

LOOKING FOR SYLVIA

A One Act Play
by
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INT. DAILY NEWS OFFICE. DAY

People talking, phones ringing, printers going. MARY, a woman in her early thirties casually dressed in jeans and tee shirt is arranging a layout with ALLEN, an aging hippie. STAN, a middle- aged overweight good ol' boy in a suit comes into office

STAN

Hey, Mary, those were some cute pictures of the Winterville Fair. We'll run them all, do a big spread in the Sunday Living Section. That kid with the cotton candy all over his face? Too much. Good work.

MARY

Thanks Stan.

STAN

Keep it up.

Stan walks out, slapping a rolled up paper against the door frame as he leaves.

MARY

I should show him the ones of the steer castrations I took at the Agriculture Fair.

ALLEN

Oh, come on. That's Stan's highest praise. Heart-felt praise.

MARY

How about heart-felt raise?

ALLEN

You'd need some *really* cute pictures for that.

MARY

(shaking her head)

I don't know; I don't think I can be cute enough... I hate taking those pictures. I'm sick to death of them.

Allen

I know, I know. It's not ART. You want to do ART. Well, love to stay and kibbitz, but I just got a call on a blood and guts, Hwy 29. Want to join me? It won't be cute, I promise.

MARY

Maybe another time.

INT. Trendy café. Day

ADRIENNE is fortyish, with long red hair and dangling earrings. Her face in repose is not happy. She is seated, waiting.

ADRIENNE

Hi girlfriend. You look beat. Work got you down?

MARY

(makes a face)

Sorry I'm late. Allen wanted me to print some color photos right at the last minute; I'd already stayed up till one doing a layout. Ugh.

Mary roots in her purse for a cigarette, lights it.

ADRIENNE

You shouldn't smoke.

MARY

What are you, my mother?

ADRIENNE

I guess since I can't tell Sylvia what to do, I need to tell someone. I have to be so careful what I say to her. She's in one of her black moods at present; boy trouble, I think. She used to at least talk about them. Now, I haven't got a clue.

MARY

Neither do I.

ADRIENNE

I guess this is what joint custody is like.

MARY

Oh, come on, Adrienne.

ADRIENNE

No, it's Ok. I guess it's natural to idolize people when you're a teenager. She's picked you. She makes you sound so exotic; you should hear her : "you never talk about ideas around here, she says, all you talk about is what's for dinner or the phone bill. Mary reads Camus." Do you read Camus?

MARY

Well, I have. I have good intentions but I usually fall asleep before I finish two pages. Look, you know I'm not trying to foster some kind of glorified image.

ADRIENNE

Of course I know that. Really, better you than some god knows what--crystal believer trying to convert her to the Church of Wisdom. Or a dyke gym teacher. She has this idea of you as a struggling artist.

MARY

Hah, I wish that was true. Look, it's just easier, for a kid to talk to someone who's not family. You know that.

ADRIENNE

Oh, but you are family.

MARY

I enjoy her company, that's all. Sometimes I feel as if we're both seventeen. Don't worry, she'll see my clay feet soon enough.

ADRIENNE

I wonder.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT. Day

Mary comes in her apartment, heaves her equipment on the couch, runs her hands through her hair, moves to the stereo and turns it on, then disappears in the direction of the kitchen. The walls are covered with photographs, mostly black and white, some by well known photographers (Stieglitz, Evans, Laughlin) others her own. On the side table are smaller snaps of Dan and Adrienne, Adrienne and Sylvia, Sylvia in various stage of childhood.

EXT. STREET

Sylvia, seventeen, a tall, dark-haired beauty, saunters down the street towards Mary's apartment. Her expression is dreamy, preoccupied; her face still has a childish roundness to it, even though her jeans and revealing top make her look older.

INT. APARTMENT

Sylvia comes in door.

SYLVIA

I just ran up all your steps. Whew. Hi. Is this a bad time?

MARY

No. I was just making tea. Want some?

Sylvia nods, drops books on floor with a THUD. Mary goes into kitchen.

SYLVIA

Where's Marlene Dietrich? Here kitty, kitty.

MARY

She's probably hiding in the bedroom.

Sylvia looks for the cat, goes into the bedroom, where she gets distracted and starts rooting around in Mary's jewelry box.

SYLVIA

Whatever happened to those Indian earrings you used to wear? The ones shaped like feathers with turquoise in them?

