too fast. Joy, Joy!

Joy pays no attention to Autumn.

JOY

What is it you want, Jake?

JAKE

Uh, well...

JOY

It's okay, you can tell me.

JAKE

I don't know.

JOY

Here, whisper it in my ear.

Jake whispers something in Joy's ear, and Autumn immediately begins to panic. Joy nods, and Jake smiles and starts to kiss her neck.

AUTUMN

Oh, no, please Joy. Not yet, I'm not re

JOY

You've been dreaming about Jake for months.

AUTUMN

Yes, but-

JOY

Now you have him. You want to keep him, don't you?

AUTUMN

Of course, but-

JOY

This is the only way you can.

AUTUMN

Maybe we can just slow things-

JOY

You know where slow gets you? Slow gets you close enough to see him hit it off with a different girl who does care for him enough to do these things. Is that what you want?

AUTUMN

No, but-

JOY

Look, it's not a big deal. Everyone else is doing it. You wanna become his girlfriend right?

AUTUMN

Well, yeah-

JOY

Then you have to show him you can do girlfriend things.

Joy grabs a blanket off the couch and covers herself as she gets down on her knees for Jake.

AUTUMN

It felt like my heart was about to beat out of my chest. Everything was blurry, and I just wanted to go home...but I wanted Jake. I wanted to be like all the other girls. I just wasn't ready yet.

JAKE

Are you sure this is okay?

JOY
Yes.

AUTUMN
No!

Joy disappears under the blanket and the lights on them go dark, leaving only Autumn illuminated.

AUTUMN
After, I called my mom to come pick me up.

Mother enters.

MOTHER
You wanna talk about it?

Autumn doesn't say anything.

MOTHER
Talking can help you know...I have been told I'm a good listener...okay...maybe not recently, but if you're gonna give me that look you at least have to give me the chance to deserve that devil's glare. Come on, I know something happened. Talk to me?

Autumn walks past her.

MOTHER
Fine, just get in the car.

Mother exits as the scene shifts behind them back to the classroom.

AUTUMN
My mom didn't ask about it again. I spent the entire weekend in my room. I felt sick. I felt ashamed. But worst of all, I felt alone. See, that's the thing about Joy. She never stays around for long.

Lights up on the classroom.

AUTUMN
Before I knew it, Monday came around. I don't remember much about school that day. The only thing on my mind was avoiding Jake like the plague. But it was a small school, and eventually, he found me.

Autumn tries to run the other direction.

JAKE
Hey, Autumn, hold up!

AUTUMN

I'm gonna be late.

JAKE

Autumn I know you have a free period next. Can we just talk for a sec? I tried to call you on Sunday, but your mom said you weren't feeling good. You okay?

AUTUMN

Yeah, I'm fine.

JAKE

You sure? Cause it feels like you've been trying to ghost me.

AUTUMN

I don't know what you're talking about.

JAKE

Look, about what happened-

AUTUMN

Stop.

JAKE

No, I'm sorry if-

AUTUMN

I said stop.

JAKE

I'm just trying to explain.

AUTUMN

Don't.

JAKE

I'm really sorry if you felt like you had to do that.

Jake freezes in place. Autumn comes down stage and sits, her feet dangling off the edge of the stage.

AUTUMN

Do you ever feel like a puddle? My mom thinks I'm a puddle. Well, technically she says-

Mother enters.

MOTHER

You're just an anxious mess. If you don't deal with it, one day you are going to stress-melt down into a puddle. So, get it together. Your life is not that hard.

Mother exits.

AUTUMN

She was right though. Except, I had melted into a puddle a long time ago. I felt like this small blob of water contaminating an otherwise perfect field of grass and flowers. I was this accidental appearance in a world that I didn't understand. And let me tell you what this world does to puddles like me. It drains them. Every flower, every blade of grass steals my water, slowly, but I feel every moment of it. Every uncomfortable social exchange, which for me was every social exchange, drained me. Now, I know that Jake was trying to be nice, hell, he hadn't even done anything wrong, but what he didn't understand is that if he kept talking, and I had to accept what happened, what I did, the last drop of water in my puddle would vanish, and me along with it.

Autumn goes back to her place with Jake, once in place, Jake starts to talk without sound.

AUTUMN

I could see his lips moving, but I couldn't hear the words. I had to make him go away, to be quiet, but I was frozen...powerless. Suddenly, I heard screaming in my head. It grew louder and louder, and my blood began to boil. It only took a second, before everything went red.

Vera storms onto the stage and bulldozes towards Jake, taking Autumn's place.

JAKE

I never wanted you to-

VERA

Shut up! I don't know what you think happened, but this is what's going to happen. You're going to turn around, go to class, and never speak to me again. I don't need your words-I need you gone!

JAKE

Autumn-

VERA

And before you think of telling all of your little football friends about this lie you have concocted-

JAKE

Oh, Autumn, I didn't tell-

VERA

I would remind you that liars always get what's coming to them.

JAKE

But I wasn't-

VERA

So I wouldn't say a damn word.

JAKE

But-

VERA

Leave, Jake. Now!

Jake storms off, passing Dakota as she enters the stage.

AUTUMN

Oh, no.

DAKOTA

What was that about?

VERA

None of your business.

AUTUMN

Vera, no.

DAKOTA

Excuse me?

VERA

You heard me.

Autumn tries to take Vera's place, but Vera pushes her back.

AUTUMN

Vera, wait, let me back in. Don't yell at her.

DAKOTA

What's the matter with you?

AUTUMN

It's not her fault.

VERA

Your stupid party, that's what's the matter with me.

DAKOTA

You looked like you were having a good time.

VERA

Then you're just as stupid Jake.

DAKOTA

Jake's a great guy, what's your problem?

VERA

Frankly, my problem is you.

AUTUMN

Vera stop it!

DAKOTA

I just thought you could use a friend.

VERA

I don't need your charity or your stupid boring parties.

DAKOTA

Screw you! I was just trying to be nice.

VERA

It's better than being around you.

AUTUMN

Vera!

Autumn watches in horror, as Dakota stomps off.

VERA

This would never have happened if she hadn't invited you to that party.

AUTUMN

But she wanted to be my friend.

VERA

You don't need one.

Vera exits.

AUTUMN

I stood in that spot for what felt like hours as my emotions crashed together. For a brief moment my puddle had turned into a tidal wave, but it was gone now, and all I was left with was the devastation of its wake. I knew Vera was mad, and I knew she was trying to protect me...but she was wrong...I did need a friend.

Autumn comes down center stage, and makes a quick shift from living in the pain of the memory to her original monologue demeanor.

AUTUMN

Isn't that the most dramatic story you've ever heard? I mean, it was just a little head, no big deal. Yet, to crazy Autumn it was the end of the world. So you see, I've been fucked up my whole life.

Autumn stares at the audience, waiting for a response.

AUTUMN

Why the hell are you still here? You want another story? Should I tell you about the time my dad showed up at my mom's house and told me he'd buy me a puppy if I left with him? Or should I tell you about the time he showed up at my school, drunk off his ass, got into a fist fight with my teacher, and was promptly arrested not just for assault, but for violating the restraining order I didn't know existed? You know what, I'm going to skip all that. How about I tell you about college? I liked college.

Lights focus back on the classroom. It fills with members of the ensemble, as Autumn takes a seat. The scene she describes next happens in pantomime.

AUTUMN

There wasn't all this social pressure. I thought there would be, but I went to college out of state, and it turns out if you don't bother anyone, they won't bother you. I could focus on class, study, and then hang out in the library until it was time for bed. I had a routine. I was comfortable. I don't think I ever really knew what that word meant until college. I had my shit together.

One day, in one of my English classes we were exploring poetry, and we had to submit a piece of our own. I wrote a poem about the dark. A silly little thing, but my teacher read it in class. I don't think I've ever been so proud and embarrassed at the same time. Anyways, I was packing up after class, when I felt a tap on my shoulder.

Kasey, a woman with heavy eye make-up and grunge clothes taps Autumn's shoulder.

KASEY

Hey, that was your poem, right?

AUTUMN

Yeah...

KASEY

It was awesome. I really liked it.

AUTUMN

You liked it?

KASEY

Yeah, it was deep and dreary, but still sort of beautiful. I love that kinda shit.

AUTUMN

Oh, well, thank you.

KASEY

You should hang back for a minute. There's this creative writing group I'm in, and we meet in the next room over in like ten minutes. You should come.

AUTUMN

Oh, I don't know. I couldn't share my poem. I'm not really what you would call, uh, outgoing.

KASEY

That's fine, just listen to the group. It's chill, so I promise no one will put you on the spot. I'll sit in the back with you, if you want.

AUTUMN

You would do that?

KASEY

Yeah, then I can give you the scoop on everyone. Most people are pretty cool, but there is this one guy who compulsively writes these not-so-subtle sonnets about this girl who is in no way shape or form into him. It's pretty great. I'll give you the play by play. He's on sonnet number 104. And yes, they do get more and more desperate.

They share a laugh. Joy comes on stage, but Autumn shoos her away.

AUTUMN

You know what, that sounds like fun.

KASEY

Sweet. Well, Autumn, my name is Kasey. You finish packing up, and I'll save us two seats in the back. See you in a sec.

Kasey exits. The scene shifts to Autumn's dorm room. Kasey enters the stage and plops on the couch half way through Autumn's monologue.

AUTUMN

I went to that creative writing group, and Kasey was awesome. She was this strong and fearless individual, but for some reason, she didn't drain my puddle. I could be my stupid, shy, self-conscious self and she liked me anyways! I kept going to the group, and before I knew it, I was the secretary. I loved it. Soon, Kasey and I started doing other things together. It began with getting smoothies before class, and then escalated to dorm room hang outs. And we talked. First about boring stuff, but then we started to really connect. I told her about high school.

KASEY

High school blows. I didn't have any friend's either. Don't sweat it. People suck, so fuck 'em.

AUTUMN

You don't suck.

KASEY

I do sometimes, everyone does. The difference is I'm not going to let anyone define me by those few moments. My decisions are my own.

AUTUMN

I don't know how you do that.

KASEY

Do what?

AUTUMN

Like, don't you care what people think about you?

KASEY

Not really. Why would I?

AUTUMN

I don't know, to fit in? So you can become who you're supposed to be and succeed in life?

KASEY

That's the big American lie right there. No one knows why they're here or what they are supposed to do. And success? What a load of horse shit. I've had the displeasure of knowing some of the most entitled assholes private school can produce, the ones who were handed a damn road map to life. And they are just as miserable as everyone else. The only difference is that they have a giant silver spoon up their ass.

AUTUMN

I guess.

KASEY

Oh, by the way, whatcha doing Friday night?

AUTUMN

Studying, why?

KASEY

Why don't you come over to my apartment instead? I'm having a small get together.

AUTUMN

Oh, I don't know. I don't really do parties, Kasey.

KASEY

Don't worry, it's nothing big. Just a few close friends, that's it. It'll be chill.

AUTUMN

I don't want to intrude.

KASEY

If you were going to be an intrusion, I wouldn't have invited you. Come on, I'd really like it if you came.

AUTUMN

You promise that it's just going to be a couple of people?

KASEY

Totally chill.

AUTUMN

All right, fine. I'll come.

KASEY

Awesome! Now that that's settled, what was that movie you were gonna show me? The Bride's Princess? Ugh, sounds like a boring chick flick.

AUTUMN

It's The Princess Bride and just give it a chance, I promise you are going to like it.

KASEY

Fine, but I pick next!

Autumn steps down stage and addresses the audience as the scene behind her shifts again, now to a larger room, similar to where the first party was. It is crowded.

AUTUMN

I don't really know why I decided to go, but I did. Her place was only a few blocks from campus, so I walked over. I remember counting the cars parked on the street and praying they were not representing the number of attendees for this 'chill get together,' but of with my luck, they were.

Autumn enters the apartment. She pushes through the bodies to Kasey, who clearly is already half way in the bag.

AUTUMN

So, this is just a few close friends, huh?

KASEY

Autumn! You came! I didn't think you'd come.

AUTUMN

Yeah, I'm full of surprises.

KASEY

Come on, have a drink.

Kasey hands Autumn a beer.

AUTUMN

Thanks. I don't think I'm going to stay long.

KASEY

Oh, come on, you haven't even given it a chance. I know what'll loosen you up.

Kasey reaches into her jacket pocket and pulls out a bag of assorted pills.

AUTUMN

What's that?

KASEY

Your ticket to a good night!

AUTUMN

I don't think so, Kasey.

KASEY

Don't be so uptight.

AUTUMN

Kasey, are you high right now?

