

An Original Play *Next Door*
Domestic Abuse Addressed in the Theatre

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Abstract

This creative thesis assesses how the theatre has addressed domestic violence in various shows such as *Waitress* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In this paper, the reality of abusive relationships and the victims who are trapped in them is examined, and the subject is addressed in an excerpt of the original two-act play entitled *Next Door*. *Next Door* is a domestic drama that hopes to represent accurately an abusive relationship and its complexities through the relationship of Anna and John and also seeks to portray the struggle of those on the outside who wish to help.

An Original Play *Next Door*: Domestic Abuse Addressed in the Theatre

Introduction

In a study conducted by the World Health Organization, researchers discovered that “[g]lobally, 35.6% of women have ever experienced either non-partner sexual violence or physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, or both” (García-Moreno et al. 20). That means that approximately 1 in 3 women have experienced violence of some nature. According to a study performed by the Center for Disease Control, approximately 4,774,000 women in the United States experience physical violence every year from an intimate partner (Breiding, et al 10). Abuse is simply defined as “a pattern of behavior used to gain and maintain power and control,” and it comes in many forms including physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial, and digital abuse in addition to stalking (“Is This Abuse?”). Domestic abuse is a subject that affects women both globally and nationally, and throughout the centuries, theatrical performances have been used by writers, producers, directors, and actors to convey the shortcomings of society as well as the struggle of humanity; domestic abuse falls into these categories.

It is crucial for the theatre to talk about subjects that tend to be avoided in today’s society for the sake of those who feel voiceless, as its storytelling ability is able to break down walls and allows people to understand complex material. This is especially important as many stories of domestic violence are generalized or stereotyped by others who do not understand the complexity of the situation. The theatre has an important opportunity to present a truthful view of a pressing subject that is frequently misunderstood.

Creative Theory

The theatre can often be used solely for entertainment and a type of escapism, but stories that resonate with audience members are more likely to be successful because they are accurate portrayals of truth. Theatre has been used in vast ways to address cultural events in addition to social and political issues. One of the issues it has specifically addressed is the topic of abuse in various plays and musicals such as *Waitress* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Both of these shows address domestic violence on the stage and delve into this important crisis while allowing people to see the truth of these dangerous relationships. A recent example of this can be seen in the Tony-nominated musical, *Waitress*.

Waitress is the story of Jenna Hutcherson, a waitress at a small town diner who discovers that she is pregnant with her abusive husband's child. She then begins an affair with her gynecologist, Dr. Jim Pomatter, and struggles with trying to leave her husband to protect herself and the child. Jesse Mueller who plays the lead character, Jenna, stated in an interview that she "spent time with victims of sexual and domestic violence at the Mount Sinai Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention (SAVI) program in New York. That process, she said, was an 'interesting challenge' that allowed her to get inside Jenna's head but made her feel 'blessed to not know what that's like firsthand'" (Wong). This specific research is key when one is telling a story as painful and difficult as abuse. Mueller's in depth analysis is what ultimately led to her performance being hailed as "pitch-perfect in her portrayal of a woman battling emotional and physical abuse" (Romano). However, it is not only important to the creators of *Waitress* to portray the truth of a woman struggling in an abusive relationship, but they also desire to help

those who are trapped in abusive relationships. This can be seen through the musical's partnership with the SAVI program as they "met with the cast during rehearsals and have pamphlets available at every show. [T]heir hope is that through the bright lights, comedy and fun filled show the audience will leave with a key message, end domestic abuse and find happiness in your home" (Quinn). Although this message is truly hopeful to the audience, *Waitress* still stumbles at times in its depiction of abuse.

Waitress portrays an abusive relationship between Jenna and Earl, but Aja Romano states that Earl demonstrates a "stilted nonchalance" and the show tries "to downplay his controlling behavior" (Romano). Another red flag seen in this production is found in the relationship between Jenna's co-worker Dawn and her online date with a man named Ogie. Although Ogie is played as a comedic character who refuses to leave Dawn alone, and they end up together eventually, there is still the struggle in the audience's mind as they watch "stalking passed off as mutual love" (Romano). Finally, Jenna's escape from her husband is never depicted, and therefore appears extremely simple, which is not at all the case. In fact, most women try to leave an abusive relationship up to seven times, and seventy-five percent of women who die in domestic incidents are killed by their abusive partners during these attempted escapes (Romano). The writing team was well aware of the difficulty many women face but tried to remain true to the original story while "reworking the script so that the finale [didn't] feel false" (Hartigan). There are those on both sides who would argue with each other over what constitutes the better ending. However, one aspect that seems to be a common theme in *Waitress* is the idea of hope for those who are trapped. This hope can be more difficult to

see in other theatrical performances depicting abuse such as Tennessee William's play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

A Streetcar Named Desire follows the story of Blanche, a woman who has lost nearly everything and comes to stay with her sister, Stella, and Stella's abusive husband, Stanley. During the course of her stay, Blanche's shady past is revealed, and the malice of Stanley is clearly seen as well, particularly in his treatment of Blanche, which culminates in her rape at the end of the play. Domestic violence is clearly seen throughout the show as Stanley abuses Stella and Blanche. When Stanley first enters, Williams describes him saying,

Since earliest manhood the center of [Stanley's] life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependently, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens . . . He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them." (29)

The character of Stanley is set up from his very first description to be a man who is abusive, and his abuse is seen in his inclination to "violent drunken rages and physical abuse;" however, Stella believes "she cannot leave because of her sexual needs for him and because she is about to have his baby" (Silvio 138).