MARY

Why, you want them?

SYLVIA

I remember you wearing them all the time. When I was little I thought they were a part of you.

MARY

They must be in there somewhere. You can have them if you can find them. (beat) I had lunch with your mother today.

SYLVIA

Really? Oh, look, here they are. How do I look?

Sylvia comes into kitchen wearing earrings.

MARY

About 10 years out of date. Actually, they look good on you. They're yours.

Mary pours tea into mugs.

MARY

Adrienne says you've been having boy trouble.

Sylvia shrugs. Telephone rings. Mary goes into bedroom to answer. Sylvia looks at photos on table. Mary returns.

SYLVIA

Who was that?

MARY

Oh--a gallery. The Silver Street in Atlanta.

SYLVIA

What did they want? To show your work?

MARY

Yeah, some of my new stuff. Do you want honey or sugar?

SYLVIA

Honey. That's great. What are you going to give them?

MARY

Good question. I don't have much that I'm happy with right now--I've been so busy at that paper--

SYLVIA

What about these?

Sylvia indicates photos lying on table.

MARY

They're so old. Maybe I'll do something new--I've still got a few rolls to develop; I don't even remember what's on them.

SYLVIA

Well, I like these, even if they are old.

MARY

You're easy to please.

SYLVIA

I'm not an idiot.

MARY

I know that! It's just that I've shown most of this stuff. I'm tired of it. I feel so--*stuck*.

SYLVIA

Why are they all in black and white? Why don't you do color? I mean for something new.

MARY

Black and white is more formal. You notice texture, composition, those elements. Color can overwhelm all those things; besides I do color at work.

SYLVIA

I like color. I mean, I like these too. At least you you're good at something. I'm not really good at anything.

MARY

You're real smart.

SYLVIA

I'm pretty smart, in a general sort of way. But I can't do anything special. I don't have any talents.

MARY

Give yourself a chance. You're young. Enjoy it.

SYLVIA

You sound like everyone else. What's so great about being young? You have to go around pretending you know what you're doing when you haven't got a clue, and everyone expects so much from you--to achieve honors for Dad, get a good boyfriend for Mom. I mean, was it so great for you?

MARY

I guess not. But some of it was fun.

SYLVIA

Yeah, like what?

MARY

Oh, I don't know. Like staying up late with friends, going to movies, eyeing boys at the pool.

SYLVIA

Boys. I'm sick of them. All the ones at school are so immature. I like the guys I work with at Blue Sky, they play in bands and do cool stuff.

Mary

You mean those shaved tattooed guys!! But they are so much older than you. What about--what's his name?

SYLVIA

James? Yes, him. I thought he was different. But then, like, we went to see this movie, this French movie, "Manon of the Spring," and afterwards, in his car, I said, so what do you think? and he just leaned down and started kissing me.

MARY

You didn't like that?

SYLVIA

No. Yes, but I wanted to talk about the movie first. So, when I pushed him away he shrugged his shoulders and said, yeah, great flick--like what is there to talk about? He just didn't get it.

MARY

Boys are so cute at your age. I'm jealous. You don't even know how cute they are.

SYLVIA

I can't believe you really think that. You know what he calls JUDE THE OBSCURE? Judy and Oscar. It's juvenile. He made an idiot of himself in class.

MARY

Aren't you being a little hard on him?

SYLVIA

You wouldn't put up with someone like that; why should I? Don't you want someone serious, someone you can talk to?

Mary gets up abruptly, starts clearing up the mugs.

MARY

We aren't talking about me. Look, I just don't like to see you taking yourself so seriously. You might miss out.

SYLVIA

On what?

MARY

Friendship. Love. Warmth. Whatever. Sometimes you give the impression of being very cool. It can put people off.

SYLVIA

How come suddenly I'm not what everyone wants? Mom's down on me, too.

MARY

Adrienne? Why?

SYLVIA

You don't want to know.

MARY

O.K. then.

SYLVIA

She says I spend too much time over here. She says she doesn't want me aspiring to "second-rate bohemianism". What does she mean by that?

INT. ADRIENNE'S KITCHEN. Day

Adrienne stirs coffee, watches finches feeding at window.
Doorbell RINGS. Mary walks in. Adrienne turns to greet her.

ADRIENNE

Look, winter's coming.

Mary joins her at window.

