

The Star Killers

a play
by Aaron Ricciardi

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Starring:

- JACQUI DAWN SMITH: 30s-40s, female. A perennially unemployed actor who lives in Los Angeles, California, and works as a cater waiter. Her given name was something else, but she changed it (not legally) to “have more star quality.” Her looks are remarkably unremarkable. She is a fervent evangelical Christian who prays regularly, and, when she does, she sometimes speaks in tongues, which she learned to do in church and on YouTube. She’s lived in L.A. since she graduated with a B.A. in Theatre Arts from a private, conservative Christian college, where she mainly did musicals. At college, there were only around twenty other Theatre Arts majors, and nearly all of them were hobbyists. Jacqui stuck out because of how seriously she took her craft. Plays Woman in the scenes from the movie *The Star Killers*.
- S.E. CAINE: 50s-60s, female. A perennially unemployed former model and actor, who never truly pursued either career, though she does love to brag about the nude modeling work she did in her early twenties, which she insists was fine art and not pornography. She is married to Donny. She goes by the initialism of her first and middle names—pronounced “Essie”—because these names were given to her by her parents, whom she abhors. Her beauty once could stop traffic, but this is hard to tell these days, since she dresses like she’s in some kind of punk rock militia and since she somewhere along the road became bug-eyed. Though she has never actually made a film, she fancies herself “an auteur.”
- DONNY CAINE: 60s-70s, male. A B-list—actually, now more like C-list—film actor. He is married to S.E. His goofy looks pigeon-holed him as a “character actor,” but he possesses a bona fide virtuosic talent. Donny was once clean-shaven and rather adorable, but, today, he is slovenly and off-putting, with baggy, dirty clothes and a baggy, dirty beard. Donny’s career began at nineteen years old, when, during his sophomore year of college, he was discovered by a respected independent film director. Donny’s deepest desire has always been to be taken more seriously as an actor. He has started teaching acting workshops for the dough. Plays The Star in the scenes from the movie *The Star Killers*.
- MANNY KANTOR: 50s-70s, male. If you didn’t know this gruff, slovenly Jewish man was responsible for multiple award-winning films, television shows, and productions on Broadway and in the West End, you would never guess it. He’s the guy at the bagel place whose orders begin with the word “gimme.” Since people fear him and like his projects, he gets away with abhorrent, vicious crimes like physical and emotional abuse and rape.

Setting:

Los Angeles, California. 2016, give or take.

Production Design:

Perhaps the play takes place in a low-budget, bare acting studio, with basic furniture and blocks, the kind of space where an acting class would take place. There wouldn't be much in the way of props or theatrics, until the sudden violence and blood, which should look terrifyingly real.

Visual Effects:

When we move from reality to movie, there should be a distinct tonal shift. Reality is gritty and sad, but the movie we see is the fine masterwork that S.E. imagines she'd make.

Editing:

Most every scene change should feel like a jump cut.

Script Supervisor:

Scenes in reality are in this font. Scenes from the movie are in this font.

Italics denote *emphasis*. CAPS denote EMPHASIS and VOLUME.

A forward slash (/) indicates that the following line should interrupt the current line at that spot.

There are few pauses and silences indicated in the script. Actors and directors can (and should!) put more in where they feel right.

Casting:

Jacqui, S.E., and Donny should be played by actors of any race; Manny is probably White. Keep in mind that Jacqui, S.E., and Donny are not so much conservative as they are libertarian, not so much ignorant as they are selfish. They feel they've been maligned, so they distrust everything. This kind of right-wing victimhood is of course often linked with Whiteness, but recent history has shown that this ideology is tempting to all.

“Suppose you throw a party. Early on, you're busy greeting people, fetching drinks, making sure the sound system works. Everyone seems to be having a good time. You could stand outside the front door with a flashlight, interviewing each potential guest, but instead you decide to leave the gates open. You don't think about what might go wrong. On the whole, people are basically trustworthy. Why would someone want to ruin the party?

Inevitably, things go wrong. You play an obscene song. Someone complains. You play an unobjectionable song. Everyone stops dancing. One person sneaks into the bathroom for a cigarette, and you decide to look the other way—you sort of like the idea of hosting a raucous party, the kind with a trace of illicit smoke in the air. But then people start smoking in the hallway, and on the dance floor, and someone has an asthma attack. Sleazy men start making aggressive passes at women; word gets around, and many women decide to leave. Someone spreads a rumor that the bartender is poisoning the drinks. Another person makes a racist joke, and several people laugh; before you can confront them, they scatter into the crowd.