In the end, Stanley ends up committing one of the most heinous acts possible by choosing to rape Blanche. Liang Zhang states that "Stanley's down-to-earth character proves harmfully crude and brutish. His disturbing, degenerate nature [is] fully evident after he rape[s] his sister-in-law" (224). Unlike Earl in *Waitress*, Stanley is a terrifying reality of abuse and the depravity of a violent man's heart. It is impossible for anyone to

excuse or to try to defend Stanley by the end of the play as he has lost any sympathy he has garnered from his readers. Zhang quotes one of Blanche's lines saying, "Some things are not forgivable, deliberate cruelty is not forgivable" to reveal the malevolence of Stanley's crime (qtd. in Zhang 224). Although this show depicts a realistic abusive relationship, there seems to be little hope as Stella is still trapped in her marriage with Stanley at the end of the play. However, others have taken this play and used it to try to make a difference.

In 2013, Outside the Wire, a social impact and theatre company in New York, partnered with the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence to present scenes from *A Streetcar Named Desire* and to host a conversation with the audience afterward. At these performances, scenes would be read and "a panel of community members who represent different perspectives on the issue of domestic violence [shared] their reactions" (Atwood). This opened up the floor for discussion among those who attended and allowed everyone to be given information about the resources available to victims of abuse. The desire of Matthew Perry who works for Family Crisis Services was for people to leave the readings with an understanding of domestic violence and an awareness of how they can help those in these situations. He said,

"Although most people will say domestic violence is wrong . . . they often will blame the victim for the abuse they are enduring and fail to hold the abuser accountable. I hope that audience members can recognize that we, as community members, often do this without realizing what we are doing. We believe we are being helpful, but alas we are not. No one deserves to be abused, abuse is always wrong."

This event was able to take a play performed in 1947 and use it to address the victimization of women in the twenty-first century by bringing to light the plight of those trapped in abuse.

Strategy

Domestic violence is a prevalent attack particularly against women globally, and the purpose of the play *Next Door* is to address domestic abuse. There are many misconceptions of aggression in the home including the view that it happens to only weak-willed women in low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, this is far from accurate (Roberts 6). Women who are intelligent, talented, wise, and in places of leadership can be victims of mistreatment as well. A common belief held by outsiders of abuse is that “[b]attered women who remain in a violent relationship do so because they are masochistic” (Roberts 13). However, there are many reasons why women stay including economic need, intermittent reinforcement and traumatic bonding, learned helplessness, fear of the abuser, and fear of losing custody of the children (Roberts 14). *Next Door* tries to create an engaging story where the audience can understand abuse further, as well as attempting to challenge the stereotypes that exist and to reveal that healing can begin with a single courageous step.

Style

Next Door adheres to the style of realism as outlined by William Dean Howells, an “outspoken literary [critic]” whose ideas were analyzed in Brenda Murphy’s book *American Realism and American Drama, 1880-1940*. Murphy quotes Howell stating that “the primal purpose of a play is to illustrate life or to reproduce it” (24). Some of the key aspects of realism include staying inside the fourth wall in addition to “psychological

conflicts of the characters in dialogue they would naturally speak, [and] a form that was derived from the human experience being depicted” (49). These aspects are tied into the writing process for *Next Door*, as the play is written with the intention to portray abusive relationships truthfully. The characters never break the fourth wall during the show, and their speech is natural while also giving away information about each person. *Next Door* is written to be as realistic as possible without falling into the monotony of life. It is important to note, however, that this play also has a contemporary edge.

Contemporary drama includes many elements, and although *Next Door* does not demonstrate them all, it does include some facets. One aspect of contemporary theatre is that it has “no traditional resolution” (Andreach 82). These plays often leave the storyline open at the end with many questions which will encourage the audience to think about the story long after the curtain has closed. A wonderful example of this kind of play is seen in *Doubt: A Parable* by John Patrick Shanley as the answer to the play’s main question remains unknown. Although *Next Door* ends with Anna leaving the relationship, what remains unknown is what will happen to her now. The audience is left wondering if she will be chased by John, die trying to escape, or if she is able to evade him completely. They must ask themselves if Naomi will face any repercussions since she indirectly helped Anna leave her marriage. The play seeks to encourage audiences to pursue answers, spurring them on to further thought, research, and even action, which could be seen in helping friends in abusive relationships, volunteering at a women’s shelter, or even raising awareness of abuse.