KASEY

Just take a pill, and I promise you'll start to relax.

*Joy enters the stage. Autumn notices her presence,
the rest of the stage action freezes in place.*

AUTUMN

Joy, go back, I've got this under control.

JOY

Do you? 'Cause it looks like you're about ruin another
friendship.

AUTUMN

Joy, she's drunk.

JOY

She's having fun.

AUTUMN

And high.

JOY

She's chill.

AUTUMN

She's being stupid.

JOY

She's having a run-of-the-mill college experience.
Unlike some people.

AUTUMN

Joy, I don't want to do this. I'll have a beer, but
that's it.

JOY

Come on, girl, commit to having some fun for once.

AUTUMN

That does not seem fun to me.

JOY

And that's one of your many problems, you don't know
what fun is. And if you don't try anything, you'll
never find out. You have a chance here to make
something real and be part of a group. You know, have
more than one friend.

AUTUMN

I don't need a group. I have Kasey.

JOY
Not for long.

AUTUMN
What do you mean?

JOY
This is the first time you've been invited to meet her other friends. If you don't participate, your friendship is as good as over.

Kasey and the other characters unfreeze.

KASEY
Come on, Autumn. Just try some, I know you're a little goody-two-shoes, but for once can't you try something I want for a change?

AUTUMN
What's that suppose to mean?

KASEY
I don't know, I just feel like every time we hang we do what you wanna do. We watch the movies you wanna watch, order the food you wanna order, talk about your life.

AUTUMN
We do not only do what I want.

KASEY
Come on, just one night, let's do what I want. What's the harm?

JOY
Yeah, Autumn, what's the harm?

Joy reaches into the bag.

AUTUMN
No!

Autumn grabs Joy's hand. The bag of pills falls to the ground. Autumn forcibly drags Joy across stage and outside of the apartment.

JOY
Now look what you've done!

AUTUMN
What I've done? You made me make a scene! Just get out of here. Kasey isn't like everyone else. She'll understand.

JOY
No, she won't. And then you'll wish you listened to me.

AUTUMN
Just get out of here!

*Joy exits. Steven, who had watched the encounter
in the apartment, walks outside to join her.*

STEVEN
Hey.

AUTUMN
Hi.

STEVEN
Pretty crazy in there, huh?

AUTUMN
You could say that.

STEVEN
You a friend of Kasey?

AUTUMN
Yeah, do you know her?

STEVEN
A little, mostly through mutual friends though.

AUTUMN
Mutual friends?

STEVEN
I roomed with her old boyfriend. Man, she threw some
crazy parties my Sophomore year. I used to go to school
here.

AUTUMN
Use to?

STEVEN
Yeah, college didn't really agree with me. Thought it
was bullshit to pay thousands of dollars for classes I
didn't want to take that offered no job security. So, I
decided to take my chances in the real world.

AUTUMN
I get it, college isn't for everyone.

STEVEN
I work construction, my company is actually doing the
work for the new dorms on the south side of campus.

STEVEN

First time I've had less than an hour commute in a bit, it's pretty great. I'm actually just down the road from here. Saw the cars and figured I'd check it out, but judging from your expression, it's probably best for me to stay outside.

AUTUMN

Oh, it's fine, I just don't...uh...really do parties.

STEVEN

There are parties and then there are Kasey's parties. I'm guessing she's still got her bag of happiness?

AUTUMN

Yeah, how did-

STEVEN

She use to pressure her boyfriend to get into that stuff, me too for that matter. It's actually why he dumped her.

AUTUMN

Really?

STEVEN

Hey, I'm not trying to knock your friend. She's a nice enough girl, don't get me wrong, but I don't know...she's always just been a little much. But hey, I still came to check out what was going on, so what do I know? Guess, I have too much time on my hands now that I'm not juggling work and studies.

AUTUMN

Yeah, maybe.

STEVEN

Hey, you okay?

AUTUMN

Yeah, why?

STEVEN

I don't know, you just seem like you're stressed or something.

AUTUMN

I, uh, I don't know. Kasey and I, we got into a fight, it's so not a big deal-

STEVEN

You try something?

AUTUMN

No, but, uh...

STEVEN

Hey, don't let her pressure you. I made that mistake once. She gave me a couple little white pills and it made me so sick. I was puking colors I didn't even know were colors. So, long story short, you're smart to avoid it. Don't let her bully you into thinking otherwise.

AUTUMN

Thanks.

STEVEN

I'm Steven.

AUTUMN

I'm Autumn.

STEVEN

That's a beautiful name.

AUTUMN

Yeah, nothing says beautiful like the season of dying.

STEVEN

No, I'm serious. There's something enticing about a season that's so fleeting.

AUTUMN

Really? How so?

STEVEN

I guess it's the fragility of it. Makes you appreciate the here and now. You never know when it's going to change. Never knowing exactly when it's going to fall apart...beautiful.

AUTUMN

Huh, I never thought of it that way before.

STEVEN

I'm glad I could offer a fresh perspective.

(Beat.)

So, we've established that this isn't really your scene.

AUTUMN

Nor does it appear to be yours.

STEVEN

You catch on quick, Autumn. I do, however, love pizza. There's a cute little joint a few blocks away I was thinking of migrating to. I'd love some company.

AUTUMN

I am pretty hungry.

STEVEN

Is that a yes?

Autumn ponders it for a moment. She looks over her shoulder where Joy can be seen poking out from off stage. Joy motions for Autumn to go.

AUTUMN

Lead the way.

Steven exits, and the scene behind Autumn is cleared as she comes upstage to address the audience.

AUTUMN

And that's how I met Steven. There was just something about him. He had these incredibly beautiful eyes, I felt like I could get lost in them forever. It was good...great, actually. At first. He was my knight in shining armor. The first man I ever felt comfortable with. Steven was sophisticated and mature. He spoiled me. Like really spoiled me. He always seemed to have money. And who did he spent it on? Little ol' me! It was really sweet, but, if I'm being honest, it made me kind of anxious. With him I was the center of attention all the time and even though I'd say we didn't need to go out it was five-star dinners, movies all the time, and that's not even counting the gifts.

Steven enters with a necklace, and places it around Autumn's neck.

AUTUMN

Oh, Steven, it's beautiful.

STEVEN

Yes, you are. I love you.

Steven kisses Autumn lovingly on the cheek.

AUTUMN

I love you too!

Steven exits.

AUTUMN

It had only been two months, but I did love him. I was obsessed with him. Dreamed of him every night, saw him every day. It was magical. But Kasey was never as impressed.

Kasey enters the stage.

KASEY

What the hell, Autumn?

AUTUMN

What?

KASEY

Are you still mad at me about the party? Because we talked about that, and you said it was fine.

AUTUMN

It is fine.

KASEY

Then why haven't you returned any of my calls?

AUTUMN

You know I don't like talking on the phone.

KASEY

Okay, smart ass, how about my texts? And don't tell me texting is suddenly too social for you.

AUTUMN

Kasey, I'm sorry, I've just been busy.

KASEY

Oh, I know, with Steven.

AUTUMN

Yes, with Steven.

KASEY

I'm glad you're happy, but I miss you. So stop ignoring me for this guy, and let's hang out tonight.

AUTUMN

I can't.

KASEY

What do you mean you can't?

AUTUMN

I have plans with-

KASEY

Don't you dare say it.

AUTUMN

With Steven.

KASEY

Come on, Autumn. When was the last time we hung out?

AUTUMN

It's been a while.

KASEY

And when was the last time you saw Steven?

AUTUMN

Last night...well, technically this morning.

KASEY

Ohhhh, girl! See this is exactly why we need to hang out. I need to know these types of things. Come on, call and cancel. Blame it on me. I'm sure prince charming will understand.

AUTUMN

Okay, fine...I'll call him.

Autumn brings out her cell phone and dials.

KASEY

Oh, now you like phones?

AUTUMN

Oh, shut up. Okay, it's ringing...hey! I'm good, how are you? That's great. Actually, that's what I was calling you about, can we reschedule for tomorrow night instead? Well, it's just Kasey really wanted to hang out tonight, because we haven't seen each other in a long time. Oh, yeah, I know we had plans. Yes, I did tell her that, but-...oh, uh-huh. No, that makes sense. No, babe, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to-...yeah. Okay. Sounds good. I love you too. Bye.

Autumn hangs up.

KASEY

So?

AUTUMN

He said no.

KASEY

What?

AUTUMN

Well, we did have plans.

KASEY

That's ridiculous! He can't tell you no. He's not your damn boss.

AUTUMN

Come on, Kasey. How about we hang out next weekend? Please? I promise, we'll make a day of it! Do girl stuff.

KASEY

Girl stuff?

AUTUMN

I don't know, just, please, can we hang next weekend?

KASEY

Fine, but you better not flake.

AUTUMN

I won't.

KASEY

All right, I'll see you then. Text me.

AUTUMN

I will.

Kasey exits. Two chairs and a table with some plates are set up behind Autumn, and Steven takes a seat.

AUTUMN

But I didn't text her, because that night at dinner...

Autumn sits across from Steven.

AUTUMN

Hey...

STEVEN

What?

AUTUMN

I can tell you're mad at me. We haven't spoken since we ordered. What's wrong?

STEVEN

I don't know, Autumn. I guess I just feel like a chump.

AUTUMN

A chump?

STEVEN

Yeah.

AUTUMN

Why?

STEVEN

Because I thought we had something real and different, but you were ready to blow me off tonight.

AUTUMN

I didn't want to blow you off. I just wanted to reschedule.

STEVEN

Is there really a difference?

AUTUMN

Of course there is. You know I love you.

STEVEN

And I love you. I love you so much, and, I guess, you just made me feel like I was worthless. Like Kasey was more important.

AUTUMN

She's not! I promise, she was just feeling a little neglected is all. I picked you, didn't I? I'm here.

STEVEN

Yeah...you did.

AUTUMN

So, let's enjoy our date.

STEVEN

You're right. Let's have a good night. I actually had some good news. Next weekend, I found a cute little cabin on a lake for stupid cheap, and I want to take my fragile little bird on a weekend get away. Doesn't that sound fun?

AUTUMN

Next weekend?

STEVEN

Yeah, why, is there a problem?

AUTUMN

It's just that I made plans with Kasey.

STEVEN

Are you serious right now?

AUTUMN

Well-

STEVEN

Just forget it, Autumn. You know what, I'm not hungry anymore. Let's just go.

AUTUMN

Steven-

Steven gets up to leave.

STEVEN

I said let's go. Now!

AUTUMN

Wait, Steven, don't leave.

Autumn moves to grab Steven's hand.

AUTUMN

Please. I'd much rather go on a trip with you.

STEVEN

Promise?

AUTUMN

Yes.

STEVEN

Okay...

Steven embraces Autumn.

STEVEN

Look, I'm sorry. It's just that you are my everything. There is nothing else I care about. I don't ever want to be without you, not even for a second. I need you, Autumn. I need my fragile little bird.

AUTUMN

And I need you.

Steven kisses her and then leaves the stage.

AUTUMN

And that's how it started. First, I stopped hanging out with Kasey, but then it got worse. If I'm being really honest, I didn't think much of it. I remember thinking "this is what love is." I would text Kasey, but every single time we made plans, I would end up canceling. He'd convince me to stay in bed with his sweet kisses or we'd end up in an argument about it. It became easier to just ignore her texts completely. But when she showed up at my door one morning, ignoring her became impossible.

Kasey enters.

KASEY

What the hell, Autumn?

AUTUMN

Kasey, hi, uh, I was gonna call you-

KASEY

Oh really? I find that hard to believe since I haven't heard from you in like 3 months.

AUTUMN

It hasn't been that long.

KASEY

Oh yes it has. We haven't really hung out since the party. Are you still mad at me for that? I mean seriously, I apologized like a dozen times-

AUTUMN

No, no, it's not that. And we have hung out since then-

KASEY

Yeah, like once. You've even stopped going to the creative writing club. You love that group! I mean, do you seriously hate me that much?

AUTUMN

I don't hate you. I don't.

KASEY

I know I can be pushy sometimes, but talk to me about it. You can't just abandon me.

AUTUMN

Oh come on, Kasey, don't be dramatic.

KASEY

What would you call it then? We went from seeing each other practically every day to you ghosting me

KASEY

completely. I mean, you even started leaving class early-

AUTUMN

That's not because of you. If I leave that class early, I can meet Steven before his lunch break ends.

KASEY

So that's what this is, huh? It's all because of him?

AUTUMN

It's not...well, maybe a little.