What can you do? You don't want to let things get out of hand. You consider pausing the music, turning on all the lights, maybe identifying a few of the troublemakers and dragging them out by the collar. That would set an example, but could also spoil the mood, and the party might never recover.

By far the easiest solution, and the only one that will set you up to be perfectly consistent in the future, is to do nothing, or almost nothing. You can't spend all your time policing everyone. Instead, you establish a clear, simple policy: as long as none of your guests do anything violent or illegal, they can say whatever they want. After all, you believe in free speech.”

— Andrew Marantz, *Antisocial*

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“It's a very tough period of time. There's never been a time like this where such a thing happened where they could take it away from all of us. From me, from you, from our country. This was a fraudulent election, but we can't play into the hands of these people. We have to have peace. So, go home. We love you. You're very special.”

—President Donald John Trump, 1/6/2021

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“RADIO REPORTER (V.O.):

Reports are unclear as to the extent of the devastation, but from all accounts Los Angeles, Washington, and New York have been left in ruins.

RUSSELL CASSE:

Good God! I've been sayin' it. I've been sayin' it for ten damn years. Ain't I been sayin' it, Miguel? Yeah, I've been sayin' it.”

— Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin, *Independence Day*

INT. ACTING STUDIO – NIGHT

A rinky-dink acting studio. Jacqui stands on the stage, while Donny and S.E. sit in the audience. The stage is bare, save for some basic furniture and blocks that have been pushed to the sides and the back. Jacqui has just finished performing a monologue.

A long silence.

DONNY

All that matters is that you believe what you're saying. That's all that matters. Right here, right now, but any time you do this acting thang—you believe it, and we'll believe it too. And the problem is, I don't believe you. I don't believe a word you're saying. And I don't think you believe you either.

JACQUI

I don't. Gosh you're so right, I'm a phony, I'm—

DONNY

Well I'm gonna help you. There's a lot going on in this monologue.

S.E.

It's not a monologue; it's a speech. A monologue is when a character is alone.

DONNY

My wife is brilliant.

S.E.

This isn't about me.

DONNY

You are. She's brilliant, and that's why her script has so many layers. Let's uncover them. Now, it's the end of the world. This character might be using this guy, but she still hasn't been fucked in a long time. You know what that's like?

JACQUI

Umm.

S.E.

Donny—

DONNY

You know what, don't answer, don't answer—just think. Think about a low point, your own life, when you felt, that's it, I can't go on any longer. You have it?

Jacqui nods. Silence.

DONNY

Well what is it?!

JACQUI

You want me to answer?

DONNY

Of course!

JACQUI
(emotional)

It's—sorry.

DONNY

It's okay. Take your time.

JACQUI

It's right now.

DONNY

How so?

JACQUI

Well, when I first moved here, it was like Oz. I was off the farm, and life was suddenly in color. Basically right when I got to L.A. I booked a national commercial. I made so much money, I was able to buy a car. But, ten-plus years later, I had to sell the car, so now I take the bus, and—

DONNY

The bus in L.A. That's grim.

JACQUI

And add to that, my roommate's giving my room to his friend, I can't find another place, I can't afford to put down a deposit anywhere, I cater waiter which makes me want to die, and I can't book an acting job no matter how hard I try.

DONNY

Your folks, back on the farm, what do they think of your career?

JACQUI

Oh they think I should give it up.

DONNY

Do you think they're right?

JACQUI

No!

DONNY

But if you were gonna make it, wouldn't you have made it by now?

JACQUI

No! Very few people hit it big at, like, twenty.

DONNY

I did.

JACQUI

Everyone follows their own path. Like that guy who made a movie on his phone and now it's in movie theaters. It worked out for him.

DONNY

But what if it doesn't work out for you?

JACQUI

It will.

DONNY

It will?

JACQUI

It will.

DONNY

It will?

JACQUI

It will.

DONNY

Okay.

JACQUI

Okay.

DONNY

Okay.

JACQUI
Okay.

DONNY
Okay.

JACQUI
Okay?

S.E.
He wants you to start the speech again.

JACQUI
Oh!

DONNY
I want her to get there herself, S.E.! I want her to feel it!

S.E.
As I have repeatedly told you, that bizarre technique doesn't work.