Target Audience

The target audience for this play is ages sixteen and up. Because domestic abuse is a heavy topic and difficult for many to understand and watch, this show is not suitable for kids. However, the author believes that it is key for those above the age of sixteen to watch this play, which can be marketed as an educational show that highlights the need to talk about domestic violence. It is especially for those who are involved in abusive relationships and those who know someone who is involved in an abusive relationship. However, it does not end there. There are many people who have never been touched by abuse, but it is important for them to understand the gravity of domestic violence and why these women must be helped and defended in the precarious situations in which they find themselves. Anyone is able to help through raising awareness, volunteering, or donating to various organizations who support victims of abuse. There are a vast number of people who may be able to benefit from this story and the reality that is portrayed on the stage.

Play Summary

Next Door is a play about Naomi, a woman in her mid-twenties and her newly married friend, Anna, who has just moved next door to Naomi's apartment. Naomi suspects that Anna's husband, John, is abusive, but Anna refutes her statement. Naomi shares her concerns with her boyfriend, Jack, who during the course of their conversation accidentally blurts out that he wants to marry Naomi. Naomi is caught off guard and doesn't offer a response due to her fear of commitment and being hurt. John appears to make amends with Anna later that night; however, when Anna and Naomi talk again, Naomi divulges that she heard a scream a few nights ago from Anna's apartment. While

the women are talking, Jack stops by to fix the broken coffeemaker and accidentally leaves his ring, which John finds later that evening. This prompts John to believe that Anna is cheating on him and he begins to beat her. Naomi enters the room and tackles John to stop him and is able to prove that the ring belongs to her boyfriend, Jack. Naomi talks to Jack about everything the next day, disturbed by the whole incident and later comes to find that Anna is shaken as well. Both Naomi and Anna must decide whether love means running, staying, or maybe both, and they must decide before it is too late.

Scene Synopses

Act 1, Scene 1. The first scene of the original play *Next Door* is documented as well as a summary of each of the following scenes. These scenes are meant to provide an understanding of the method of how the theatre can and should address important social issues like domestic abuse.

Act 1, Scene 2. John returns home and surprises a sleeping Anna with a bouquet of anemone flowers. John listens to Anna talk about her evening and offers to order food for the night so they both can rest. He eventually apologizes for the outburst earlier in the evening but asks Anna why she does not trust him, prompting an apology from her. Anna begins to believe that the incidents with John are over and affirms to him her belief that he is a wonderful husband. They both decide to go for a walk, and everything appears to be at peace in their relationship.

Act 1, Scene 3. Anna and Naomi are having coffee in Anna's apartment a week later, and Anna begins to question Naomi's hesitations with Jack, citing Naomi's tendency to run away. Jack enters to help fix the broken coffeemaker in spite of Naomi's reluctance. In the process, he takes his ring off and forgets to put it back on before he

leaves. When Naomi rushes back to her apartment to meet with the landlord, Jack tells Anna about the untimely proposal and Naomi's struggles. Jack and Naomi argue when she comes back about the walls she hides behind and ultimately Jack leaves. Anna points out Naomi's fear of being hurt by Jack, which Naomi brushes off to question Anna about her relationship with John. Anna assures Naomi that things are getting better when Naomi confronts Anna about the scream she heard from Anna's apartment a few nights earlier. Anna inadvertently admits that John has been violent with her on occasion, but turns the spotlight back on Naomi and her fear of commitment with Jack. The women call a truce and go to Naomi's apartment to find some earrings. John enters after they have left to find the two mugs sitting on the counter and Jack's ring. Anna re-enters and John begins to accuse her of being unfaithful, producing Jack's ring as a sign of proof. He then begins to beat her, but Naomi hears the commotion from next door and rushes through the unlocked middle door to tackle John. John throws her down, but the women convince him to look inside the ring at an engraving of Naomi's name. John realizes the truth and begins to search for ice for Anna and tells Naomi to get some for him. John then holds Anna and tells her that he would not act this way if he were not so afraid of losing her. Naomi tries to call the police, but Anna refuses to allow her to do so.

Act 2, Scene 1. It is the next day, and Naomi goes into Anna's apartment to pick up her sweater and check on Anna. Jack knocks on the door to pick up his ring, but before Naomi can tell him what happened, John returns to the apartment for a missing file, finding the two standing near the door. Naomi excuses herself to get Anna's dress and leaves resulting in John and Jack conversing about the women in their lives; it becomes increasingly clear that both have very polar opposite views as John tries to

instruct Jack in the necessity of control in relationships. Naomi re-enters with dress in hand before the men get too heated, and John realizes that he is running late and requests that Naomi not use the connecting door anymore. After John leaves, Naomi tells Jack about the previous night's events, and together, they create a plan if the situation arises again. Naomi decides to be honest with Jack, thanking him for his help, while also confiding in him her struggles concerning her dad's outright rejection of her when she was nineteen and her ex-boyfriend's rejection of her pain. Jack assures her that he will not leave or reject her and Naomi accepts his proposal. After a moment of celebration, it is decided that Naomi will move out of her apartment as soon as possible, and she will try to convince Anna to go to a women's shelter.