KASEY

Autumn-

AUTUMN

I know, it's just I've been really busy and things have been going really well with us and-

KASEY

Come on Autumn, tell me the truth. You can't possibly be so in love you are unable to take two seconds to respond to a text or return a call.

AUTUMN

You want the truth?

KASEY

Yes.

AUTUMN

Steven doesn't like you.

KASEY

Well, I'm not his biggest fan either.

AUTUMN

He's just protective and he's worried about me.

KASEY

He doesn't even really know me. I've only ever really seen him at parties. Is that what he's judging me off of cause that's not fair.

AUTUMN

No, it's not just that, I guess he was roommates with one of your ex-boyfriends and, I don't know, he said things just were a little weird.

KASEY

Who, Jason? Look, I dated that guy for like 5 seconds. We didn't work out, what's the big deal?

AUTUMN

Well, he kind of implied you two didn't work out cause you wanted to 'party' more than he did.

KASEY

Party? Oh...party...gotcha...well, so what?

AUTUMN

Look, he knows you get pushy and he's just afraid of that.

KASEY

I got pushy with you one time and you blew me off. I've apologized for that, I mean, come on. I won't invite you to parties anymore, I promise. I've been trying to cut back myself, but it's hard, Autumn. Hard when I have nothing to do on a Friday night, because my best friend won't call me back.

AUTUMN

Yeah...I'm sorry, I think I just got kind of wrapped up in everything. I'll talk to Steven.

KASEY

Promise?

AUTUMN

I promise.

KASEY

Good, because this whole not talking thing is so overrated. We good?

AUTUMN

Yeah, we're good.

KASEY

So, tomorrow night, you, me, and all the junk food we can carry. We're so far behind on our "Golden Girls" binging and I haven't cheated on you at all.

AUTUMN

Not at all?

KASEY

Okay, I watched like two episodes, but that's it I swear.

AUTUMN

I knew you liked it!

KASEY

Oh, shut up.

AUTUMN

You made such a stink, but look at you, you're hooked!

KASEY

Yeah, yeah, whatever. So, tomorrow?

AUTUMN

Tomorrow.

KASEY

Sweet.

Steven enters.

STEVEN

Oh, Kasey...I didn't think you'd be here.

KASEY

I was just leaving. See you tomorrow, Autumn.

Kasey exits.

STEVEN

See you tomorrow?

AUTUMN

Yeah, she just kind of showed up here, but I think-

STEVEN

I cannot believe you.

AUTUMN

Hold on, just let me explain-

STEVEN

You promised you would ignore her.

AUTUMN

I was ignoring her, that's why she showed up here. I haven't seen her in months-

STEVEN

You see her three times a week.

AUTUMN

In class, that doesn't count.

STEVEN

You're so full of shit. You know she doesn't even like you, right?

AUTUMN

That's not true.

STEVEN

It is true. She makes fun of you when you aren't around.

AUTUMN

And how would you know that? Don't tell me you get to hang out with her and I don't.

STEVEN

No, I don't hang out with her. I hate that woman. I just know, Autumn. That's just the type of person she is.

AUTUMN

You just know? Steven, that's ridiculous.

STEVEN

I'm not on trial here. I'm not telling you how I know. You'll just get upset.

AUTUMN

I'm already upset!

STEVEN

Look, I don't want to have this argument again. You're not to see her any more!

AUTUMN

You can't just ban me from seeing someone.

STEVEN

Like hell I can't! You're mine. I'm not sharing you with a damn druggie!

AUTUMN

I wouldn't call her a druggie. She just likes to have fun. And I don't do that stuff.

STEVEN

For now.

AUTUMN

You know I wouldn't. Besides, Kasey's trying to quit. You're all pissed off for no reason.

STEVEN

I have plenty of reasons to not like that bitch.

Vera enters, fuming mad, and stands directly behind Autumn.

AUTUMN

Don't call her that!

STEVEN

Or what?

AUTUMN

I'm not going to let you insult my best friend.

STEVEN

I thought I was your best friend.

AUTUMN

You know what I mean.

STEVEN

No, I don't know what you mean.

AUTUMN

Steven-

STEVEN

I'll call her a bitch if I want to. She is a bitch.

AUTUMN

Stop it!

STEVEN

B-I-T-C-H, bitch!

Vera swirls Autumn out of the way.

VERA

You shut your mouth right now! You're not to call her that ever again. Do you hear me? She's my best friend, and I'm going to see her tomorrow whether you like it or not.

STEVEN

Shut up!

VERA

No, you're being a complete asshole-

Steven slaps Vera across the face.

STEVEN

See, just the thought of her turns you into a bitch, too. You wanna go, fine, go, but you will never see me again. I won't answer your calls, I won't be there to hold you, and when you realize I was right and that bitch doesn't even like you, there'll be no one to take care of you anymore. You'll be all alone. Again. But this time you'll be alone forever. Because, honestly, who else could possibly love a broken bird like you?

Steven turns to walk away, Joy emerges from backstage and launches for him. Steven freezes.

VERA

What're you doing?

JOY

I'm stopping him.

VERA

Why? You heard what he said.

JOY

He's just trying to protect us. He cares, Vera! And now he's about to leave forever.

VERA

We can do better.

JOY

What if we can't?

Vera looks to Autumn.

VERA

Autumn, what do you want us to do?

Autumn stares at them for a moment and then looks at Steven.

AUTUMN

I...I love him.

Vera exits. Steven unfreezes.

JOY

Wait, stop, please. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to yell.

STEVEN

But you did.

JOY

I know, but I'm sorry. I love you so much, and if you don't want me to hang out with her anymore. I won't.

STEVEN

I mean ever, Autumn. Don't even bring her name up again.

JOY

I won't.

STEVEN

You better not. I know I spoil you, but I'm the only one who'd do those things for you. You wouldn't be worth it to anyone else.

JOY

I know.

STEVEN

I don't think you do. I've treated you so well, too well. It's gone to your head and you've forgotten who you are. A worthless, pathetic, broken bird. I have found a way to love you, but you don't deserve it. Say it!

JOY

I don't deserve it.

STEVEN

That's my good little bird. Now don't you ever raise your voice to me again.

JOY

I won't.

Steven grabs Joy's face rough, and makes her look directly into his eyes.

STEVEN

I mean it. Never again. Is that understood?

JOY

Yes.

STEVEN

Good.

Steven releases her face.

STEVEN

Now I think an apology is in order.

Steven holds out his hand.

AUTUMN

Joy, go to him.

Joy doesn't move.

AUTUMN

Joy, what's wrong?

JOY

I can't do it, Autumn.

AUTUMN

What do you mean?

JOY

It...it isn't right. It's not fun...it's not me.

AUTUMN

You've done it before.

JOY

That was different. Jake was different. You know that. Part of you wanted to do it.

AUTUMN

But we have to.

JOY

No, not we. Not this time. I'm sorry, Autumn.

AUTUMN

Please.

JOY

I'm sorry.

Joy runs off stage.

STEVEN

I'm waiting.

AUTUMN

Steven, please, do I have to?

STEVEN

You owe me.

Dee enters the stage opposite of Steven. Autumn starts to move, but Dee walks in front of her and takes Steven's hand instead.

AUTUMN

Please no...

STEVEN

Shhh...everything's gonna be alright. Daddy just needs a little something.

Steven Dee exit. Lights go out. Autumn steps down center where a spotlight slowly rises on her.

AUTUMN

That's when everything went blank...The next day, things were better, and he was back to his normal self. Well...almost...usually when he yells he says he's sorry the next day, but this time he didn't. I wish I wouldn't have let her in. That's why it changed, I'm sure of it. It was my fault. Obviously, I canceled on Kasey and I started to stay over at Steven's so that she couldn't just show up again. But it wasn't enough. I had broken his trust and I needed to earn it back. So he made rules. I had to check in with him after every class and I had to let him check my phone before bed. I tried really hard to remember all his rules, but it was just a lot. Once I forget to check in and that made him mad. Another time I laughed at too many of his friend's jokes. That made him jealous. One day Kasey sent me a really long message and I responded. I just said that I was sorry, but when he saw that he became furious.

Autumn rolls up her sleeves, revealing bruises on her arms.

AUTUMN

I shouldn't have responded to her, not even once. I told him I was done and I meant it. But I missed her. I couldn't help it. I never responded to her again. It was the start of a new semester, so we didn't have class together anymore. But with my luck being what it is, she found me walking around on campus one day.

Lights shift and Kasey enters. Autumn quickly rolls her sleeves down.

KASEY

Well, would you look at that. You're alive.

AUTUMN

Kasey!

KASEY

Did you forget that I don't bite? What the hell is with that look?

AUTUMN

I can't talk to you, Kasey.

Autumn is looking around fearfully.

KASEY

I noticed, since you don't anymore. What the hell are you looking for?

AUTUMN

Nothing. I have to go.

KASEY

Wait a second, Autumn.

Kasey grabs Autumn's arm, and Autumn winces.

KASEY

Are you hurt?

AUTUMN

No, I'm fine.

KASEY

Autumn?

Kasey moves towards Autumn and she flinches.

KASEY

Autumn, what's wrong? You're acting like I'm about to wail on you. (Beat.) Oh my god, Autumn, is he hitting you?

AUTUMN

Of course not.

KASEY

Autumn, this is not okay. We need to get you help-

AUTUMN

You don't know what you're talking about.

KASEY

I think I do. Autumn, he's hurting you.

AUTUMN

He is not. Just leave me alone.

KASEY

No, I'm not just gonna leave you alone. This bastard can't get away with this.

AUTUMN

Don't call him that.

Vera enters.

KASEY

Are you kidding me right now, Autumn? You're brainwashed.

AUTUMN

You don't know a thing about it.

KASEY

You're flinching every time I move and you wanna tell me everything's fine? That asshole has got you under his spell.

AUTUMN

Don't call him names.

KASEY

Autumn...this isn't love. He's using you.

AUTUMN

Stop it.

KASEY

You can do better than that asshole!

*Vera rushes on stage and takes Autumn's place.
Autumn walks down stage.*

VERA

What part of your puny little brain do I have to yell at to make you stop?!

*Autumn says her lines directly to the audience,
interlaced with the action.*

AUTUMN

I knew what Kasey was saying was true.

KASEY

Autumn-

VERA

Who are you to tell me what love is? I don't see your boyfriend around here. Oh wait, you don't have one.

AUTUMN

But it didn't matter. I didn't want to hear it.

KASEY

Autumn, wait-

VERA

Maybe it's because all you do is party and get high. So pardon me if I don't feel like listening to your sage advice.

AUTUMN

Because if I let her make it real.

KASEY

You have bruises, Autumn. Wake up!

VERA

Oh, I'm wide awake. Awake enough to see he was right about you.

AUTUMN

Everything would fall apart.

KASEY

He's hurting you!

VERA

No, he's not.

KASEY

You need to get out of that relationship.

AUTUMN

I knew Vera didn't like Steven. Hated him even.

VERA

I love him, and he loves me. And saying this stuff, just because he didn't want me to hang out with you anymore, is low.

KASEY

You know that's not why.

AUTUMN

But I wouldn't survive without him, and if I wouldn't survive, neither would she.

VERA

I don't need your lonely pathetic ass in my life. So take your accusations and your drugs and go bother someone else. I don't want to talk to you anymore.

AUTUMN

So, she defended him to save me.

KASEY

Autumn-

AUTUMN

But it didn't work.

VERA

Stay the hell out of my life!

Vera and Kasey both storm off and exit on opposite sides of the stage. Autumn is left completely alone.

AUTUMN

I used to think I knew what being alone felt like. What being sad felt like. But I was wrong. True pain...feels like nothing at all.

The Monster, clothed entirely in black, enters the stage. The Monster starts to follow behind her, mimicking her movements, and then almost like a puppet master The Monster begins to slow her down.

AUTUMN

Everything seemed to move so fast around me, but I was stuck in slow motion. It was like I had I had this Monster inside of me, making everything feel so heavy.

A table is set up behind her with a backpack, plate, fork, and book on top. Autumn goes to sit. She begins to eat off of the plate during her next lines, but each time she lifts the food up, The Monster takes it and eats it for himself.

AUTUMN

Simple things went first. Like eating...my food started to lose it's taste, even my favorites...everything was bland. Almost as if I wasn't eating it at all, so, eventually, I lost my appetite all together.

She grabs the book and begins to read. The Monster keeps pulling pages back, forcing her to re-read things she has already read.

AUTUMN

Next came some of my favorite things. Things that were once my escape, like reading, suddenly were dull and worthless. I found myself reading the same pages over and over again, never advancing forward. So I stopped.