MARY

What kind of birds are they?

ADRIENNE

House finches.

MARY

They're pretty; what do they have, purple breasts?

ADRIENNE

Uh, huh. Don't be fooled, though. They're as mean as sin. Watch that guy there run off the little one. (laughs) Actually, the females are the most aggressive.

MARY

I didn't know that.

ADRIENNE

They're very territorial.

DAN comes in, pours himself a cup, and leans against the sink. He is mid-forties, good looking, but there is something guarded, wary, about him. He does not sit down with the women.

DAN

Well, well, the gang's all here.

ADRIENNE

That's right.

DAN

Mary, how's your work going? Haven't had an exhibit in a while, have you? It seems like it's about time.

Adrienne and Mary exchange glances.

ADRIENNE

I don't think it's up to you to set Mary's professional timetable.

MARY

No, really, it's ok; he's right. You're right. I haven't been shooting much lately; I don't know--it gets expensive, time consuming. I work pretty hard at the paper.

DAN

(holds her gaze)

I can remember a time when you went without food rather than go without film.

ADRIENNE

Sometimes it's better not to remember too much.

DAN

Thanks, Adrienne, for that piece of wisdom.

MARY

Actually, Silver Street called a few days ago....

DAN

Yeah?

MARY

They're having a group show of local photographers. I said I'd bring something, but I don't know what.

DAN

Well, get something together. They might not call again. I've got to get going.

Dan puts his coffee cup in the sink, leaves abruptly.

ADRIENNE

He's a fine one to talk. He hasn't had a show in years.

MARY

Don't worry about it. My feelings aren't hurt. He's right.

ADRIENNE

He always said you had talent. I guess he hoped you'd go further than he did--star student and all that. Or else he was afraid you would.

MARY

And I ended up a second-rate bohemian.

They eye each other warily; Adrienne knows Mary knows she's told Sylvia this.

ADRIENNE

You haven't ended up anything yet--

MARY

Then why did you tell Sylvia that?

ADRIENNE

Look, I'm sorry. I was angry, hurt--she's always extolling your virtues. I'm losing her, Mary. And I don't want her to be like you--do you? Can't she do better with her life than we've done with ours?

MARY

We haven't done so badly. At least you haven't. You have a family, your work...

Adrienne shakes her head, frustrated because Mary just doesn't get it.

ADRIENNE

It would be one thing if you were doing your art--OK, then I'd understand this infatuation. But you've given up.

MARY

Jesus, you're brutal. You're jealous. You're jealous because your daughter would rather talk to me than you.

ADRIENNE

You're right.

INT. MARY'S DARKROOM

MARY is printing black and white photographs. Shostiokovich plays in background.

MARY (VO)

Photography is all a matter of what you choose to put into the frame. It is amazing how things change when you put a camera to your eye. From a great distance, the roofs and streets of my slummy neighborhood look like a clean abstractionist dream, all black lines and clear white spaces; garbage cans become cylinders, garage doors become serrated rectangles; trees turn into spindly line drawings, not a hint of the midnight fights, of the dog shit steaming on winter nights, the never ending sounds of television seeping into the air.

(beat)

Then again, close up, a body, some perfect model's body, can become a tortuous landscape. A slightly sagging breast fills the lens, and every crevice of the nipple, every fine hair becomes exaggerated.

(beat)

The very act of taking a photograph is a distortion of the subject; rendering that piece of reality into black and white and gray is a further distortion. In art, there is no such thing as pure communication; however, I try to fill the frame as naturally as possible. I only use available light. I never crop in the darkroom. That is what Dan taught me. It is still what I believe makes the best photographs.

INT. UNIVERSITY DARKROOM

A younger Mary in school darkroom; her hair is up, she wears more make up, Grateful Dead on radio, A knock on the door. Mary turns down music, turns off safe light.

MARY

It's OK, come in.

A younger Dan comes in.

DAN

Just thought I'd see how you were doing. (beat). These are looking very good. You are learning to see things fresh--remember what Paul Drmee, the poet, wrote about Kertesz, "No rearranging, no posing, no gimmicks, no fakery. Your technique is as honest, as incorruptible, as your vision."

Dan continues inspecting the photographs.

I think, though, that you can get darker values over here (he points to a section of a print. Then he puts his hand on her neck and kisses her) Will I see you tonight?