JACQUI
No, this is great! "This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies. Turns out they're exactly what the end of the world is actually like—"

DONNY
Cut. You messed her up, S.E. She was in the zone. She was right there and you distracted her.

S.E.
If she was truly in the zone, she couldn't have gotten distracted.

DONNY
You were smiling too much. Life has beaten the shit out this woman.

JACQUI
I was trying to flirt.

DONNY
Less flirting, more sex.

S.E.
You're like an animal. You're like an animal in heat.

DONNY

Yeah!

JACQUI

What kind of animal?

DONNY

Whatever you want!

JACQUI

Okay.

DONNY

Okay—

S.E.

You know what—May I?

DONNY

Be my guest.

S.E. goes to Jacqui.

S.E.

You. Are a gorilla. Go.

Jacqui gets down on her haunches and acts like a gorilla. She does whatever S.E. tells her to.

S.E.

Now move. Move around the space. Go to some bushes and pick off some berries. Oh, Mama Gorilla! This is your baby. Protect your baby, Mama Gorilla. There are lions coming. You have to stand guard. Beat your chest and roar. That's it. Bigger! BIGGER! MORE!!! Now take all that, put it inside you, and zip it up. Feel that rage. Feel that pain. But don't express it. You're not a gorilla anymore. You're a woman. But you're also a gorilla. Start the speech.

JACQUI

(acting)

“This feels like one of those end-of-the-world movies. Turns out they're exactly what the end of the world is actually like. Even this conversation feels like a movie. What if this *was* a movie? Or should it be *were* a movie? I never know the right word there: were or was. In a movie I'd know the right word. In a movie I'd know the right everything. Do you...? Do

JACQUI

(acting)

“you...? Sorry, I’m being all awkward. Do you have a place to stay tonight? I don’t have much, but I have a small cot. Times like these, we’ve got to stick together.”

S.E.

Cut. That was better.

It actually was.

DONNY

Yeah, that was good.

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EXT. PACIFIC PALISADES MANSION – NIGHT

Manny wanders around, bored at yet another party. He somehow looks both slovenly and made of money.

Jacqui, perhaps in a catering uniform, forcing good cheer, saunters with a tray of shrimp summer rolls, a bowl of sauce, and napkins. Manny walks over to her.

JACQUI

Good evening, Mr. Kantor!

Manny doesn’t acknowledge her. He moves his face inches from the tray and inspects and smells the food.

JACQUI

I am *such* a fan—the movies you’ve produced have all been *so* important to me.

MANNY

What is this shit?

JACQUI

It’s shrimp summer rolls!

Manny sighs loudly and walks away.

JACQUI

Before you go—I'm an actor—my name is Jacqui Dawn Smith—and I wanted to introduce myself, because I figure you miss a hundred percent of the shots you don't take—

MANNY

Drop dead.

And Manny is gone. S.E. and Donny scurry in, trailing Manny.

S.E.

Go talk to him!

DONNY

I will!

S.E.

You're being a pussy!

Jacqui notices Donny and S.E.

DONNY

Will you keep your voice down?

S.E.

I'm not being that loud! Lighten up.

DONNY

I'll talk to him.

Jacqui goes to S.E. and Donny.

JACQUI

S.E.! Donny!

A moment. Donny and S.E. stare at Jacqui, unaware of who she is. Jacqui worries she made a mistake saying hi. Then, suddenly, S.E. remembers.

S.E.

Gorilla girl!

DONNY

Who?

JACQUI/S.E.
I/she took your/our workshop!

DONNY
Oh!

JACQUI
Jacqui.

S.E.
Jacqui, of course.

DONNY
Riiiiight.

S.E.
How could you not remember? I led her in animal work!

DONNY
I remember. How you doin'?

JACQUI
Um, I'm better now that I'm running into y'all! I've been on cloud nine since your workshop. I love animal work. Like, we are animals.

S.E.
That's right. We are savage, wounded animals, all of us.

JACQUI
I'm a gorilla, you know? I am a gorilla.

S.E.
Stick in this business long enough and that's what you'll see: the viciousness, but also, the pain.

DONNY
You'll see assholes. You'll see a whole industry populated by capital-A assholes.

S.E.
I feel the worst for the Jacquis of the world at a party like this. She's gotta spend the night licking the taints of said assholes.

JACQUI
People haven't been that bad.

S.E.