Act 2, Scene 2. Naomi goes to Anna's apartment, and they have a candid conversation about Anna's marriage and her reluctance to leave. Anna takes the brochure for the women's shelter before Naomi leaves but she remains noncommittal. Anna stuffs the brochure into her purse as John enters with a box for Anna that he picked up as a gift for them. Anna opens it to find a handgun that John has bought to protect them from burglars. Anna voices her concern to John about the potential dangers of having a gun in the house with their relationship being the way it is. John then begins to wave the gun around and points it at Anna, ultimately pulling back the hammer and firing, but there are no bullets in the chamber. Anna is beside herself with fear, and as John puts the gun back, he knocks over her purse, spilling its contents. As he cleans it up, his hand pauses on the brochure, but he does not look at it and places it back in her purse. John disappears into the bedroom to turn in early for the night. Anna stares at the brochure for a moment then

goes to the couch, pulls a suitcase out from underneath it, looks at the bedroom door, turns off the light and closes the front door, ending the play.

Marketability

The statistics originally presented at the beginning of this paper reveal that this story has the potential for being the mouthpiece of millions of women and can be understood and related to on various levels. Anna's character will resonate deeply with the women who are in abusive relationships and some of these women may even realize for the first time that they are involved in these types of relationships through this show. Other people will be able to resonate with how to help someone who is involved in an abusive relationship through the character of Naomi. For people who have never been in abusive relationships nor do they know anyone involved in one, they will understand the pain of the women who face these situations every day, and it will hopefully encourage them to recognize this issue and stand up for those who are hurting around them. The desire is to create a story that touches the hearts of the audience and inspires compassion, action, and understanding.

Competition

Next Door's competitive edge lies within addressing an important social issue in the culture which affects millions of voiceless women. This play has the opportunity to be performed in community centers and shelters to educate people about domestic violence and to open up a discussion about abuse with resources for those who need help. This play's hope is for audiences to recognize abuse for what it is and to help those who are involved in toxic relationships. The realism style in which the play is written is also helpful, as it is recognized and accepted in this generation. Demastes believes, "Thanks to

television and cinema, today's audiences come to the theatre 'trained' in realism . . . As a result, the doors of American theatre remain open to the widest spectrum of the American public as long as it offers a realistic format" (30). These combined elements urge audience members to come see a compelling show that strives to raise awareness of domestic violence and the stories of the women that live with that pain.

Scene Sample

Below is the complete first scene.

NEXT DOOR

By Esther Karram

SETTING

The living room of a one-bedroom apartment and the bedroom of the apartment next door which connects through a door; Hartford, Connecticut

TIME

Present

CHARACTERS

NAOMI

A woman in her mid-twenties, strong-willed, compassionate, impulsive

ANNA

A woman in her mid-twenties, Naomi's best friend, loyal, intelligent

JACK

A man in his mid-twenties, Naomi's boyfriend, genuine, protective

JOHN

A businessman in his late twenties, Anna's husband, volatile, manipulative

ACT ONEScene One

AT RISE Late afternoon. The living room in Anna's apartment and a connecting door leading to the bedroom in Naomi's apartment. NAOMI is sleeping soundly. Yelling is heard in Anna's apartment from the bedroom offstage.

JOHN (yelling)

You're going behind my back now, is that it?

ANNA

I didn't go behind your back, John!

(NAOMI sits up in bed disoriented.)

JOHN

Why were you even moving that money around in the first place? Never touch that account again, do you hear me? Do you hear me?

ANNA

(strangled yelp of pain) Yes!

JOHN

Promise me!

ANNA

I promise!

(JOHN enters from the offstage bedroom into the living room where he grabs his briefcase. As he does so NAOMI runs to the connecting door in time to hear JOHN exit upstage through the front door with a slam. NAOMI pauses and listens for anymore sounds. This has happened before. NAOMI knocks on the connecting door. No response.)

NAOMI

Anna?

(NAOMI knocks again. ANNA emerges from the bedroom wearing a sweater.)

Anna, please open the door.

(NAOMI knocks harder.)

Anna, I need to know you're okay.

(ANNA knocks on the door as well.)

That's not gonna cut it this time, Anna. Open up.

(ANNA unlocks the connecting door and opens it slightly, moving away.
NAOMI enters into the living room.)

Are you okay? NAOMI

What's wrong? ANNA

I . . . thought I should check on you. NAOMI

I'm fine. ANNA

Anna, look at me. NAOMI

What? ANNA

Why do you keep letting him do this to you? NAOMI

Do what to me? ANNA

I can hear you through the walls. NAOMI

And? ANNA

And I can hear you arguing – NAOMI

(interrupting) We just had an disagreement. That's it. ANNA

Do you want to talk? NAOMI

ANNA
No.