Autumn puts the book down in frustration, grabs the backpack, and gets up. The table, food, and book are all removed. Her bedroom is set up behind her. Autumn walks across the stage, but with each step she moves slower due to The Monster.

AUTUMN

The last thing I had left was school, and even that no longer brought me joy. It became this burden. I stopped doing my assignments. There was nothing there for me anymore. There was nothing for me anywhere. There was only one thing I truly wanted anymore, and that was to sleep.

Autumn goes to lie in the bed.

AUTUMN

But once I laid down, I couldn't get up.

The Monster is above her, holding her down in her bed. Steven enters.

STEVEN

For the love of, it's six o'clock, and you're still not up?

AUTUMN

I'm sorry, I tried, but I just can't.

STEVEN

That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Get your ass out of bed! I'm starving.

Autumn tried, but The Monster forces her down again.

AUTUMN

I can't.

STEVEN

You have been like this for days now, maybe even weeks, I don't know, and I don't care. You're not sick, and you're not a damn cripple. Get up.

Autumn tries again, gets a little further but succumbs to The Monster.

AUTUMN

You don't understand.

STEVEN

Of course, I don't. No normal person would. What the hell is wrong with you?

AUTUMN

I don't know.

STEVEN

You don't know?

AUTUMN

I don't know. I just can't bring myself to move. I feel so heavy and tired and-

STEVEN

Oh, you're tired? *I've* been working! I just spent 10 hours working in the 90 degree heat moving metal sheets around, and you want to bitch to me about how tired you are? Did you even go to class today?

AUTUMN

No.

STEVEN

You are so fucking lazy, get up!

AUTUMN

I can't.

STEVEN

I've had just about enough of this 'can't' crap.

The Monster allows Steven to drag her off the bed. Autumn ends up on her knees. The Monster stands above her, his hands pushing down on her shoulders.

STEVEN

Oh, what now you can't stand? Get up, Autumn.

Autumn tries, but The Monster keeps her down.

STEVEN

I said get up.

Autumn tries again, but The Monster is too strong.

STEVEN

You better fucking get up!

Autumn makes a little progress, but The Monster prevails, shoving her into the ground.

STEVEN

You dramatic piece of shit. Screw this, I'm going back to my place. You're fucking worthless, you can't even make me a damn meal.

Steven storms off.

AUTUMN

Then I felt something worse than nothing. Hopelessness.

The Monster pulls out a knife.

AUTUMN

I wasn't me anymore. My brain wouldn't listen. It just kept saying there was nothing left. It was never going to get better. Nothing would change. How I'm feeling right now is how I would feel forever. It kept saying it over and over again.

The Monster reaches his arms around her and Autumn sees the knife. Autumn is no longer talking the the audience. She stays on her knees trapped in the Monster's arms and begins to cry.

AUTUMN

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I tried. I can't...I just can't anymore. I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry Steven. I'm sorry Kasey. Kasey!

For a moment Autumn perks up.

AUTUMN

Kasey, I need to talk to Kasey. Kasey!

Autumn struggles with The Monster viciously. The knife falls to the floor and she is released. She runs to her bed and grabs her phone.

AUTUMN

Come on, Kasey, pick up, pick up. Kasey, please...please pick up.

(Beat.)

Hi, Kasey...it's Autumn...I bet you don't recognize that name anymore... Don't worry, I don't blame you for ignoring the call. I wouldn't answer either. I don't know why I even called...I've...I've just been really struggling lately. I miss you. Kasey, I messed everything up. Everything. It's...hopeless. And I have no one to blame but me.

The Monster picks up the knife again and walks over to Autumn.

AUTUMN

I know our friendship is over. Everything is over. But I guess...I guess I wanted to call and tell you that I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything. I never meant to yell at you, to hurt you. But I did...and...I guess I

AUTUMN

just wanted to say I'm sorry one last time. I'm sorry, Kasey. You'll never have to deal with me again. I promise.

Autumn looks at The Monster.

AUTUMN

No one will.

Autumn hangs up and tosses the phone on the bed face up. The Monster beckons Autumn over. She stands center stage, and The Monster grabs her hand and displays her wrist. The Monster takes the knife and slits her wrist. She collapses on the ground. The stage goes dark.

The Monster drags Autumn off stage. This is the only moment in the show where the audience stares into the darkness of the stage with no action. During this time, Autumn is brought back on stage, now wearing a hospital gown, and placed on the bed, with new white linens on it. Lights up. Kasey enters and runs to Autumn.

KASEY

You son of a bitch, you're alive!

AUTUMN

In the flesh.

Kasey looks at the bandage over Autumn's wrist.

KASEY

Does it hurt?

AUTUMN

Not much, but I'm on a lot of drugs. Is this what drugs feel like, Kasey? Because if so, I totally get it now. I should've tried them a long time ago.

Kasey laughs.

KASEY

No, you dumb ass. I bet your drugs are the real deal, you know I couldn't afford any shit that good.

Autumn laughs.

KASEY

Was anyone able to get a hold of your mom? I can call and-

AUTUMN

They got a hold of her.

KASEY

It'll be nice to see her again, I bet.

AUTUMN

Oh, yeah, just the family reunion I was hoping for.
God, why did I give them her information?

KASEY

Probably the drugs.

AUTUMN

Figures.

KASEY

Autumn...Autumn, I'm so-

AUTUMN

Don't.

KASEY

But-

AUTUMN

I'm the one who should be apologizing. Not you. I'm the
one who called.

KASEY

I'm so glad you called. You have no idea...when I got
your message...I'm so glad I called the cops.

AUTUMN

Ah, that's how they found me.

KASEY

Then I just kept calling you, but you never picked up.

AUTUMN

I was taking a nap.

KASEY

Very funny, Autumn. You could've died.

AUTUMN

I wanted to die.

KASEY

Do you wanna die now?

AUTUMN

No...I don't think so...but that's probably the drugs talking.

KASEY

Autumn-

AUTUMN

I don't know Kasey. I don't know much of anything right now.

KASEY

You know you're alive.

AUTUMN

Yes, I guess there's that.

Steven enters.

STEVEN

Knock knock, baby bird. Oh, hey Kasey.

KASEY

Hey...

STEVEN

I'll let you both catch up, sorry. Sweetheart, I just talked to your mom. She is boarding her flight now. She should be here within the next few hours. I'm going to get her from the airport. I was gonna wait here with you, but how about I start getting your stuff and move it to my place? That way you two can talk.

AUTUMN

Sounds good.

STEVEN

Okay. I love you.

AUTUMN

I love you too.

Steven exits.

KASEY

Why the hell was he here?

AUTUMN

I asked them to contact him.

KASEY

Are you shitting me right now?

AUTUMN

What, he's my boyfriend?

KASEY

He's why you did this!

AUTUMN

No, I'm why I did this. The doctors said they can help. They have some pills to keep The Monster away.

KASEY

The Monster? What are you talking about, *he's* the monster!

AUTUMN

No, he's not. The Monster is in my head. I'm depressed, Kasey.

KASEY

Of course you are! You're in a fucking abusive relationship.

AUTUMN

I can't blame my problems on him. It's not his fault.

KASEY

Like hell it isn't.

AUTUMN

You have to stop, okay? Please, just drop it.

KASEY

I can't drop it. How on earth am I suppose to drop it? And why the hell is he going to your house?

AUTUMN

He's getting my stuff.

KASEY

Why?

AUTUMN

Because once they release me, I'm moving into his place.

KASEY

What?!

AUTUMN

I was telling him how much I didn't think I could handle going home, and he offered. It's probably better I'm not alone for a while. That's what the doctors said anyway.

KASEY

That's because they don't know, Autumn.

AUTUMN

There's nothing to know.

KASEY

It's going to happen again.

AUTUMN

What?

KASEY

I'm going to get that call again. Except, maybe next time, I'll be in class, or at work, or my phone will be dead, and I won't listen in time. It's going to happen again.

AUTUMN

Kasey-

KASEY

I can't. I can't do this again, Autumn. I can't watch you die. I have to leave.

Kasey begins to leave.

AUTUMN

Kasey, wait, Steven and I talked. He said we can hang out again. He said it's fine.

KASEY

It's not fine. I cannot sit around and watch you kill yourself. I can't do it. Autumn, if you stay with him, you're going to die.

AUTUMN

Don't make me choose.

KASEY

You already have. Goodbye, Autumn.

Kasey exits the stage. Lights shift, and Autumn gets out of bed, and returns to talking to the audience. The scene changes behind her to Steven's living room.

AUTUMN

They made me stay for observation for a few days, and I had to go back for some check-ups. Racked up quite the medical bill. At least, that's what my mom kept telling me.

Mother enters the stage.

MOTHER

You just had to do this to yourself didn't you? First you go to some expensive out-of-state college, and then you pull a stunt like this? Do you want to be in debt forever?

AUTUMN

She stayed around for a while after, to make sure I was alright. It was good to see her though...mostly. She sure loved Steven.

MOTHER

You were going to leave this cutie behind? The doctors were right to give you crazy pills.

AUTUMN

They're antidepressants, mom.

MOTHER

I know, I know, don't be so sensitive, I'm just kidding around. Wow, this sure is a nice place.

AUTUMN

Yeah, it's nice.

MOTHER

That's it? It's nice? I'd think you'd be a little more grateful, he is taking you in and on very short notice. Do you know how lucky you are?

AUTUMN

I know, Mom, I'm just tired.

MOTHER

Everything okay?

AUTUMN

Yeah.

MOTHER

You sure, because you can always come and stay with me for a while you know.

AUTUMN

I'm fine Mom, Steven is taking care of me. I'm really lucky, just like you said.

Mother's tone is suddenly very ominous and serious.

MOTHER

Okay...just...be careful. A man with eyes like that, well, it can be easy to get lost in them.

AUTUMN

What's that suppose to mean?

Mother snaps out of it.

MOTHER

Oh, nothing. I'm just being silly. Hey, if things don't work out with you two, you think I can take a shot at him?

AUTUMN

Mom!

MOTHER

Jeez, why do you have to take everything so personally? You've always been dramatic. I mean look at you...but you're still here and that's what matters.

(Mother hugs Autumn.)

Next time though, can you wait until you're off my insurance?

AUTUMN

Mom-

MOTHER

I'm kidding.

Steven enters.

STEVEN

How are my two favorite ladies doing?

MOTHER

Oh, we're wonderful, just talking about how amazing you are. This is such a nice home.

STEVEN

Oh, it will do for now. Someday I want to get your daughter a big ol' house.

MOTHER

See, Autumn I told you, lock him down before I take him for myself.

STEVEN

You're too kind. How about I order us in some Chinese food?

MOTHER

You are an absolute saint.

STEVEN

I'll get the menus.

Steven exits.

MOTHER

He really does have beautiful eyes...

Autumn turns to the audience.

AUTUMN

It was no wonder why she was obsessed with Steven. He took really good care of me while she was here. But eventually she had to go back home.

Mother exits. Autumn removes the hospital gown. She is clothed underneath.

AUTUMN

I was feeling better. The antidepressants were doing their job. I hadn't felt The Monster since that night. But the pills did other things too. Things I didn't expect.

Joy, Vera, and Dee enter the stage and line up behind Autumn, spotlights on all three.

AUTUMN

One night Steven wanted to use me to impress his friends at some club. We had done that before. So, I got all glammed up and then called Joy. But she didn't come. I called again and again, but nothing. Steven and I got into a huge fight that night. Joy was the first to go.

Joy's spotlight goes out.

AUTUMN

Without Joy, Steven started escalating. His hits got harder. What used to be bruises were quickly becoming scars. By the time I had tried to call Vera, it was too late. She was gone too.

Vera's spotlight goes out.

AUTUMN

Without them, I was powerless. He started doing things other than hitting me. Things I didn't want to do...He had bullied me into things before, but it was different now. One night, he took my hair and drug me into the

AUTUMN

bedroom. He pushed me onto the bed and tore off my shirt. I remember crying, begging him to stop, but it was as if he didn't hear me at all. Steven started to remove my pants, and that's when Dee came. She was different now, though...slower...When I woke up the next morning I caught the smallest glimpse of her before she disappeared. She was always the strongest of us, but after that night, she was gone too.

Dee's spotlight goes out.

AUTUMN

Without Dee, I started to understand what it truly meant to be vulnerable. I started to see Steven for what he really was. What Kasey had warned me he was. I knew the pills were keeping The Monster away, but I needed Dee back. I needed them all back. So, I stopped taking the pills. And, well, I guess that brings us to that night. I mean, I'll tell you what I can, but like I told you, I don't remember.

Autumn moves into Steven's living room. She sits on the couch.