You can speak your mind with us. We've known these people forever. They're pretentious, self-righteous star fuckers. They're vermin.

DONNY

They're vultures. Of all the people you've brought that tray to tonight, who's been the worst?

JACQUI

People really haven't been that bad.

DONNY

Come on. We all know that's not true. If you knew you could murder one of these lickspittles and get away with it, who would it be?

S.E.

(loving this)

Oh my god, Donny—you're so bad.

DONNY

I'm not leaving you alone until you pick. Any one of 'em. Dead. For retribution.

JACQUI

I'd probably have to say that woman and also that woman over there, 'cause when I brought them my tray they were having this whole conversation about how their cleaning ladies don't look poor, because in America we have all these clothing stores that are cheap but look expensive, and then that woman said to the other one, "We dress our poor very well in this country." And the whole time both of them were stuffing their faces with the food from my tray, and neither of them thanked me.

S.E.

A fine choice.

DONNY

A most excellent decision.

Manny approaches the Caines.

MANNY

Donny.

DONNY

Manny! Great to see you!

MANNY

I didn't think you'd show up.

S.E.

Donny Caine always shows up.

DONNY

You can count on me, Manny.

S.E.

Donny Caine always delivers.

MANNY

Nobody's seen you in a hundred years. That's when people start asking questions: Where's he been? Is he alive?

DONNY

Oh I'm alive!

S.E.

He is very much alive. Vigorous and full of stamina, like a twenty-year-old. Believe me.

MANNY

Sometimes a little disappearance can be useful, though.

DONNY

What do you mean?

MANNY

I mean if you want to make a comeback.

DONNY

Well, I like the sound of that.

S.E.

Yes we do.

MANNY

I got this idea, Don—

DONNY

It's funny—we've got an idea too—

S.E.

Yes we do, we have a very good idea we wanted to throw your way—

DONNY

We wanted to talk to you about it—

Manny notices Jacqui.

MANNY

What are you standing here for? Go away.

JACQUI

Oh.

MANNY
(vicious)

GO AWAY!

S.E.

Oh my god!

DONNY

She can stay!

S.E.

Take it easy!

DONNY

This is actually our friend Jacqui!

S.E.

Who is a wonderful actress, by the way.

MANNY

Then why don't you act like a waitress and ask these night people if they want some food?

JACQUI

Shrimp summer roll?

S.E.

Blech. Blech! I don't have an appetite after witnessing that!

DONNY

Suit yourself. I'm hungry.

S.E.

Donny, you know you shouldn't. He's allergic to shrimp.

JACQUI

How 'bout you, Mr. Kantor? Shrimp summer roll?

MANNY

Nice try, toots. I'm kosher.

JACQUI

I think these are kosher!

MANNY

Shrimp is very much not kosher.

JACQUI

I never met a Jewish person until I moved to L.A.

MANNY

Really riveting stuff. Let me know if you ever want to sell your life rights. I smell a blockbuster. Alright, you've done your job, now shoo. Be seen and not heard, honey bunny.

S.E.

Manny, Jacqui is a human being / and she does not deserve to be spoken to like that!

MANNY

Donny, kindly put your wife back in her cage.

S.E.

Oh, I'm the one / who belong in a cage. Okay. Me—

DONNY

Tell you what, I think I will have one of those, thank you, Jacqui—

S.E.

Don't eat that shrimp!

S.E. tries to stop Donny taking a roll from Jacqui's tray, which causes Jacqui to spill the contents directly onto Manny, thereby drenching Manny in soy sauce.

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EXT. CHAIN RESTAURANT PATIO – NIGHT

Jacqui and the Caines sit at a table. The Caines stuff their faces with shrimp.

JACQUI

I thought you were allergic to shrimp.

DONNY

She just says that.

S.E.

It's easier than telling the truth. A few years ago we went to a party and we were the only ones to get violently sick afterward, so suffice it to say we're careful about what we put in our bodies. We hardly even eat out anymore.

DONNY

I can't remember the last time. If we do go out to eat, it's always to a place like this.

S.E.

At a chain restaurant, all the food comes prepackaged so it's consistent.

DONNY

She's taken the food home to do tests on it.

S.E.

To make sure what they say is in it is actually what's in it.

DONNY

And we always eat outside, so we don't have to worry about being overheard or bugged.

S.E.

Well, we don't have to worry *as much*.

DONNY

Paparazzi, man.

S.E.