NAOMI
Did he hit you?

ANNA
No! John would never do that. He's just been under pressure at work. The move has been difficult for both of us and –

NAOMI
Anna, save it. This is the third time now since you moved here. And who knows how often before that . . . I'm worried about you.

ANNA
Don't be. Yes, he gets angry but so do I. You've heard me yell at him, and you don't come bursting in here to his defense.

NAOMI
It's not him I'm worried about.

ANNA
Then why are you worried about me? You'd think you'd never heard people fight before.

NAOMI
I have. But fighting shouldn't sound like that.

ANNA
Well it does with us. I'm sorry we bothered you. We'll try to keep our domestic disturbances to ourselves from now on, deal?

(NAOMI hesitates.)

Deal?

NAOMI
Fine. (Beat) Do you know what time it is?

ANNA
Five thirty.

NAOMI
That late?

ANNA
Yeah. Your shift must have wiped you out.

NAOMI

It was a long night. Is John coming back?

ANNA

No. He was leaving for a meeting.

NAOMI

But it's dinner.

ANNA

I told you work was crazy. Garner's got him going at all hours of the day.

NAOMI

Garner?

ANNA

His boss.

NAOMI

I take it you aren't a fan of the man.

ANNA

He takes advantage of John. I'm hoping after this marketing blitz is done John can be home more. Things will settle down.

NAOMI

So things haven't been the best?

ANNA

They've been a little challenging, but like I said, work's been stressful. And if he does well in the blitz, he might get promoted to branch marketing executive. That would mean the world to him.

NAOMI

But what about you?

ANNA

What about me?

NAOMI

You matter here too.

ANNA

I know that, Naomi.

NAOMI

Really?

ANNA

Yes, really. He's just busy, okay? His job is stressful; I get that.

NAOMI

A kindergarten classroom isn't a walk in the park either.

ANNA

Believe me, I know. Sarah had a complete meltdown today because she wasn't first in line for gym class. Then David kept pulling on her braids and making fun of her freckles. I still need to figure that whole situation out. (notices NAOMI) I'm sorry. I'm babbling.

NAOMI

Why are you apologizing?

ANNA

You didn't ask to hear all of that.

NAOMI

I mentioned school and you told me about it.

ANNA

Why did you even bring up the kids?

NAOMI

You have stressful days as a teacher.

ANNA

Yes . . . and?

NAOMI

You don't take your stress out on John. Just because he's overwhelmed at work doesn't give him a free pass to behave however he wants at home.

ANNA

I'm not the perfect wife, Naomi. I snap at him sometimes too.

NAOMI

But you aren't the one –

ANNA

Give us a break okay? He's in a major work shift, and I'm starting to deal with upcoming report card assessments. He's always been supportive of me so the least I can do is be there for him.

But –

NAOMI

ANNA
Trust me on this. I'm married. You aren't. There's give and take here.

NAOMI
Six months of marriage isn't that long, Anna.

ANNA
Well, it's six months over you.

NAOMI
(Beat.) So what are you doing now?

ANNA
I'm not sure yet. I should probably unpack some boxes. I can't believe it's taken me this long.

NAOMI
Cut yourself some slack. You've been busy from everything I can see.

ANNA (anxious)
Yeah. It's not an excuse though. I should've had it done a while ago.

NAOMI
Anna.

ANNA (realizes her anxiety has shown)
I know. You're right.

NAOMI
Would you like some help?

ANNA
Naomi, I couldn't ask you to do that.

NAOMI
You didn't. I volunteered. Besides, I'm not working.

ANNA
I'm sure you have plenty of other things to do.

NAOMI
If you want me to go I can.

(Beat) No. Stay. ANNA

You sure? NAOMI

Yeah. I'd appreciate the company. ANNA

I can make you some tea. NAOMI

You hate tea. ANNA

But you like it. At least one of us should enjoy the beverage of choice. NAOMI

Actually, I'd prefer coffee this time. ANNA

And another one bites the dust. NAOMI

Just this once, then I'm back to my tea. ANNA

Rabbit juice. NAOMI

Oh come on; it's not that bad. ANNA

Well I'm grabbing my coffee from next door. NAOMI

Alright. ANNA

(NAOMI exits through the connecting door and out her bedroom door. ANNA pulls up the sleeve of her sweater revealing a large bruise, but quickly hides it again as NAOMI reenters through the door carrying some coffee grounds.)

NAOMI

You do have a coffee maker, don't you? I'd use mine, but the electricity has been acting up lately. I need to get the landlord to take a look at it.

ANNA

That doesn't happen often does it?

NAOMI

No. Don't worry. You guys shouldn't have to deal with it.

ANNA

I hope so. That's the last thing we need right now.

NAOMI

So, coffee maker?

ANNA

Oh! Sorry. Yeah, on the counter. It's one of the fancy ones though. The little cups are in the cupboard.

NAOMI

Really? Do you know how to work it?

ANNA

Don't look at me. It breaks on occasion.