AUTUMN

I'd been off the pills for about two weeks when it happened. I remember sitting on the couch watching TV, when Steven came into the room in a rage.

Steven enters in a rampage.

STEVEN

I cannot believe you!

AUTUMN

What?

STEVEN

You little bitch! What did you tell them?

AUTUMN

Tell who?

STEVEN

The doctor!

AUTUMN

Nothing!

STEVEN

Nothing?

AUTUMN

Nothing at all, I swear. I told them I didn't remember.

STEVEN

Oh really, because I just had a fucking cop show up at my job site and ask me a couple of very suspicious questions.

AUTUMN

I swear, baby, I said nothing. When they noticed the bruises, I said what you told me, that I got black out drunk and must've fallen down.

STEVEN

I told you not to go.

AUTUMN

I had to, it was my follow-up. You know that.

STEVEN

You don't go when you are fucking covered in bruises.

AUTUMN

I tried to hide them. I used make-up, and-

STEVEN

Shut up!

Steven slaps her across the face.

AUTUMN

I'm sorry, Steven. Please, I'm sorry. I swear, I didn't say anything.

STEVEN

I don't believe you.

Steven grabs a knife off his belt.

STEVEN

But that's okay, because you're never going to say another word again.

AUTUMN

Steven please!

Autumn tries to flee. He grabs her hair, and pulls her back.

AUTUMN

I'm sorry! I'm so sorry.

STEVEN

Not fucking sorry enough. See this?

Autumn nods.

STEVEN

No one would think anything of it, you know. You already tried once. Everyone would think that you just tried again.

AUTUMN

Help! Help! Somebody help me!

Joy, Vera, and Dee enter the stage.

STEVEN

Shut up!

AUTUMN

Please, please don't.

STEVEN

What did you tell the doctor?!

Steven holds the knife to her throat. Joy, Vera, and Dee get closer and closer to her.

AUTUMN

Nothing, I told them nothing. I swear, baby, I swear.

STEVEN

After everything I've done for you, you're going to try to put me in jail? You owe me your life, and I think it's about time you pay that debt.

AUTUMN

Steven, no, please, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry!

STEVEN

I could do it right now, you know. You see dead birds on the sidewalk all the time, and no one blinks an eye. Why would you be any different?

AUTUMN

Steven, please.

STEVEN

Give me one reason not to end you right here, right now.

Joy jumps in and takes Autumn's place. Dee grabs Autumn's hand and guides her in one swift motion to sit on the ground. Dee covers Autumn's eyes.

JOY

Wait, baby, let me make this right. Let me try. Please. I can make everything better. Let me show you how much I love you. Let me make all of this go away.

Autumn starts to rock back and forth. Dee begins humming nursery songs to her, keeping her eyes off of Steven. Vera has placed herself behind Steven, waiting for her moment.

JOY

Please, I'll do anything you want.

Steven relaxes for a moment and lowers the knife. Steven turns and Vera sees her chance. She grabs the knife. Vera stabs him in the chest, then again and again and again and again. Steven falls to the ground drenched in blood. Joy and Vera walk over to Autumn who is in the fetal position, still rocking back and forth. Vera places the bloody knife in Autumn's hands. Vera and Joy exit, walking backwards, keeping their gaze on Autumn. After a moment Dee rises, giving Autumn a kiss on the top of her head before leaving.

Autumn's rock begins to slow. She notices the bloody knife in her hand for the first time. She looks to Steven and cries out in horror.

AUTUMN

Steven! No!

She runs to him, and starts cradling him to her.

AUTUMN

No, Steven. Please, no...no!

She grabs her phone and calls 911.

AUTUMN

Please send an ambulance. Hurry! I-I-I think I just killed my boyfriend.

Blackout.

ACT TWOScene 1

Lights come up on Autumn who is sitting on the floor center stage. The stage is white and bare.

AUTUMN

So, that's it. I told you I didn't remember. One moment Steven and I are arguing and the next, I'm staring at his bloody body. Look, I know I did it. I must have. For fuck's sake, will you lock me up already?

There is a knock off stage.

AUTUMN

Finally!

Doctor enters.

AUTUMN

You're not the police...

DR. WEBER

No, I'm your doctor, Dr. Weber. Remember me? I'm the one you talked to when you first got here.

AUTUMN

Oh, yeah, that's right. Come to give me some happy pills, doc?

DR. WEBER

No, I'm here to help.

AUTUMN

Help? I don't need help. I need handcuffs and an eight by eight cell.

DR. WEBER

No, Autumn, I don't think you do.

AUTUMN

Okay, a six by six cell. I really don't care.

DR. WEBER

I don't think you belong in a cell at all. Autumn, do you know why you're here?

AUTUMN

Yeah, to see if I can stand trial.

DR. WEBER

Yes, because after the incident-

AUTUMN

The incident! That's rich.

DR. WEBER

You suffered a mental breakdown. Which is perfectly understandable given your situation.

AUTUMN

The only thing I understand is that I'm a murderer. I'm gonna plead out.

DR. WEBER

Look, please listen, I'm not really supposed to offer legal council, but-

AUTUMN

Then don't. Why are you even here?

DR. WEBER

I came to tell you something.

AUTUMN

Tell me what?

DR. WEBER

I've cleared you for trial.

AUTUMN

Oh. Okay, well, thanks. Consider me informed.

DR. WEBER

I know you've been refusing to see a lawyer.

AUTUMN

So?

DR. WEBER

I want to make sure that you make an informed decision because you do have options, Autumn. Your life doesn't have to be over. There's actually a lawyer here who wants to see you.

AUTUMN

I'm pleading out, end of story. Send the lawyer away to feast on someone else's misery.

DR. WEBER

Will you at least meet with him?

AUTUMN

I said no.

DR. WEBER

Please?

AUTUMN

Can you hear me? Or am I suddenly a fucking ghost? Or have I officially reached the level of crazy where people don't even hear me when I talk?

DR. WEBER

You're not crazy, Autumn.

AUTUMN

Oh, I'm not, huh?

DR. WEBER

No. That's why I cleared you. When I first met you and you told me your story, I thought you might be suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder, more commonly known as multiple personalities, but that's not right. Vera, Joy, Dee, they are mental manifestations of your coping mechanisms.

AUTUMN

Coping mechanisms?

DR. WEBER

Everyone has different sides of themselves, even me. I'm different at work than I am with my friends than I am when I'm home alone.

AUTUMN

Yeah, and how many of those sides have killed someone?

DR. WEBER

Well, none.

AUTUMN

Well, that's why I belong behind bars and you don't.

DR. WEBER

But everyone processes trauma differently. That's how we survive-

AUTUMN

We have very different definitions of surviving.

DR. WEBER

Look, we all wear these different masks. The difference with you is your creativity and perception. You see these masks and coping mechanisms within yourself and

DR. WEBER
give them names. Take Vera for example, the first time you felt her you described her as this rage building inside you. This anger bubbled up and out came Vera who took all this anger out on the nearest possible person.

AUTUMN
Can you just get out of here?

DR. WEBER
What Vera did and does, that's displacement, Autumn.

AUTUMN
I don't want to hear it. You're not changing my mind.

DR. WEBER
I'm trying to help you understand. Now take Joy, she's the one that takes over when your anxiety is holding you back. Sometimes she acts on things you're too afraid to do on your own, but she also can convince you to do things you don't want. Sometimes its peer pressure, but I think usually, it's fear.

AUTUMN
Fear?

DR. WEBER
We all have fears. The fear of being alone, of not fitting in, of thinking you can't do better. That's what happened with Steven, isn't it?

AUTUMN
I stayed because I loved him.

DR. WEBER
Then there's Dee.

AUTUMN
Don't!

DR. WEBER
That's where it all started. What I have to tell you might hurt, but you need to know. The inspiration for the personification of these parts of you, all started with Dee. Whatever happened that caused Dee to emerge-

AUTUMN
I don't know what you're talking about.

DR. WEBER
She's your denial, Autumn.

AUTUMN

Shut up!

DR. WEBER

You said you were six when you first felt her? Whatever you experienced back then, I think is the crux of everything. You were so young, but you're older now, and you need to find another way to cope. Pushing it down, pretending it didn't happen isn't healthy. It will be hard, but-

AUTUMN

Steven is dead! He's dead because of me. Whatever story you are concocting to make this tragedy make sense, it's not gonna work. I killed him. I belong in prison.

DR. WEBER

Autumn, please just meet with the lawyer.

AUTUMN

Did they show you pictures?

DR. WEBER

What?

AUTUMN

The police. Did they show you pictures of what I did?

DR. WEBER

Yes.

AUTUMN

Then you should know how sick I am.

DR. WEBER

Autumn, I think you killed Steven in self-defense.

AUTUMN

No one stabs someone more than five times in self-defense.

DR. WEBER

Try to remember, Autumn. Try. I think you'll be surprised at what you find.

AUTUMN

No! I don't want to remember!

DR. WEBER

You should at least-

AUTUMN

Get out of here!

DR. WEBER

Autumn-

AUTUMN

Leave, dammit! Leave me alone!

DR. WEBER

Okay, I'll go. I really hope you change your mind.

Doctor leaves, and Autumn begins to pace back and forth angrily, talking to herself.

AUTUMN

Stupid doctor doesn't know anything. Anything! Coming in here and fucking diagnosing me, trying to force me to see a lawyer. Coping mechanisms my ass. I'm demented. I'm broken.

Vera enters the stage.

VERA

No, you're not.

AUTUMN

What are you doing here?

VERA

Same thing as you, I killed my boyfriend.

AUTUMN

Go away, Vera.

VERA

I can't.

Joy enters the stage.

JOY

None of us can.

VERA

We're you, all of us.

JOY

Your doctor was right about more than just that.

AUTUMN

What do you mean?

VERA

You don't belong in prison.

AUTUMN

I...We killed Steven.

VERA

He was going to kill us.

AUTUMN

You don't know that. He was just upset. He's gotten mad before.

JOY

And he hurt us then. Besides, that night was different.

AUTUMN

No.

JOY

You know it was. Try to remember.

AUTUMN

He wouldn't hurt us, he loved us.

VERA

He did hurt us. Look at your body, Autumn.

Autumn looks at the bruises on her arms.

JOY

It was him or us.

AUTUMN

He didn't deserve to die.

JOY

Maybe not.

VERA

Oh, he did.

JOY

Vera.

VERA

What? My only regret is that I didn't stab him more.

JOY

Vera!

VERA

Fine, maybe he didn't. I don't know. I guess I'm not exactly what you would call unbiased. I do know something though.

AUTUMN

What?

VERA

You didn't deserve to die.

JOY

And you don't deserve to be locked up for the rest of your life. You did what you had to do. We all did.

AUTUMN

I could've run away. I could've gotten out!

VERA

Not that night.

AUTUMN

I loved him.

JOY

I know. I did too.

AUTUMN

He wasn't the problem. I was. I'm the broken one.

VERA

Why do you think that? Because he told you that you were?

JOY

He got to us, Autumn. I know he got to me. I never wanted you to have to be alone. I thought that this is what love was...I'm sorry.

AUTUMN

But...I loved him. I still love him. I miss him. Even now, I want him back...

JOY

I know.

AUTUMN

Things started so good between us...We were happy, truly happy. We could have gotten that back, if I-

VERA

No, Autumn, I'm sorry, but that was never going to happen. Don't you remember all the things he did to you?

JOY
No, she doesn't.

AUTUMN
I remember some.

JOY
Not all.

Dee enters the stage, but stays at a distance.

AUTUMN
Dee?

Dee moves slightly closer.

AUTUMN
Dee, I need to know what happened. Please. I need to see it all.

Autumn moves closer, Dee steps back.

AUTUMN
Dee, please.

Autumn walks up to Dee, and reaches for her hand. Dee retracts and runs off stage.

AUTUMN
Dee, no!

JOY
I'm sorry, Autumn.

VERA
She doesn't think you're ready yet.

JOY
You need to ask for a lawyer.

AUTUMN
I don't know-

JOY
Please, just think about it.

VERA
If not for you, for us.

JOY
We don't want to go to prison.

VERA

And neither should you.

Autumn sits on the floor. Joy and Vera exit. The lights shift over her, representing the passage of time. The lights return to their original positions and there's a knock heard off stage. Alex enters bringing with him two chairs.

ALEX

I thought you might appreciate an actual seat.

AUTUMN

Thanks.

Alex sets down the chairs, and they both take a seat.

AUTUMN

So, uh, you must be the lawyer.

ALEX

Yes, but please don't think less of me. I'm one of the good ones. My name is Alex.