MARY

(not looking at him)

Doesn't Adrienne notice all the time you spend away from her?

DAN

She's too busy to notice. But if you can't make it tonight....Let's not talk about Adrienne; it seems like we always end up talking about Adrienne. Will I see you?

MARY

Yes.

She reaches out as if she wants something from him, her face worried.

DAN

Good.

He takes her hand, his expression tender.

Don't worry so much. My family is my lookout.

MARY

O.K.

INT. ART BUILDING. Day

Young Mary and GIRLFRIEND in art department hall. They both are dressed "funkily" They walk by an open class room and the girlfriend lingers for a minute and stares, then catches up with Mary.

FRIEND

(pseudo-dramatically)

Well, he is nice looking; I can give him that much. What happens if you split before you finish? It's unpredictable--will the scorned lover fail the tender graduate student; or is she in reality, sleeping her way to a degree, hanging on until the end? It's hard to tell.(Pause, more serious now.) How did you get yourself into this?

MARY

I just happened. I don't know. He's so good; I mean his work is so good, so clear. He knows things. I wanted to learn from him--

FRIEND

But does that mean you had to sleep with him? I mean, he's married for god's sake.

EXT. Art building. Day.

Mary and friend walk out of the building to a small grass lot outside and sit on a bench. The friend offers Mary an orange. They peel and eat as they talk.

MARY

One night I was working in the darkroom when Dan stopped by and asked me to see "On the Waterfront" with him. I didn't think much about it--Adrienne was busy with the kids and didn't have any interest in it. It is was one of Dan's favorite films. We went and had a beer afterwards. It seemed perfectly natural.

FRIEND

I think I see what comes next.

MARY

He told me all the usual stuff--it's so embarrassing to hear myself repeat it--how Adrienne never paid him any attention after the kids were born. Poor Dan, all that brilliance gone unloved. So, I took him home with me. You do things like that when you drink too much.

FRIEND

You bought that stuff? You're too smart for that.

MARY

Well, maybe I'm not so smart. Look, I'm not real happy about the whole thing. Sometimes I can't believe this is me. I don't like sneaking into theaters separately so no one sees us together, never going out with friends.

FRIEND

Do you think Adrienne knows?

MARY

Sometimes I think Adrienne knows; sometimes I think Adrienne doesn't care; sometimes I think Adrienne set the whole thing up. I picture them in bed at night, talking about me. The thing is, I feel betrayed. Isn't that strange?

Friend stands up, brushes orange peels off skirt and looks with concern at Mary.

EXT. ADRIENNE'S BACK YARD. LATE AFTERNOON

Younger Adrienne and Mary and Sylvia in Adrienne's garden, the little girl is playing, the women working in the garden. SYLVIA dancing about, playing with the cat, very innocent; the women's bent bodies almost reminiscent of a Brueghel print.

ADRIENNE

Be sure and divide the asters from around the crowns;
like this--see: the smaller ones come right off.

Mary begins to divide the plant; then stops, and just looks at Adrienne. Both women are on their knees. Adrienne is separating roots with a hunting knife.

MARY

Doesn't it hurt the plants when you cut the roots
like that?

ADRIENNE

It hurts them more if you don't; they choke each
other.

SYLVIA

Hey, Mom look at me. Mary look, no hands. Hey guys.
Hey...

MARY

Addy (she hesitates) Addy, you know I work very
closely with Dan.....(Adrienne cuts her off).

ADRIENNE

Sylvia! Get down from there! You're too high!
(beat) That child, do you see her up in that tree?
It must be twelve, fourteen feet up there.

Mary looks up, startled. Sylvia climbs down, and Adrienne goes back to work.

ADRIENNE

The iris tubers, though, you have to be careful how
you break them apart. We've got a load to dig up,

too. I don't know what I'd do without you sometimes, Mary; I really don't know what we'd do without you.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT--DAY. Present.

Mary is hanging up prints to dry. Doorbell rings. Sylvia comes in.

MARY

I'm in the darkroom. I'll be out in a minute. You're early.

SYLVIA

We had assembly today. Someone talking about HIV; I already know all that stuff.

Mary comes out of darkroom.

MARY

Is that why you look upset?

SYLVIA

No. It's Dad. He can be such a shit sometimes; I don't know how Mom can stand him.

She sits down in chair, legs sprawled, playing with her hair. Although she tries to affect a cool attitude, she is obviously upset.