NAOMI

I'll figure it out. Jack has one of these at his place.

ANNA

How's he doing?

NAOMI

Pretty good. Keeps telling me that he's going to take me on a fancy date for our one year.

ANNA

That's sweet.

NAOMI

He's always been a romantic; I'll be a bull in a china shop.

ANNA

When are you guys going to get engaged? You've been dating long enough.

Who knows. NAOMI

You haven't talked about it? ANNA

We have. Just not in detail. NAOMI

What do you mean not in detail? ANNA

Well, we can't seem to agree on china patterns. NAOMI

Shopping for china with a bull? Sounds dangerous. ANNA

Very funny. How long did you and John date before you got engaged? Eight months? NAOMI

Six. He was really sweet. Always bringing me flowers, calling to make sure I was doing okay. ANNA

Does he still do that? NAOMI

In his own way. I mean it's different when you're married. ANNA

Like how? NAOMI

What do you mean how? ANNA

Hey if I'm going to get married I need to know these things. NAOMI

Well, the flowers stopped, but John still calls on occasion. Normally just to see where I am. ANNA

Does he do that a lot? NAOMI

ANNA

Depends on what you mean by a lot.

NAOMI

Sounds like a watchdog instead of a husband.

ANNA

Would you stop? It's sweet, okay?

NAOMI

It just doesn't seem right, Anna. None of this does.

ANNA

And you know about this all of a sudden? Everyone says the first year is difficult so just leave it. I told you, I don't want to discuss it.

NAOMI

I'm just saying.

ANNA

I know. But I don't understand why you're belittling my husband? You stood up there with me. If you thought something was wrong, why didn't you say something then?

NAOMI

I'd met him only twice because you lived on the other side of the country. He seemed decent enough, but now I'm wondering what you didn't tell me. Can I help it if I don't like watching some guy make my best friend upset?

ANNA

You always were such a mom.

NAOMI

It's not right, Anna.

ANNA

Drop it, okay? I don't want to talk about it.

NAOMI

But Anna –

ANNA

Please!

(Silence)

NAOMI

I think I figured the machine out.

ANNA

Would you mind putting the coffee in a travel mug for me?

NAOMI

Why?

ANNA

I'm going to go for a walk. Clear my head.

NAOMI

Anna, come on.

ANNA

Naomi, if my personal life is all you're going to talk about then I'm going for a walk. I'm not looking for an interrogation right now.

NAOMI

I just want to talk, Anna. We haven't done that in a while.

ANNA

Well I guess our schedules don't help much with that.

NAOMI

Yeah. Can we talk soon?

ANNA

We're doing that now.

NAOMI

But we haven't really caught up. How was the move? The new school? Your kids? Today was the first I'd heard about them. There're tons of things to talk about.

ANNA

Like my marriage?

NAOMI

Well . . . yeah (before ANNA can interrupt) but only what you want to tell me. I thought we'd get to talk more since we're living next to each other, but it hasn't really worked out.

ANNA

I know.

NAOMI

Anna, I really am sorry. I find it hard to leave things alone sometimes I guess.

ANNA

You guess?

NAOMI

Alright! Fine! It's hard for me! Satisfied?

ANNA

Yes. (Beat) I appreciate your concern, Naomi, but I just need a friend, okay?

NAOMI

Yes, ma'am. And my first job as your friend is to get you to try this coffee.

(NAOMI hands ANNA a mug.)

ANNA

Thanks.

(ANNA takes a sip.)

That's actually not bad.

NAOMI

I told you it's good! I added some French vanilla creamer and sugar too.

ANNA

I'm impressed.

(They are both sitting on the sofa.)

NAOMI

See! Coffee isn't the great evil you think it is.

ANNA

I didn't say it was evil. Just addictive, and I don't want to go into coffee withdrawal thank you very much.

NAOMI

You do know that caffeine is addictive, right?

ANNA

And your point?

NAOMI

Caffeine is also in tea.

ANNA (mischievous)

I know.

NAOMI

You'd think you were anti-coffee or something.

(NAOMI brings her mug up to her lips.)

ANNA

Oh no!

(ANNA jolts up, startling NAOMI and making her spill coffee on herself.)

NAOMI

Oh!

ANNA

Naomi! I'm so sorry! Did you burn yourself?

NAOMI

Just a little. It's fine. I think I got some on your couch.

ANNA

Not the couch!

NAOMI

Why did you jump like that?

ANNA

I have a PTA meeting tonight, and I'm supposed to talk about the new anti-bullying initiative I'm heading up. The meeting's at seven, and I haven't finished my prep for it. But the couch . . .

NAOMI

It's a couch, Anna. It's fine.

ANNA

Coffee stains. Permanently.

NAOMI

We can always flip the cushion over.

ANNA

No, we can't. There's a tear in the other side. Long story.

NAOMI

You go get ready, and I'll get the stain out. I need to get it out of my clothes anyway.

ANNA

You sure?

NAOMI

I'll do the best I can.