AUTUMN

I'm Autumn, but you probably already know that. I'm surprised they found me someone so fast.

ALEX

I've actually been waiting to see you.

AUTUMN

Waiting?

ALEX

Yeah. I was actually on the other side of the glass when you told your story.

AUTUMN

That's right, my doctor did say there was someone here. What do you want?

ALEX

To help you. It sounds like you've changed your mind about rolling over and you're ready to fight this.

AUTUMN

I think so. I don't know. I just know that it's not as black and white as I was thinking before. I did something terrible, but in that moment, I'm not so sure I had another choice.

ALEX

That's something I can work with. Do you think you're strong enough to stand trial?

AUTUMN

The doctor already cleared me. What does it matter what I think?

ALEX

It matters to me.

Autumn takes a moment.

AUTUMN

Yes, I think I can do it.

ALEX

Good, then let's get started.

AUTUMN

Wait a second, back up. I need to know your fees. I don't have much, and my mother hasn't spoken to me since this all went down. So, how much?

ALEX

Nothing.

AUTUMN

What?

ALEX

I want to do this pro bono.

AUTUMN

Again, what?

ALEX

That means for free.

AUTUMN

I know what pro bono means, I meant why.

ALEX

Let's just say I was convinced.

AUTUMN

By who?

ALEX

Kasey.

AUTUMN

Kasey? No, she wouldn't do that. Not for me at least.

ALEX

Why not?

AUTUMN

I chose Steven over her on more than one occasion. Before all this, we got into a huge fight. We're not really friends anymore.

ALEX

I wouldn't be so sure about that. She sounded like a friend to me.

AUTUMN

What did she do?

ALEX

Well, she harassed me for one thing. It started out as a normal day, with the only oddity being a rather desperate message from some rambling girl I didn't know begging me to take on some case I hadn't heard of. I never even listened to the whole message. I didn't think much of it, until the next day. This woman barges straight into my office! I don't even know she got in the building, let alone past my assistant, but she steamrolls straight through my stammering and says:

Kasey steps onto stage.

KASEY

Look, I don't care how busy you are. We need to talk!

ALEX

She sat down like she owned the place and refused to leave. I was about to call the cops, but then I saw this fire in her eyes. I knew I had to listen. And I did. She told me about you, and she told me about Steven.

KASEY

Look, I get it, you don't know me, and you don't know Autumn. But Steven was one fucked up dude. Please, if you promise me that you'll at least talk to her, I promise I'll leave in peace.

Kasey exits.

ALEX

And the rest is history.

AUTUMN

Kasey did all that for me?

ALEX

You have more people in your corner than you think.

AUTUMN

I guess so. But that still doesn't explain it.

ALEX

Explain what?

AUTUMN

You. That can't be the first sob story you've ever heard. And, unless you're a really bad lawyer, I'm guessing you have more lucrative ways you could be spending your time. So, why are you really here?

ALEX

Kasey did convince me to check you out, but you're really the one who convinced me.

AUTUMN

Me?

ALEX

When I heard your story...it reminded me of my sister. She lost her battle with depression last year, and it destroyed me. I felt like I didn't know her at all. She kept everything inside, and, I just think if she could have let me in, if more people would have seen...maybe she would still be here.

AUTUMN

I'm sorry about you sister.

ALEX

I wasn't there to hear her story, and now I'll never get to. But it's not too late for you, Autumn. You're my chance at redemption. Please, let me help you.

Autumn takes a moment to think.

AUTUMN

Okay, let's do this. What do I have to lose, right?

ALEX

Thank you. All right, let's get started. I think I already know who we can call as our first witness.

Lights shift, and the stage transforms into a minimalistic court room. Judge stands at a podium up stage. Autumn and Alex take their chairs and

put them stage right. Lawyer enters with his own chair and places it next to theirs and takes a seat. Autumn sits one seat apart from him. Kasey enters and take a seat next to Judge, and Alex moves to question her.

ALEX

So, after you found out Steven was hitting Autumn, what happened?

KASEY

We got into a huge fight, and then I didn't see her until the hospital. We fought again there, too.

ALEX

What did you fight about?

KASEY

I found out she was going to move in with that bastard. I told her to leave, but she said she loved him. I've never seen someone so brainwashed.

ALEX

So, she couldn't leave?

LAWYER

Objection!

ALEX

I'll rephrase. Kasey, as someone who was very close to Autumn, in your personal opinion, do you think Autumn felt like she could escape this relationship?

KASEY

No, I think she felt trapped.

ALEX

No more questions.

Alex sits.

LAWYER

I have some, your honor.

JUDGE

You may proceed.

Lawyer stands.

LAWYER

You stated that you fell out of touch with the defendant, is that correct?

KASEY

That's right.

LAWYER

And you say that's because Steven wouldn't let her talk to you anymore.

KASEY

Yes.

LAWYER

So, it had nothing to do with your drug problem.

ALEX

Objection.

JUDGE

I'll allow it. Answer the question.

KASEY

He was controlling her! It wouldn't have mattered if I were Mother Theresa.

LAWYER

But you do have a drug problem?

KASEY

I'm getting help.

LAWYER

But you just enrolled in rehab this past month.

KASEY

Yeah, so?

LAWYER

So, you were not undergoing any kind of treatment when you were friends with Autumn?

KASEY

I'm still her friend.

LAWYER

But you were not getting any sort of help for your issues during the times in question.

KASEY

No.

LAWYER

Louder please.

KASEY

No, I was not.

LAWYER

In fact, isn't it true you were just kicked out of your current apartment?

KASEY

Yes.

LAWYER

Can you please explain why to the jury?

KASEY

Look, after Autumn tried to kill herself and I found out she was going to go live with that pig, I lost it. The pills I was taking weren't enough anymore, so I upgraded. But that shit- I mean stuff, isn't cheap, okay? I started stealing from my roommate. She figured it out when her stereo system went missing.

LAWYER

And isn't it true that the rehab you're currently enrolled in is part of the requirements of your plea deal?

KASEY

Yes, but-

LAWYER

It sounds to me like Steven knew what kind of person you were, and didn't want his girlfriend to get mixed up in it.

ALEX

Objection, speculation.

LAWYER

I'll rephrase. The actions you described sound like the actions of a concerned and caring boyfriend who didn't want you to drag his love into your crime-filled rabbit hole.

KASEY

That's not why.

LAWYER

But is it possible?

KASEY

He was hurting her-

LAWYER

Answer the question, is it possible?

KASEY

Yes, I guess it's possible.

LAWYER

And when you saw her, did you actually see bruises?

KASEY

Uh, no, but I knew they were there.

LAWYER

Oh, do you have x-ray vision?

KASEY

No, but she winced. She was in pain.

LAWYER

Maybe you were grabbing her arm too hard.

KASEY

What? No!

LAWYER

Did she ever tell you she was being abused?

KASEY

No, but-

LAWYER

In fact, didn't she tell you the exact opposite?

KASEY

She was lying, because she was scared.

LAWYER

And you know this how?

KASEY

I just knew.

LAWYER

So, you never saw him hit her, never saw bruises, she never told you he hurt her, and you never told anyone about your suspicions?

KASEY

You're twisting everything.

LAWYER

Did you tell anyone? Yes or no?

KASEY

No, but-

LAWYER

So you must not have been that concerned.

KASEY

I was concerned, I just-

LAWYER

Just what? Didn't care enough about your supposed best friend to say anything? Or maybe this is just the perfect chance to win back a friend and spit on someone you never liked.

ALEX

Objection.

LAWYER

Withdrawn. No further questions for this witness, your honor.

JUDGE

You may step down, Kasey. We will break for the day. Jury is dismissed.

The lights shift from the court room, everyone exits the stage except for Alex and Autumn who come down center stage.

AUTUMN

This was such a bad idea.

ALEX

I told you, they're going to paint him as a model citizen. You knew this wouldn't be easy.

AUTUMN

They tore Kasey apart! Made her look like a liar and a good for nothing druggie!

ALEX

I know, that's his job. Mine is to keep them from believing him.

AUTUMN

Well, you suck at your job, because I think they bought it!

ALEX

This isn't over, we are far from done. Are you ready for tomorrow?

AUTUMN
No.

ALEX
You better get ready. Just remember what we went through.

AUTUMN
I know, I know. It's just...what happened to Kasey up there...that's going to be me, isn't it?

ALEX
Yes, but we prepared for all of that.

AUTUMN
I know...I know...but now it'll be me.

ALEX
And your mother.

AUTUMN
Can we take her off? I really don't think it's a good idea.

ALEX
We have to. After they trotted up Steven's parents like they did, we need her.

AUTUMN
I don't think I can do this.

There is a knock from off stage.

ALEX
I knew you would be nervous, so I thought of something that might help. Come in.

Kasey enters.

AUTUMN
Kasey?!

Autumn runs to Kasey and wraps her in a big hug.

ALEX
I'll give you two a moment alone.

Alex exits.

AUTUMN
Kasey, I can't believe you came today. After everything.

KASEY

Of course I came.

AUTUMN

Alex told me what you did for me.

KASEY

Dammit, he wasn't suppose to do that.

AUTUMN

Thank you.

KASEY

What are friends for?

AUTUMN

Apparently they're for dragging each other into a bunch of shit. Kasey, what he did to you in there...I'm so sorry, I had no idea he was going to bring that stuff up.

KASEY

That's okay. I knew. Alex warned me that they probably would. It's all public record.

AUTUMN

You were going through all that, and I wasn't there to help. Worse, I didn't even know. Kasey, I'm so sorry.

KASEY

Don't do that, Autumn. It's not your fault, and it's dangerous to think that way. Trust me, I know. Some of what the lawyer said in there was true, you know. I should have told someone about what was going on with you and Steven. I thought about it...a lot. I thought about it when I saw you on campus that day, and I almost screamed it from the top of my lungs when you told me you were moving in with that bastard. But...I never did. I don't know why. I think part of me was scared. Scared you'd hate me forever, scared I'd make things worse somehow. Part of me was angry too, I think. Angry that you would let him do that to you.

AUTUMN

I know it doesn't seem like it should have been, but to me, it was so much more complicated than that.

KASEY

Look, I may not ever fully understand how it was for you with him. But I do know what it's like to be addicted to something that isn't good for you. I understand what it's like to breathe in something toxic, but tell yourself it's air.

AUTUMN

It's like I was trapped in a dark closet and when you tried to open the door all this light poured in. It had been so long since I'd seen any light that it burned me. I panicked and slammed the door shut. When I realized my mistake, it was too late. All the strength had left my body, and, suddenly, I was too weak to open it at all. Kasey, that feeling...it's paralyzing.

KASEY

Yeah, it is. But it gets better.

AUTUMN

It does?

KASEY

Yeah. What that damn lawyer didn't let me talk about was how glad I am that all that shit happened. I'm getting help now.

AUTUMN

Really? Rehab's working?

KASEY

Yeah. I hated it at first, but now, not so much. It's still hard. You're forced to face these demons you didn't know you had, but now I'm not doing it alone. These unknown entities that have been haunting me for years suddenly have faces, and now that I'm looking at them in the light instead of shadows, I realized that I'm stronger than they will ever be.

AUTUMN

That's incredible. I'm really happy for you.

KASEY

You're strong too, you know. Way stronger than you think you are. No matter what happens in there, you can handle it. You can handle anything.

They hug.

KASEY

I'll be there, by the way. So you'll have at least one friendly face to look at.

AUTUMN

I appreciate that.

KASEY

Don't mention it. Besides, I expect the same treatment from you when I murder someone.

AUTUMN

Love you too, Kasey.

KASEY

Feel any better?

AUTUMN

Yeah, I think I do.

KASEY

Then my work here is done. Remember, you can do this.

Kasey exits. Autumn takes a moment to reflect.

AUTUMN

I'm stronger than I think I am.

Vera enters the stage.

VERA

You're stronger than you think you are.

AUTUMN

I can handle anything.

Joy enters the stage.

JOY

You can handle anything.

AUTUMN

I can do this.

Dee enters the stage, but barely.

AUTUMN

We can do this.

Autumn moves towards Dee.

AUTUMN

But I need your help.

Dee walks to her.

AUTUMN

I need to remember.

They approach each other. Autumn reaches her hand out, and Dee slowly reaches hers out. They look like they are about to touch, but right before they do the lights shift, and the scene returns to the courtroom. Autumn is whirled into a seat stage

right, and Dee is taken by Joy and Vera in the shuffle. All three take their places standing behind Autumn. Judge, Alex, Mother, and Lawyer enter and take their positions. Alex is seated next to Autumn. Judge is at the podium. Mother is at the witness stand, and Lawyer is questioning her.