Life is about mitigating risks. Aren't you hungry?

JACQUI

I'm full.

DONNY

Come on. It's our treat after everything that happened. We're really sorry.

JACQUI

It's fine. My manager had been wanting to fire me for a long time.

S.E.

He was screaming at you!

JACQUI

Oh, that wasn't even bad. He's been way worse than that.

S.E.

Listen, I love gay men, but uptight, snooty queens like him run around whining that they're this mistreated minority, meanwhile they're abusive, and they essentially have a mafia!

JACQUI

He *was* always nicest to the gay servers. Sometimes they'd, you know, in the bathroom, during an event.

S.E.

UCH!

JACQUI

And then those were the ones who'd get promoted to captain.

DONNY

Speaking of, let's flag down the waiter. What do you want?

JACQUI

You're so sweet. I actually don't eat after eight p.m. It's a diet.

S.E.

See? This is why I gave it up. The unrealistic beauty standards they place on actresses in this business is frankly criminal. And I mean that literally. They call themselves liberals, progressives, feminists, they fight for their right to breastfeed in the town square, the casting couch is tantamount to Vietnam, but all they actually care about is perky tits and a waist the size of a tic tac, because they think that's what sells tickets, and, like everything, it's all about money, so go see any movie and none of the women look like actual human beings. They can eat my shit.

DONNY

Not to mention, she's beautiful.

S.E.

I expound upon Hollywood's unrealistic beauty standards and your response is to focus on her looks?

DONNY

I'm saying she's beautiful just the way she is.

S.E.

Correct. Pure, simple beauty.

DONNY

Where you from?

JACQUI

Indiana.

DONNY

What do I always say, S.E.?

S.E.

He always says it.

DONNY

I always say, these places everyone forgets about, in the middle of nowhere—Indiana, Texas—I'm from Texas—the places none of these jackoffs ever go, unless they're shooting something there and taking advantage of that place's native people—that's where the true beauty is in this country.

S.E.

It's not to be found in the cities! It's not to be found in L.A., that's for sure! It's not to be found in those ostentatious scumbags you served at that party! I should know, okay? I came from that world. I played golf, I was on the sailing team, the whole nine yards. I can see right through them.

JACQUI

They all seem, like, so conceited and just, like, not nice. I'm a Christian, and I—

S.E.

We're Christians too, but we also incorporate other beliefs.

JACQUI

How beautiful. Yeah, I'm a Christian, and it takes my breath away how cruel and closed-minded people can be in this business!

S.E.

This is what my script's about—the toxicity of Hollywood and how if it keeps going the way it's going, it's all gonna be over.

JACQUI

You are really speaking my language. So what's all going on with your film?

S.E.

We're shopping around for a producer.

JACQUI

I'll produce it. I have tons of producorial experience. Is that crazy?!

S.E.

It is. We're looking for someone with clout.

DONNY

She means someone at a studio.

S.E.

No offense.

JACQUI

None taken!

DONNY

That's kind of why we were at that party.

S.E.

Donny and Manny go way back.

JACQUI

Manny Kantor is a big deal! I mean, if you can get him to produce it, that would be amazing!

S.E.

Too bad *this* guy chickened out.

DONNY

I was about to.

S.E.

You had ample opportunity.

DONNY

You have to finesse these things.

JACQUI

Have you sent him the script?

S.E.

Yeah, *that'll* happen!

DONNY

S.E. thinks he won't read it.

S.E.

S.E. *knows* he won't read it.

JACQUI

Why? It's such an amazing script!

S.E.

It's an *important* script. It's Mulholland Drive but less stupid.

DONNY

Manny and S.E. don't get along. It's a long story.

S.E.

I'm not afraid to tell it! And it isn't even long. When we were all much younger, before Donny and I had even met!, I had a meeting with Manny in which he asked me to quote unquote give him a massage and I told him to take a hike—I'm too smart to fall for that, okay?—but he's never quite gotten over that, so now he has no respect for my work. It's an open secret the guy's a pig. His office is essentially a rape factory.

JACQUI

Still, it would be great to get him on board.

S.E.

Of course!

DONNY

I'll figure something out.

JACQUI

Ya know, my neighbor did a reading of her script at her apartment recently, in which I was honored to play the lead. She provided beer and everyone had so much fun. You should do something like that and invite Manny!

DONNY

I don't think he'd ever come to that.

S.E.