MARY

What happened?

SYLVIA

First of all, he's never home. Which wouldn't be too bad if he left me alone to do what I wanted. The only time he acts like a father is when I want something and he can say no.

MARY

Sylvia, I'm sure it feels that way now, but your father loves you. Don't you remember when he used to bring you to school and let you do your homework on his desk? I'd be working around the place and see you bent over, coloring away.

Sylvia, sitting in her chair, her leg slung high over the armrest, one arm crooked behind her head, looks petulant and unconvinced.

SYLVIA

Well, maybe back then, when I was a little kid...it's not like that now, believe me. He never listens to me at all--he just wants me to do what he wants, like I'm some kind of puppet. He makes fun of my ideas, my friends, my clothes.

MARY

What does he want?

SYLVIA

He wants me to make good grades. He thinks I should be a science whiz or something. I hate science and math and he acts like that makes me freaky. It's just because he wants me to get a scholarship. So he can brag to all his friends about me. It has nothing to do with me.

MARY

You are his only child, Sylvia. Maybe that puts too much pressure on you. But all parents want the best for their kids, the best as they understand it...

SYLVIA

Yeah, that's what Mom says. But he treats her like shit, too. You always got along with him. Is he a good teacher?

MARY

Very good. The students used to adore him, at least when I was a student.

SYLVIA

Then why isn't he more understanding of me? Of how I hate this place. I'm not sure I even want to go to college. I want to work and then bum around Europe. He says I have to go to State.

MARY

Maybe you could study abroad while you're in school?

SYLVIA

I can't wait that long. I don't fit in here. I feel like I can't breath. I don't have anyone to talk to--except you.

Mary

I know. I know what it's like to feel like you can't breathe. It's just--life is hard--your dad isn't just making that up. It's good to have dreams, Sylvia, you just need to make sure you can make them come true. And that might mean working on your math...

SYLVIA

That's just the kind of thing Dad says. I don't think he ever had any dreams; he just puts down other peoples'.

MARY

Oh, I think maybe he had dreams; maybe he still does.

SYLVIA

Take my word for it--he doesn't. Every word that drops from his mouth is dripping with sarcasm.

MARY

You're a lot like him, you know.

SYLVIA

Oh, yeah, how? That's pretty grim.

MARY

Well, let's see. Your mouth is like his: it looks like his, and sometimes you talk like him.

SYLVIA

I think I look like my mother.

MARY

Well, you do have her eyes; especially the way you can stare people down.

SYLVIA

You're a real pal. I don't want to look like him, that Nazi. I'd rather look like her. She's really beautiful--

MARY

Why not just look like your self? Well, we'll find out. I'll show you.

Mary begins setting up her tripod. She starts snapping picture. Sylvia is at first stiff and posed, self-conscious, but gradually relaxes and becomes more natural, teasing the cat. Mary laughs--they are having fun. Then Mary just pauses, stares at Sylvia as if seeing her for the first time.

SYLVIA

What are you doing?

MARY

I'm looking for Sylvia.

INT.MARY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

PHONE RINGS. Mary wakes up, turns on the light, answers it groggily. Dan's voice comes over the phone.

DAN

Sylvia's gone. Is she with you?

MARY

Gone? What do you mean?

DAN

She's disappeared, that's what. We were hoping she was with you.

MARY

Well, she's not. I wish she were.

DAN

Look, can I talk to you? We had a big fight and Adrienne's hysterical and I promised I'd call you.

MARY

Now? It's late--Dan, she's not here. I don't know how I can help.

DAN

I really need to talk to you. I'm at the Gardens.

MARY

O.K.

INT. THE GARDENS, a bar. Night.

Dan, dressed in an expensive sweater and chinos, is sitting at the bar, talking to the barmaid. His face is at once sensitive and debauched, his

eyes bleary. Mary comes in, in jeans and an old shirt, and sits next to him. He kisses her on the cheek.

MARY

Well, here I am. What is it?

DAN

Come on, Mary, do you have to be like this?

MARY

It's just a little too much like old times.

Mary orders a drink.

You had a fight with Adrienne? Sylvia?

DAN

Did we have a fight? When don't we fight? Going home is like spending the night in occupied territory. Yes, we had a fight. I'm not even sure what set it off tonight, really--I didn't say anything that I haven't said a million times. It was like she was already upset, just set to go off--

MARY

Give it a try.