LAWYER

Did you ever get the chance to meet the deceased?

MOTHER

Yes, I did. I wanted to stay with Autumn after her, uh, well, her outburst. Steven was nice enough to let me stay with them at his place.

LAWYER

How long did you stay with them?

MOTHER

A little over two weeks. I wanted to make sure she was okay.

LAWYER

Was she?

MOTHER

She seemed like it. A little blue here and there, and kind of lazy, but no more than usual.

LAWYER

Your daughter is lazy?

MOTHER

Oh, not lazy lazy, she was just kind of mopey.

LAWYER

How was Steven?

MOTHER

Oh, he was lovely. He would take us out to eat. He even took us to a play one night. It seemed like he really loved my Autumn.

LAWYER

Seemed?

MOTHER

I mean, how much can you ever really know a person?

LAWYER

That's true, but while you were there, did you witness any of this alleged abuse?

VERA

Stop saying alleged, it happened!

LAWYER

Your honor!

JUDGE

Alex control your client.

ALEX

Autumn, you'll get your chance to talk.

AUTUMN

Sorry, your honor.

Autumn glares back at Vera, who takes a quick step to the side.

LAWYER

Did you witness any abuse?

MOTHER

Of course not, what kind of mother would watch someone abuse their daughter and just let it happen?

LAWYER

So, it's fair to say that you liked Steven.

MOTHER

I did, yes.

LAWYER

How did you take it when you heard the news?

MOTHER

I couldn't believe it.

LAWYER

You didn't think your daughter was capable of such an act?

MOTHER

No, I didn't.

LAWYER

Did you think she did it?

MOTHER

Of course not!

LAWYER

Then why haven't you visited your daughter?

MOTHER

Excuse me?

LAWYER

You came to her aid when she had her attempt, but after this came out, you didn't reach out to her at all after her arrest. Not even once.

MOTHER

It's not like that.

LAWYER

So you did visit your daughter?

MOTHER

I was going to-

LAWYER

But you didn't.

MOTHER

I'm here now, aren't I?

LAWYER

So why weren't you there then?

MOTHER

You don't understand. It's a hard thing to process.

LAWYER

But most mothers would want to reach out when their daughter is in trouble.

MOTHER

I wanted to.

LAWYER

But you didn't.

MOTHER

When I heard, I didn't know what to do.

LAWYER

So it had nothing to do with the shame you felt.

MOTHER

No.

LAWYER

So, you didn't feel shame?

MOTHER

Well, yes, I felt shame, but it's more complicated than that. You don't know what it's like to have people you haven't talked to in years reaching out and asking about it...I just wanted to crawl into a hole.

LAWYER

But you never wanted to ask your daughter about it?

MOTHER

The report said she didn't remember.

LAWYER

But still, as her mother, why didn't you ask?

MOTHER

What good would it have done?

LAWYER

It might have done a lot. Didn't you want to at least give her a chance to tell you her side?

MOTHER

I don't know why I didn't ask, okay? I don't know!

LAWYER

It's because, in your heart, you knew she did it, isn't it?

ALEX

Objection!

LAWYER

Withdrawn. Your witness.

Lawyer counters with Alex.

ALEX

This must be hard for you.

MOTHER

It is. Thank you.

ALEX

Things have always been a little harder for you, though, haven't they?

MOTHER

What do you mean?

ALEX

Didn't you raise Autumn by yourself?

MOTHER

Since she was about seven, yes.

ALEX

So, you two were probably closer than your average mother and daughter.

MOTHER

I imagine we were.

JOY

That's rich.

LAWYER

Your honor-

AUTUMN

Sorry!

Autumn looks back at Joy angrily.

ALEX

What happened to her father?

LAWYER

Objection, relevance?

ALEX

I promise, I have a point.

JUDGE

I'll allow it. Answer the question.

MOTHER

Her father and I didn't work out.

ALEX

Why?

MOTHER

Excuse me?

ALEX

Why didn't you work out?

MOTHER

There are thousands of reasons why people don't work out.

ALEX

I know that, but I'm not asking about other people's reasons. I'm asking about yours.

MOTHER

We were just interested in different things.

ALEX

Oh, you mean like little girls?

MOTHER

Excuse me?

ALEX

Isn't it true you didn't share your husband's
fascination with little girls?

*Mother says her line in unison with Autumn's.
Mother directs her line to Alex, and Autumn
directs hers to the trio behind her.*

MOTHER

What are you talking
about?

AUTUMN

What is he talking
about?

*Everyone freezes except for Autumn and the three
behind her.*

AUTUMN

You guys?

JOY

I don't know.

VERA

Don't look at me.

All three look to Dee.

AUTUMN

Dee?

*Dee drops to the floor and covers her ears. The
scene unfreezes. Alex grabs some paper from under
his chair.*

ALEX

Defense exhibit E, your honor. Could you tell me what
this is?

MOTHER

How did you find this?

ALEX

Can you please tell the court what this is?

MOTHER

It's very old. It's a charge I placed against my husband.

ALEX

For inappropriate behavior.

AUTUMN

What?!

MOTHER

I took it back. It was all a big misunderstanding.

Autumn turns to Dee, desperately.

AUTUMN

What is she talking about?

ALEX

Is that why you moved the following week to a new state?

MOTHER

You don't understand.

AUTUMN

Dee, please, you have to tell me.

ALEX

So you didn't witness your husband touching-

LAWYER

Your honor, I thought Autumn was on trial here not her mother.

JUDGE

He's right, counselor, make your point, and make it soon.

ALEX

Did you or did you not walk in on your husband touching your daughter?

AUTUMN

Dee?

MOTHER

No, I did not!

Dee shoots up.

DEE

Liar!

Autumn, Vera, and Joy stand in shock as Dee walks towards Mother.

DEE

You knew! You saw it happen.

MOTHER

Autumn, no, you don't understand.

DEE

You came to grab my laundry that night. You opened the door to my room, and you saw everything.

LAWYER

Your honor!

DEE

You saw my daddy inside of me and you just walked away!

JUDGE

Order! Order in the court!

MOTHER

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't know what to do.

JUDGE

Alex control the defendant! The jury will disregard!

DEE

You just closed the door and left me there with him...I was crying, Mommy. I was crying and bleeding and I needed help and you just left me there!

MOTHER

The next day I went to the police. The next day, Autumn! They asked you all sorts of questions, but you wouldn't say anything.

DEE

I was scared!

ALEX

Autumn, you have to calm down.

Alex reaches for Dee, but Dee shoves him away.

JUDGE

Security!

MOTHER

I got you out of there, didn't I? I stopped it.

DEE

It was too late, Mom. I had been his broken little doll for a year!

Autumn runs up to Dee. Everyone else freezes.

AUTUMN

Dee...is this true?

Dee turns to Autumn.

DEE

I'm sorry, I can't help you forget anymore. It hurts too much...I can't-

AUTUMN

It's okay, it's okay, you've done enough. You can tell me now.

Autumn opens her arms and Dee rushes into her embrace. The second the touch, they are overwhelmed by the sensation, and they collapse to the floor together. The room unfreezes just before they collapse.

MOTHER

Autumn!

Lights shift, leaving the courtroom behind and illuminating a small bare area downstage. Autumn sits on the floor comforting Dee, who lays on her lap unconscious. A knock is heard from offstage.

AUTUMN

Come in, Alex.

Mother enters.

MOTHER

Hi.

Autumn tenses and Dee starts to stir.

AUTUMN

Where's Alex?

MOTHER

He was on the phone outside. I'm sure he'll be in soon.

Mother walks towards Autumn, but Autumn stops her.

MOTHER

Autumn-

AUTUMN

Don't come any closer.

Autumn stands and gets in front of Dee, who cowers behind her, still on the floor.

MOTHER

Please, I have things I need to say to you.

AUTUMN

Haven't you said enough?

MOTHER

You're angry, and you have every right to be. I never wanted you to remember this way.

AUTUMN

You never wanted me to remember this at all.

MOTHER

If you had a daughter, would you want her to remember all this? I thought I was protecting you.

AUTUMN

I want you to go.

MOTHER

Please, Autumn, let me talk, just for a little while. I want you to understand.

AUTUMN

I understand plenty.

MOTHER

Look, you don't owe me anything. You have every right to kick me out of here.

AUTUMN

Then why won't you leave?

MOTHER

Because I'm not here for me. I'm here for you.

DEE

For me?

MOTHER

There's more to that story. You deserve to know everything. When I'm done, I'll go, and never speak to you again, if that's what you want. Please, just let me talk.

AUTUMN

Get out.

DEE

No, wait...I wanna know...please?

AUTUMN

You sure?

Dee nods. Autumn takes a deep breath. She helps Dee up, but stays standing behind her, ready to protect her.

MOTHER

Your father was an evil man with beautiful eyes. I fell for his charm and took everything else that came with it. But what you need to understand, is that I never, not for one second, thought he would hurt you.

DEE

Mom, did he...did he hit you?

MOTHER

Among other things.

DEE

I didn't know...

MOTHER

I tried very hard to shield you from all of that. Though I was never very good at it.

DEE

All the times you sent me to my room when I didn't do anything wrong, you-

MOTHER

Grasping at excuses to keep you from seeing what our relationship was. It wasn't all bad, though you know. I think that's why these men are able to keep their power. There were times we were truly happy, but when he lost his job, those small moments vanished, and something changed in me. I started not to need him or his money anymore, and he hated me for it. I started standing up for myself. I even told him I would leave if he ever hurt me again. And to my surprise he stopped. He was far from kind to me, but he didn't touch me again. He slept on the couch and I slept upstairs, and I found peace with my new normal. I thought I had won.

DEE

But you didn't win.

MOTHER

No...I didn't.

Mother is trying and failing to hold back tears.

MOTHER

When I walked into your room that night, I froze. All of my new found strength left me at once, and I was paralyzed in pain. My body may have turned and left that room, but my mind was stuck there, staring at him...at you...That's when I realized, I had never won at all. He had just found a new target.

(Beat.)

Autumn, when I took you to the police, I wanted to prosecute. I wanted him locked up forever. I was willing to do whatever it took to make him pay...but then I saw you. They asked you again and again, but every time it was the same: you didn't remember. Then they told me about the examinations they could do, but they were so invasive...it would be like doing it to you all over again, and my anger turned into fear of hurting you more. Maybe all of this could stay buried. Maybe it was better this was. Suddenly, amazingly, I was relieved. You didn't have to live with that memory like I would have to. Going through with all of that...well, I don't have to tell you how awful court can be. I thought if I could just get you out of that house, that town, that state, I could make you safe again. Obviously, that wasn't the right choice.

AUTUMN

But even after this fresh start, you never seemed to look at me. Not really. It's like you pushed me away.

MOTHER

You're right. I did. I have no good excuse. That image of him on top of you...it has never left my brain. Whenever, I looked at you, that was all I saw, and the only way I was able to stop seeing it, was to pretend it never happened. But that created this barrier in my head and on my heart, and it changed me...ruined me. It ruined us, and what we could have had. Do you know why I didn't come to you when this all happened?

AUTUMN

Because you were ashamed of me.

MOTHER

I did feel ashamed, but not of you. Oh, baby, never of you. I was ashamed of myself. I don't care what the

MOTHER

court decides, all of this, will forever be my fault, and I will never stop hating myself for it. I had gotten you away from your father, but because I never had you face what happened, you couldn't recognize it when you met your own evil man with beautiful eyes...

AUTUMN

Mom...

MOTHER

Look, I didn't come here so that you would feel sorry for me. I came here because you needed to know, that I didn't freeze that day all those years ago because I didn't care about you. I froze because I cared too much. I came to tell you that I died that day, and have been walking around as an empty shell ever since. I needed to tell you that I have always loved you, truly loved you, but I just did everything wrong. I'm sorry, Autumn.

Mother turns to leave, but Dee stops her.

DEE

Mom...

MOTHER

Yes, baby?

DEE

Why did you name me Autumn?

MOTHER

What?

DEE

Autumn is the season of dying.

MOTHER

Oh, my sweet girl. Autumn isn't the season of dying. Do you know why a tree loses its leaves?

DEE

Cause it's dying.

MOTHER

No, it's preparing. It sheds its leaves and stores its energy deep in its core to prepare for winter. Autumn isn't the season of dying, it's resilience. It's the season of surviving. And then, after the winter is gone, you'll be reborn stronger than ever before.

Mother turns to leave again, but something stops her.

MOTHER

Autumn?

AUTUMN

Yeah?

DEE

Yeah?

MOTHER

I love you...I love you so much. I hope that some day, you can believe that.