ANNA

Thanks. I owe you.

NAOMI

A new shirt would be nice.

ANNA

I promise.

NAOMI

Are you free tomorrow?

ANNA

For what?

NAOMI

We can finish our chat in my apartment.

ANNA

Well . . .

NAOMI

Do you have something planned?

ANNA

No . . .

NAOMI

So . . .

ANNA

Okay, I'll be there. Thanks!

(ANNA disappears offstage into her bedroom.)

NAOMI

Don't lock the middle door when you leave, okay? I'm gonna change first then I'll come back and attack the stain.

ANNA (off)

Okay! Thanks, Naomi.

NAOMI

Is there anything else I can do for you?

(NAOMI puts remaining coffee into a travel mug.)

ANNA (off)

Nope! I'm good.

NAOMI

I put your coffee in the travel mug.

(ANNA enters the room wearing her heels and a different sweater.)

ANNA

Thanks.

NAOMI

Did it get cold outside?

ANNA

Cold?

NAOMI

I was sure it was in the high 70s today.

ANNA

Oh! They hold their meetings in the gym, and it's always freezing.

NAOMI

Gotcha. So we'll chat tomorrow?

ANNA

Absolutely.

(NAOMI exits through the connecting door and out her bedroom door. ANNA begins to pack up her bag when she spies the two mugs. After a moment of indecision, she quickly rinses them both and puts them back in the cupboard instead of washing them. ANNA exits through the front

door. NAOMI reenters Anna's apartment through the connecting door wearing a new shirt and carrying a spray bottle and brush. She kneels beside the couch and begins to spray and gently rub the stain in circles. A knock sounds on the front door.)

NAOMI

Did you forget something?

(NAOMI opens the front door to reveal JACK.)

Jack! What are you doing here?

(JACK enters the apartment and kisses NAOMI.)

JACK

Good to see you too.

NAOMI

How did you know I was here?

JACK

I tried your door but there was no answer, so I decided I would check Anna's. I figured you both might be talking.

NAOMI

I'm just getting a stain out of her couch. Come in. Just take off your shoes. I thought you had to work late today?

JACK

I know your 12-hour shifts are crazy so I worked late yesterday so I could leave early today.

NAOMI

You didn't have to do that.

JACK

I know.

NAOMI

So how's work?

JACK

Well, Robert assigned me a new auditing case with one of our top clients. It's with Kendall's Appliances. We just scheduled an M-3 which is for "Net Income Loss Reconciliation . . . (knowing she has tuned out) and I got to fill out a 1040 form as well as a W-9, W-4, 1040X –

NAOMI

Need I remind you that I don't speak tax. However, ask me about starting an intravenous line, helping with cardiopulmonary resuscitation, tracheotomies, bag-valve-mask ventilation –

JACK

Alright! I give! You're brilliant.

NAOMI

That's not what I was going for.

JACK

But you are. And pretty too. How'd I land a catch like you?

NAOMI

Chased me into an elevator before graduation?

JACK

I didn't chase you! We both were late to commencement, and besides, there were two other people in there. And I didn't ask for your number until we got out.

NAOMI

I gave it to you, didn't I?

JACK

And you never regretted it.

NAOMI

Well, I wouldn't say that.

JACK

Oh, stop it.

NAOMI

Okay.

JACK

What am I going to do with you?

NAOMI

Keep me around?

JACK

I think I just might. (Beat) So how was last night's shift?

Not the greatest.

NAOMI

What happened?

JACK

Everything was fine until Nancy said the Q word at one this morning.

NAOMI

The Q word?

JACK

Quiet.

NAOMI

I don't get it.

JACK

Whenever a nurse mentions and honestly even sometimes things that it's "quiet" we always get slammed. The place was a zoo.

NAOMI

I thought they had their own veterinarians.

JACK

(NAOMI gives him a look.)

That bad, huh?

I didn't sit for a solid five hours. Then we had a few people come in at six-thirty.
(NAOMI grows quiet.)

NAOMI

You okay?

JACK

It's fine.

NAOMI

(NAOMI scrubs harder.)

Alright. Talk to me.

JACK

NAOMI

Jack, I'm fine.

(NAOMI scrubs harder.)

JACK

Are you supposed to scrub that hard?

(NAOMI sighs.)

Naomi, what's going on?

NAOMI

Anna and I got into a bit of a fight just now.

JACK

About?

NAOMI

Stuff going on at home for her. She and John are having some trouble, and we had a disagreement.

JACK

That's it?

NAOMI

What do you mean "That's it?"

JACK

Naomi, you're an ER nurse. You deal with conflict every day.

NAOMI

It's deeper this time, okay?

JACK

Why?

NAOMI

It involves my best friend.

JACK

Talk to her then.

NAOMI

I tried that already!

JACK

Then let her come around on her own.