(to Jacqui)

You're missing the point. He's a misogynist who doesn't respect my work.

JACQUI

You don't have to tell him he's coming to a reading. Just arrange a meeting with him—at your office, not his—

DONNY

We don't have an office.

JACQUI

At your house then. Just tell him you want to get together to catch up and while he's there we just read the script.

DONNY

Like we trap him there?

JACQUI

Not at all—it's guerrilla theatre.

S.E.

That's rad.

DONNY

I don't think he'll sit through a whole script if we spring it on him.

JACQUI

I've only read a few scenes from this script, but I know it's so good that once he hears the first few pages, there's no way he won't be glued to his chair until the end.

S.E.

I like the way your mind works.

JACQUI

And, like I said, I have tons of producorial experience. I can handle copying the scripts and getting the beer—and I'll read in it, too, if you need another actor.

S.E.

Well there's only one other actor in the script besides Donny. He plays *The Star*, and the way I see it is every other role in the film would be played by one actress.

JACQUI

This is fate then! I'll do it.

DONNY

When you get the beer, make sure it's not Budweiser.

JACQUI

Totally—what should I—?

DONNY

Anything but Budweiser—or any Anheuser-Busch product.

S.E.

We specifically don't permit in our home anything within the Anheuser-Busch sphere of influence.

DONNY

Can't be near it.

S.E.

Donny was the face of Budweiser.

DONNY

For a few years, a long time ago. Let's just say they did us wrong.

JACQUI

I guess you could say I was the face of Cymbalta. That's the product I did that national commercial for. I played a young woman who was struggling with depression. It was a great role, and it really touched people. I got a bunch of emails from fans through my website.

Tense silence.

JACQUI

Is everything okay?

S.E.

You worked for the pharmaceutical industry.

JACQUI
(proud)

I did.

S.E.

Working for the pharmaceutical industry is basically ritualized murder.

DONNY

It's not not true.

JACQUI

Well, I didn't work for them per se.

S.E.

Excuse me? They bought you a car!

JACQUI

But I sold it!

DONNY
(to S.E.)

Calm down, babe.

S.E.

I am calm, asshole, I'm just saying she essentially made a deal with the devil, so I don't know if we'd be comfortable working with her.

JACQUI

But that was a long time ago! I had just moved to L.A. and I needed a job! Would I take that job now? Absolutely not! I'm much much *much* more careful about the work I say yes to. I want to do work that makes a positive impact on the world! Like your movie!

DONNY
(to S.E.)

She didn't know.

S.E.

Then she should educate herself, instead of coasting through life like some sort of blind shopping cart!

DONNY

She doesn't need to know.

JACQUI

I always want to educate myself! Please! Inform me!

S.E.

Where do I begin? How about the year two-thousand nine, when we lost the greatest entertainer in the history of time, Michael Jackson. Remember all those drugs? And that doctor? If you look deep into it, the doctor was getting paid by the pharma companies—and you don't have to look that deep into it, by the way—it's all right there for you to see, clear as day—it's so obvious it's stupid. You're alone in a room with one other person and you hear a toot and it starts to smell like turds and you know you didn't do it so lemme guess who farted? Hmm hmm hmm who could it be? It's not rocket science.

DONNY

So the doctor was getting paid by the pharma people.

S.E.

Right, they're paying him to give these drugs to Jackson, and the doctor doesn't take insurance or anything—don't get me started on medical insurance in this country—so the doctor's charging Jackson a couple thousand dollars a pop and he visits every day, so it *behooves* him to make Jackson sick. It *behooves* him to get Jackson addicted. That's why we don't take any medicine. We don't take any medicine for anything.

DONNY

We take supplements. Lots of supplements.

S.E.

All natural, from the earth. But no drugs. And no doctors.

DONNY

We haven't taken any drugs in probably five years.

S.E.

At least. There's no knowing who or what you can trust, because everywhere you turn there's the profit motive.

DONNY

(to Jacqui)

She's very passionate about this.

JACQUI

Totally. This is how I am about littering.

S.E.

We have to be vigilant. All of us. Not just celebrities.

(to Jacqui)

You've gotta be vigilant too. Do you take any meds?

JACQUI

Um, I have these sinus problems that affect my singing—I'm a singer—so I take stuff for that.

S.E.

Like what?

JACQUI

An allergy pill, a nasal spray—oh! an acid reflex pill—

S.E.

Stop taking that crap!