Dan

Sylvia has all these bright ideas about going abroad. She has some notion she's going to be an intellectual, drink absinthe on the Left Bank, cavort with mimes, some crap like that. Mary, the kid can barely drive a car; she's a little girl.

MARY

No, Dan, she's not a little girl. She's a young woman.

DAN

I told her she's going to State, take it or leave it; it's not like she got the greatest grades in the world; she didn't get any scholarships. I told her I'd had enough of her romantic notions, she needs to get with the program. I told her a punk with a degree is a lot better off than a punk without a degree.

MARY

Oh, no, Dan; did you say that? You pulled that boot-camp stuff with her?

DAN

It's not stuff, Mary. It's real life.

MARY

Dan, don't you see? She's so like you...she wants your approval...

DAN

You're just like Adrienne. She blames me, too. Shit.

Dan shakes his head, looks pleadingly at Mary, his hands fidgeting with his glass, then he puts his hand on hers.

Mary

She's really just insecure, Dan. She thinks we're all so accomplished, and settled and where does she fit in? We've all overwhelmed her with our hothouse existence--of course she's confused.

DAN

You were always so reasonable; why couldn't I keep you?

MARY

Don't start. Please. What do you and Adrienne want me to do?

DAN

Adrienne thinks Sylvia will call you eventually...See if you can find out where she is for us.

MARY

Why didn't Adrienne call me?

DAN

She's pretty upset; doesn't want to talk to anybody.

MARY

What if Sylvia doesn't want me to tell you where she is?

DAN

Come on, Mary, she is just a kid. She can't make those kinds of decisions. (He leans over and kisses

her, in a bleary, lingering alcoholic way) I'm counting on you.

INT. MARY'S APARTMENT. DAY

MUSIC IS PLAYING Ravel or Debussy, something suggestive of dance, of flight. Mary pins several pictures of Sylvia to the wall, and sits looking at them, smoking and frowning.

MARY

That's not it. I still haven't caught her.

There is a knock on the door.

MARY

Door's open!

Sylvia enters, somewhat timidly, followed by a young pale man with shaved head and earrings, black leather jacket. He hangs back, leans against the doorframe.

SYLVIA

Are you alone?

MARY

Of course, who else would be here?

SYLVIA

I thought Adrienne might be here--

MARY

No, your mother never comes up here. It's a bit grimy for her, I think.

SYLVIA

I guess you know I've left home.

MARY

Yes.

SYLVIA

And dropped out of school.

MARY

You have less than a year to go!

SYLVIA

It doesn't matter; I'm not learning anything. I'm going to London with Dave.

Sylvia indicates boy with her head.

MARY

I see. When?

SYLVIA

Now. I mean as soon as I can. I'm not just talking.

MARY

I believe you. Look, can you tell your friend to take a walk or something--do you mind?

DAVE

I'll go get some tea. I'll be back in half an hour, Sylvia.

Dave saunters out.

MARY

What are your plans? How are you going to live?

SYLVIA

I'm going to hock Grandma's diamond. Dave has some friends we can crash with. Then I'll get a job waitressing or something.

MARY

Are you sure you can get a work permit?

SYLVIA

I'll get one. Dave knows how to do all that stuff.

MARY

You seem to have a lot of trust in Dave.

Sylvia

As much as I trust anyone.

Mary

I thought you weren't going to leave me, Sylvia; whatever will I do without you?

SYLVIA

I'm sorry, Mary. But there isn't anything here for me. My parents hate me. I hate school. I don't fit in here.

MARY

I thought it was just your father.

SYLVIA

My mother lied to me. A dirty trick to keep me in line.

MARY

Lied!? Adrienne never lies. What about?

Sylvia looks embarrassed, looks away from Mary. She speaks very quickly.

SYLVIA

She said you had an affair with my father. I told her she was a liar; she said it so cold, like it was a big joke or something. She's just jealous that I'm over here all the time, that I can talk to you, that you have life.

MARY

Did she say that? That she was jealous?

SYLVIA

No, she said something about hardening a hothouse plant; I don't know, something obscure like that, some stupid riddle. I don't get her.

Sylvia gets up, starts pacing and digging around in her bag for cigarettes, and then looks directly at Mary.

MARY

What difference would it make to you if it were true?