Why are you so logical?
NAOMI

You are too.
JACK

I'm just worried. I can't . . . never mind.
NAOMI

No. Tell me.
JACK

It's nothing.
NAOMI

Naomi.
JACK

At work I can separate my emotions and my actions. I see someone with a gaping wound, I stitch it up. A man comes in with cardiac arrest, I help with resuscitation. But I can't fix my friend. I can't separate my emotions and my actions here.
NAOMI

Life is not one big ER. You're human.
JACK

But this is when it matters most. I can't mess it up.
NAOMI

Hold on. Who said you have to fix her?
JACK

No one I just –
NAOMI

Exactly! No one. She is not your responsibility, Naomi!
JACK

But she's my friend and –
NAOMI

And she is not a wounded animal in need of a nurse.
JACK

NAOMI

But I think John's hitting her!

JACK

(Beat) What?

NAOMI

I hear them yelling at each other and she cries out every now and then, and whenever I ask she either won't talk to me about it or she makes up some lame excuse.

JACK

Are you sure?

NAOMI

I've never seen it, but I can hear it. And she put on a sweater before she left today because it's "cold in the gym." That's what we were fighting about. I heard them yelling, and that's why I spilled coffee on her couch. Well, sort of. I've heard her crying, Jack. Anna doesn't cry. So now, Mr. Logical, what do I do?

JACK

She needs to leave, Naomi.

NAOMI

I know that! But what do I do when she doesn't want to?

JACK

Try talking to her.

NAOMI

I did that!

JACK

Then wait until she's ready and make yourself available when the time comes.

NAOMI

You don't understand . . . You know who was rushed into the ER this morning? A woman with a broken femur, a split lip, and a massive concussion. The cause? Abuse.

JACK

Naomi –

NAOMI

I saw it in her wide, bruised eyes but she didn't say anything. And all I could think was . . . it could have been Anna.

JACK
But it wasn't.

NAOMI
It could've been.

JACK
But it wasn't.

NAOMI
Should I call the police, Jack?

JACK
Next time it happens I would.

NAOMI
But what if I'm not here the next time?

JACK
Naomi, if she's refusing help then there's nothing you can do. Just be there when she's ready.

NAOMI
That's not enough.

JACK
It'll have to be.

NAOMI
I hate this.

JACK
I know.

NAOMI
I'll be sure to keep an eye on her.

JACK
Give her space though.

NAOMI
I will. We're meeting tomorrow so maybe we can talk more then.

JACK
She needs to figure this out on her own, and you pushing her to change is only going to make it worse.

I know that, Jack. NAOMI

Do you? JACK

What are you talking about? NAOMI

JACK
I'm just saying that I know you. I know that mind of yours that can't help but fix everything in sight.

Are you speaking from experience? NAOMI

Naomi – JACK

I don't cram stuff down people's throats. NAOMI

I just want you to be careful. JACK

I'll be fine, Jack. NAOMI (irritated)

Now don't get mad at me. JACK

I'm not mad at you! NAOMI

It's their mess, Naomi. JACK

Well, at least it doesn't affect you! NAOMI

Do you really think I'm that insensitive? JACK

Jack – NAOMI

JACK

When you're hurting it affects me too!

NAOMI

I don't know why!

JACK

Because I love you and I want to marry you!

NAOMI

(Beat) Jack . . .

JACK

I . . . I didn't mean to say that.

NAOMI

Of course . . . it was a mistake.

JACK

No! That's not what I meant –

NAOMI

It's okay, Jack. I understand.

JACK

Naomi, would you stop and listen? This isn't what I planned. I was going to take you out to a nice restaurant and tell you at our favorite park bench. I had it all planned out.

NAOMI

And I ruined it?

JACK

No! Just listen. I've never met a woman who has meant more to me or who I've loved so much.

NAOMI

Jack –

JACK

Naomi, please just let me get this out –

NAOMI

Please stop. (Beat) I . . . I don't know how to process all of this right now.

JACK

What's to process?

NAOMI

Oh, I don't know. The revelation that you just asked me to marry you . . . out of the blue.

JACK

It's not out of the blue. We've been dating for a while, Naomi. People who date normally aim toward marriage.

NAOMI

I know. This is just... a lot right now.

JACK

We talked about this. We talked about what it would be like to get married, have a family.

NAOMI

I know! But it was distant.

JACK

And you don't want it?

NAOMI

It's not that! I just... I can't deal with this right now, okay?

JACK

Can't deal with what?

NAOMI

Please, Jack.

JACK

Well . . . I love you and I want to marry you. I thought you should know.

NAOMI

Thank you.

(JACK waits hoping for more.)

I better get back to the couch. I want to make sure the stain's gone by the time they come home.

JACK

Okay. I'll let you get this done so you can get some more rest then.

NAOMI

You don't have to go.

JACK

I think it would be best if I did.

NAOMI

Jack. I'm sorry. I just need some time . . .

JACK

I understand. Don't worry. I'm not going anywhere.

(JACK gives NAOMI a kiss on the cheek.)

Bye.

(JACK exits through the front door. NAOMI begins to scrub again then sits back with a sigh.)

END SCENE

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