JACQUI

Even that?

S.E.

Suit yourself, but you're voluntarily taking poison.

JACQUI

Wow.

S.E.

I don't know about you, but I don't want to die.

JACQUI

I don't want to die either!

DONNY

I do not want to die.

S.E.

Every system—the pharmaceutical industry, Hollywood, the Congress—they make us think we gotta suck their teats to survive, but we all know that's not true. We have everything we need inside us already.

JACQUI

Yes!

DONNY
(to Jacqui)

Isn't she the best?

JACQUI

The best!

S.E.

We make our own medicine. We make our own opportunities.

JACQUI

But don't you sometimes get overwhelmed by it all? I pray about it all the time. Like, how do I even start?

S.E.

You just start. You do the work. You must do the work. Me, I have a very vigorous, almost monk-like artistic practice at this point. I'm up by four-thirty every morning, hard at work.

JACQUI

Four-thirty?!

S.E.

That's right.

JACQUI

What time do you go to bed?

S.E.

One, two?

DONNY

Around then.

JACQUI

Aren't you tired?!

S.E.

(laughing)

This is another pill they want you to swallow. You don't need to sleep the whole night.

JACQUI

You don't.

S.E.

Hell no! The most successful, prolific people in the world, they ain't sleepin' eight hours a night! Please!

JACQUI

I didn't know that.

S.E.

How do you think they're so prolific? My friend, there's a little thing called napping.

DONNY

We're expert nappers.

S.E.

We sleep all day long.

DONNY

In little bursts.

S.E.

That's all you need.

DONNY

You're way more alert and alive.

S.E.

Not to mention productive.

JACQUI

I want to try this!

S.E.

We'll show you right now.

JACQUI

Oh my gosh, okay!

DONNY

(to Jacqui)

You're really getting the royal treatment here.

JACQUI

What an honor!

S.E.

Get comfortable. Hold hands. Close your eyes. Just breathe. If a thought enters your mind, tap it out. Empty your consciousness. And breathe.

A long spell where, eyes closed, they all try to nap.

Suddenly, an object falls heavy from the sky and lands on their table with a bang. S.E. springs into protective mode against whoever might be attacking them. Jacqui cowers. Donny delights in the surprise.

JACQUI
GOD ALMIGHTY!

S.E.
THIS IS NOT HOW THIS IS GONNA GO!

DONNY
(laughing)
Scared the shit outta me!

S.E.
COME AND TRY ME! I'LL TEAR YOUR NUTS OFF!

DONNY
Sweetheart, come look. It's a crow.

S.E.
Stay away from that, Donny! You don't know what it is!

DONNY
It's a crow. It's still breathing. It's a sign. It's a god-given sign.

S.E.
Oh my god. It is. It is a crow. It's my bird. It's our bird.

DONNY
Its wings're moving, but barely. It's dying. There's a crow in our screenplay.

JACQUI
Wow. That's so beautiful.

DONNY
My daddy taught me about crows. When I was a tyke, my daddy'd take us hunting and he'd show off by shooting birds, because they were the smallest, and hardest to hit. He hit a lot of crows. And he'd tell us tales about 'em—folklore, legends. He'd say, it's not a coincidence that in Welsh and Cornish mythology, crows signify death. To the Chinese, crows spell barren crops. The Hindus tell us that crows are a vessel for ghosts. In Aboriginal legends, the crow is a murderer. Maybe that's why we say a murder of crows. My daddy taught me

DONNY

there's no coincidences. What is this crow telling us? Look at his little lungs moving. How'd you find us, little fella? Are you my daddy's ghost? Is death around the corner, Pops? Destruction? End times? It takes a fool to not see we're ass-backward in this country, that we need an exorcism. Like this crow, we are at our last gasp.

S.E.

We gotta put that in the movie. That was brilliant. That was fucking brilliant.

JACQUI

I agree. It was fucking brilliant, and I never swear.

*

INT. THE CAINES' HOUSE – EVENING

Jacqui and the Caines stand or sit around, idle, unsure of what to do. Jacqui holds a six-pack of beer.

S.E.

I swear to god, if he flakes—

DONNY

He's not gonna flake.

S.E.

He's late.

DONNY

He's not late yet.

S.E.

It's disrespectful.

DONNY

It's not disrespectful to arrive on time.

S.E.

Ten minutes early is on time in show business.

JACQUI

People have no respect for other people's time.