SYLVIA

What difference?! I mean, god, my whole reality. I mean why would I want to be like someone who'd be so-
-
sleazy? yuck. But it's not, is it?

MARY

Sylvia, your mother doesn't lie.

Sylvia's expression is shocked, angry, flushed--in contrast to her usual cool exterior. She looks vulnerable. It is her own face.

SYLVIA

It's true?!

MARY

Not in the way you think. It was something that happened a long time ago, but it doesn't change the fact that we all love you--

SYLVIA

This is so lame. You've been lying to me, pretending to be my mother's friend, my friend. How could you? It's disgusting.

MARY

I am your mother's friend. Your friend.

SYLVIA

You all lie!

MARY

We all make mistakes, Sylvia, not just your father. Maybe you'll understand better one day.

They look at each other; Sylvia angry and hurt, Mary vulnerable and unsure.

SYLVIA

No, I don't think so. I'll never understand.

Sylvia hurriedly gathers up her things, dropping things out of her purse. She leaves, slamming the door.

EXT. ADRIENNE'S HOUSE. DAY

Mary knocks on the door. Adrienne answers. She looks weary.

ADRIENNE

She's back; she's OK. I don't know what you said, but she's back.

MARY

It wasn't what *I* said. Why did you have to drag her into all this? You're her mother--

ADRIENNE

Because I'm her mother. It's time she didn't see the world in black and white, the bad guys and the good--

MARY

But why make her hate me?

ADRIENNE

She won't. Give it some time. She hates us all right now. None of us came out smelling like a rose. Especially me. I was relieved when you and Dan were together, it took the pressure off me.

MARY

I hope you told that--

ADRIENNE

Not yet; I still have to get used to that truth. She's still too young for it--

MARY

I never thought you'd be capable of--

ADRIENNE

Telling the truth?

MARY

Destroying our friendship.

ADRIENNE

Maybe it's time for us all to grow up.

They stand looking at each other fiercely. Then Adrienne, crying reaches out and embraces Mary.

MARY

Dan always said you were a bitch.

INT. DAILY NEWS OFFICE-DAY

Mary is packing up her office.

ALLEN

Hey slow down, you're going to break something. Have they given you a new office or something?

MARY
Leaving. I've quit.

ALLEN
You can't do that!

MARY
It's done. Now, where did I put that cable....?

ALLEN
Giving up this great career? Isn't that a little impulsive?

MARY
Probably. But what have I got to lose?

ALLEN
Benefits. Security. Companionship.

MARY
Boredom. Stuckness. As much as I love you, you aren't' enough for me, Allen.

ALLEN
Actually, I'm surprised you didn't do this years ago.

Mary stops what she's doing and stares at him.

MARY
Really?

ALLEN
I always knew you were too good for this place. You're the real McCoy. Guess this means I have to start taking cute pictures--

MARY
Afraid so. Well that about does it. I've left these slides for you, some back-ups in case you fall short. Bye Allen

They hug.

EXT. MARY'S APARTMENT. Day

Mary packing to leave; Dan drives up, parks, gets out, comes over and leans on the car.

DAN

I thought I'd see how you're doing. I guess Adrienne was a little rough on you. Sorry about that.

MARY

Good cop, bad cop. I'm fine. I'm a big girl.

Mary continues packing the car.

DAN

What are you doing?

MARY

Packing.

DAN

You're leaving? What about your job?

MARY

I think I can do better than the Daily News. At least I need to find out.

Dan puts the last suitcase in, then takes her hands.

DAN

What are we going to do without you?

MARY

Funny, that's what Adrienne once said. I guess you'll figure something out.

DAN

I'm sad, everyone is leaving.

MARY

Sylvia?

DAN

She's fine; going to NYU, if she can get in. It would be good for her to get away. I guess I was too hard on her before.

MARY

We've all been pretty hard on each other. I hope someday she'll understand all this; I hope she won't be as hard on us.

(beat)

Well, give her my love. Give her your's too.

She drives away, leaving Dan on the curb watching her go.

MARY (VO)

Sylvia will be fine. I'm sure of it, although it will be years and years before I see her again, before we truly talk. It is like the way the universe is supposed to expand: like a big balloon--all the galaxies, once close, once neighbors, once kin, grow further and further apart with each puff. And then, maybe somebody let's the air out, the universe, collapses, and they are close again.