Dee looks up to Autumn and then back to Mother, before rushing towards her to give her a big hug.

DEE

I love you too, mommy!

They hold each other for a moment before they exit. Alex enters.

ALEX

Are you okay? I just saw your mother-

AUTUMN

I'm okay.

ALEX

Are you sure?

AUTUMN

Well, I'm not normal person okay, but..yeah...I'm okay...

ALEX

Maybe I should wait to tell you...

AUTUMN

No, tell me now. What happened?

ALEX

The judge declared it a mistrial, Autumn.

AUTUMN

A mistrial?

ALEX

I'm sorry. I was already pushing my luck trying to establish your childhood trauma as a reason for your sudden break and your inability to come forward about the abuse earlier. I thought maybe if I could do that, I could get you off clean, but after what happened in there, no jury would be able to remain impartial, so the judge called it and, well...I can't say I'm surprised.

AUTUMN

Where does that leave me?

ALEX

They are going to proceed with a new trial. But none of your past can come up. I had a loose thread on it as it was, but the evidence has been dismissed. I'm so sorry, Autumn. That means we have to do it all again.

AUTUMN

Will I get the chance to be on the stand?

ALEX

Yes, yes you will.

AUTUMN

Good.

ALEX

Good? Last time, you were terrified of testifying. What changed?

AUTUMN

I'm ready now. I want to tell my story.

The lights shift back to the courtroom. Alex sits, and Autumn takes the stand. Lawyer enters and immediately begins questioning her as the lights settle.

LAWYER

Can you tell the court how long you and the deceased were together?

AUTUMN

Almost a year and a half.

LAWYER

A year and a half. That's a pretty long time, isn't it?

AUTUMN

I guess.

LAWYER

And he treated you well?

AUTUMN

No.

LAWYER

No? That's strange. So you had a year and a half relationship, and it was all terrible?

AUTUMN

Well, no, but-

LAWYER

So, he did treat you well.

AUTUMN

I mean, sometimes, but-

Lawyer walks back to his chair and grabs a box full of paper.

LAWYER

Our next exhibit, your honor.

Lawyer hands the box to Autumn.

LAWYER

Can you tell me what these are, Autumn?

AUTUMN

They look like receipts. A lot of receipts.

LAWYER

Over two-hundred receipts. Can you name some of the items on the first few receipts? Just the highlighted portions.

AUTUMN

Diamond necklace, tennis bracelet, a bunch of checks from different restaurants-

LAWYER

The list goes on and on doesn't it?

AUTUMN

Yes.

LAWYER

So he not only treated you well, but it appears he spoiled you.

AUTUMN

Yes, but-

LAWYER

But what?

AUTUMN

He was nice at first.

LAWYER

At first?

AUTUMN

He stopped treating me so well after a while.

LAWYER

Isn't it true that this was your first and so far only relationship.

AUTUMN

Uh, yes, but I don't see what-

LAWYER

So when you say he stopped treating you as well, did he stop buying you expensive gifts? Stop taking you out to fancy dinners?

AUTUMN

I mean, yes, that stopped, but that's not what-

LAWYER

This being your first relationship, you weren't aware that most relationships reach a sort of dry spell, where the romance doesn't come as easily.

AUTUMN

That's not what I'm talking about.

LAWYER

It sounds to me that you got used to a certain level and dollar amount of care, and when he no longer wanted to or perhaps could not provide that, you began to resent him.

ALEX

Objection, subjective.

JUDGE

I'll allow it.

LAWYER

Did you resent the deceased?

Everyone freezes. The lights go out on the court room suddenly, and an intimidating red light slowly hones in on center stage, where Lawyer stands, creating a large circle of light. Lawyer shifts into Steven in Autumn's mind.

STEVEN

Come on my little bird, tell me the truth. Did you resent me?

AUTUMN

Steven?

Autumn gets up from her place and moves towards Steven, entering the red glow.

STEVEN

Well, did you?

Vera enters, stepping into Steven's red glow.

VERA

Of course I resented you! But not because of what you did or did not buy me. I never cared about the jewelry or the fancy dinners. I cared about you! But you cared about the dinners and the gifts. You used them to buy me, and I let you. I resent you for who you turned me into. I was never a broken bird until you convinced me I was. I resented you, because you kept me from Kasey, my only friend.

STEVEN

So, I made you angry?

VERA

Of course you made me angry! You infuriated me! I just...I just couldn't show it.

STEVEN

Then why didn't you just leave me?

Joy enters, stepping into Steven's red glow.

JOY

I stayed at first, because I loved you. I really did love you, Steven. But you took that love and burned it until all that was left was ash. Then I stayed, because you made me feel as if I couldn't do any better. Like I didn't deserve better. You manipulated everything, and I got confused. Steven, you were abusive.

STEVEN

Abusive? How?

JOY

You started with your words. Calling me your fragile little bird, your broken bird. You called me stupid and worthless.

STEVEN

You killed me because of a few silly little words?

AUTUMN
No!

STEVEN
Then, why? Why did you kill me, Autumn? Why?

Dee enters, stepping into Steven's red glow. The trio surround Steven.

STEVEN
Why, Autumn?

DEE
Because you were going to kill me! You had been escalating for weeks. You raped me, you beat me, and when you came home from work that day, you held a knife to my throat and told me you would kill me.

STEVEN
Shut up!

DEE
And there it is. I saw it that night too, but I couldn't make sense of it. I thought you were just angry, but you weren't angry. You were scared. I see it now. You were scared I wasn't your obedient little bird anymore. You thought I told that doctor what you'd been doing to me and you were terrified. You didn't believe me, but I hadn't said a word. You're dead, because you thought you were going down and you wanted to take me down with you.

STEVEN
But I didn't take you down. You left that night completely unharmed and I was the one left bleeding on the floor.

DEE
I didn't have a choice!

STEVEN
Oh, no? You *had* to stab me again and again-

DEE
Stop it-

STEVEN
Why, Autumn? You had the knife, you could have run. Or you could have stabbed me just once and left, but no, you stabbed me over and over and over-

Autumn finds her own strength and joins the trio.

AUTUMN

Because for the first time when I looked at you, I wasn't seeing you through the fog of love I had for you. I saw you raping me, I felt your hands strike me over and over again...my insides burned with the pain of your touch. I didn't see you in front of me. I saw a monster.

STEVEN

So, you honestly expect everyone here to believe that you killed me in self-defense.

AUTUMN

It's the truth.

STEVEN

Prove it.

Autumn looks to Dee, Joy, and Vera, and takes a deep breath.

AUTUMN

I can't.

STEVEN

Why?

AUTUMN

Because I didn't tell anyone. I was too scared. But people suspected.

STEVEN

Like who.

AUTUMN

Kasey.

STEVEN

The drug addict, that's rich!

AUTUMN

And my doctor.

STEVEN

Which doctor? How many have you been to in the last year?

AUTUMN

A few...

STEVEN

Six! I carted you around to appointment after appointment while you tried to figure out your

STEVEN

medications and out of all of those doctors how many expressed concern for your safety at home?

AUTUMN

It only takes one.

STEVEN

Fine, yes, let's talk about that *one* doctor. Even in their official testimony they admitted that it was possible your wounds could have been accidents or even self-inflicted. You've hurt yourself before-

AUTUMN

But he suspected, he asked me if I felt safe at home-

STEVEN

And you said yes.

AUTUMN

But he had a feeling, a hunch-

STEVEN

So you want them to overlook murder, because one of your six doctors had a hunch?

AUTUMN

What about the police? They came to question you at work the day you died.

STEVEN

You mean the day you killed me.

AUTUMN

They suspected you-

STEVEN

They were performing a mandatory check in, after that quack doctor of yours reported his unfounded suspicions. You want to know what happened at the end of that little Q&A session? We laughed, shook hands, and they said they were sorry to bother me.

AUTUMN

What?

STEVEN

That's right. They apologized to me and said I seemed like a stand up guy.

AUTUMN

But they never even talked to me...

STEVEN

No more questions your honor.

(Steven gets real close to Autumn for his next line.)

See, my broken little bird, you went through all of this for nothing.

Steven begins to walk away.

AUTUMN

No, it wasn't for nothing, because you're still dead you son of a bitch!

The red and blue lights all go out. Lights return to the court scene, Steven is Lawyer once again. He faces the opposite of the podium and says his next lines to the audience. Autumn takes her place back by the podium, the trio behind her in support. They are all holding hands.

LAWYER

Ladies and gentleman of the jury, Autumn would have you believe that Steven Carmichael was a terrible man. That he was controlling, manipulative, and abusive. But I implore you to look at the facts of this case. Autumn killed him. The defense would have you believe the suspicions of a known drug addict, who admits to never witnessing any abuse and the unfounded suspicions of a doctor evaluating the mental state of a very troubled girl. Now, I know you just heard Autumn's testimony. Is her story powerful? No doubt, but it has no place here. It belongs at a trial that Steven Carmichael will never get to have. He was innocent in the eyes of the law, and did not deserve to be brutally murdered in his own home by someone who claimed to love him. The defense is trying to paint him as a villain, but the truth is none of us know the truth. Why? Because Steven was not allowed the opportunity to tell us his story. We don't know his past. And now, no one will ever get to know his future. Remember who is on trial here, and do the right thing. Find her guilty.

Lights dim as the entire ensemble works to clear the stage. Autumn and her trio take down center stage and are the only ones illuminated by the light. During the following scene, Autumn and her trio move downstage right. The trio helps Autumn change into a prison jumpsuit over her clothes. The ensemble speak their line in the darkness.

JUDGE

The jury has reached their verdict. How do you find the defendant?

JURY

We find the defendant guilty of murder in the second degree.

JUDGE

The court thanks the jury for their time. The defendant will meet for sentencing. Jury is dismissed.

Lights shift back to how they were at the top of the show illuminating the now bare stage. Autumn is standing center stage. Vera, Joy, and Dee are standing in a line behind her several feet apart from one another. Autumn addresses the audience just as she did at the top of the show.

AUTUMN

I was sentenced to twenty years...yeah, ain't that some shit? Don't worry Alex is already working on an appeal. He says he won't give up on me. Even if we don't get it, the judge who did my sentencing was touched by my story. Due to the mitigating and aggravating circumstances of the events in question, I could be up for parole in five years, so long as I behave myself. I'm even in a program that is helping me take classes so that when I do get out, I won't be so behind in college. Might even earn my degree in here, who knows. He said he still wanted me to have a shot at life. He's actually the one who told me about this group and encouraged me to join. Kasey was right, it helps not to have to face these demons alone. She visits me by the way. Once a week, like clockwork. My mom visits too, believe it or not. She travels here once a month. It's strange seeing her now that she was forced to face her own demons. I think she needs our visits more than I do. That's okay though, because now, I'm starting to really know her. And there was a lot I didn't know. I feel like I have a mom for the first time in my life.

AUTUMN

Now, I know what you're all thinking. What about my trio? They're still with me. Joy helps me turn off my inner monologue and just enjoy the moment every once in a while.

JOY

Okay, take a minute. Breathe in...hold it...now breath out. Okay, that's it, that's all the time we're spending on those negative thoughts today. Now let's go to commissary and get ourselves a treat and maybe get something for that cutie over there.

Joy selects an audience member and gives them a fun winks.

AUTUMN

And Vera, well...let's just say she's teaching me to be strong and to stand up for myself. She's doesn't let me take anyone's shit.

VERA

No, you are not finished with that book, don't give it up, just cause they asked. Tell them no. It's okay to say no. And if they don't listen, I'll make them.

Vera makes a threatening motion of 'I'm watching you', to an audience member.

AUTUMN

And Dee...well...

Dee rushes over to Autumn, and starts dancing around her.

DEE

Come on, Autumn, play with me!

AUTUMN

She's teaching me to be a kid again. She's helping me learn that it's okay to be vulnerable sometimes, when it's with the right person. That the world can be a safe place.

DEE

Come onnnnnn, play!

AUTUMN

Just a second.

Dee starts to pout and looks to an audience member to say her next line to.

DEE

No fair, I wanna play.

AUTUMN

Look, I'm not saying it's all rainbows and butterflies. There is a lot more for me to learn and a lot more for me to heal...but I'm trying. My story is far from simple, but it's mine and at least I know now, without a doubt, that I survive the winter.

Dr. Weber enters.

DR. WEBER

Autumn, sorry to interrupt, but it's time for your session.

DEE

Oh, me first, me first!

JOY

I'm coming!

VERA

Hey, wait for me!

The trio follows Doctor and they exit.

AUTUMN

My name is Autumn, and I'm finally learning to cope.

END OF PLAY