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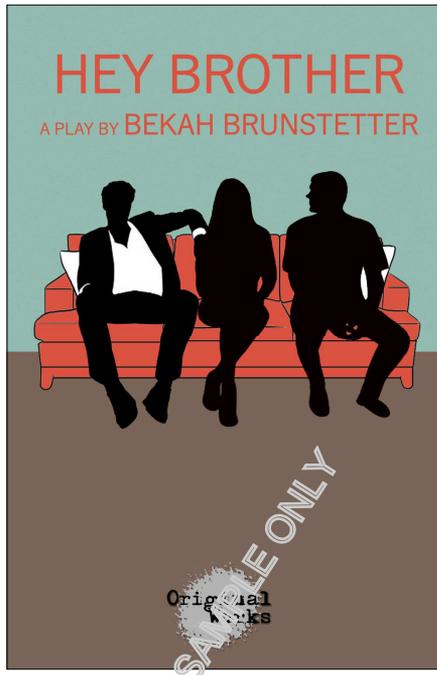
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*The Water Tribe*  
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**HEY BROTHER by Bekah Brunstetter**

**Synopsis:** As the saying goes, you can't pick your family. At odds brothers, hard drinking financial planner Ben and grad student Issac, are cohabitating in Ben's beachside North Carolina home and it isn't going well. Adding fuel to their fire is Kris, an Asian-American grad student, who sets her eyes on both of them, forcing a love triangle neither is prepared to handle.

**Cast Size:** 2 Males, 1 Female

# **The Water Tribe**

**by Don Cummings**

SAMPLE ONLY

THE WATER TRIBE had its world premiere January 17, 2020, produced by Ensemble Studio Theatre/Los Angeles in association with VS. Theatre Company. It was directed by Tricia Small. Scenic design and key art were by Adam James Glover. Lighting design was by Shara Abvabi. Costume design was by Michael Mullen. The production stage manager was Maya Braunwarth.

The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

Claudia	Hannah Prichard
Johnny	Christopher Reiling
Sydelle	Jayne Taini
Sonia	Alexandra Daniels
Brian	Jon Joseph Gentry

## CHARACTERS

**CLAUDIA** - 20's, smart, good with inputting, clear headed, lower-class white person, great sense of spontaneity with a need to connect. Very present.

**JOHNNY** - 20's, sincere, confused, wants intimacy, kind, but thrashing underneath it all. Poor. Jewish. Searching hard.

**SYDELLE** - 60's, secular Jewish woman who does not believe in God, straight forward, pragmatic. Caring. (Pronounced SI-del. Short i.)

**BRIAN** - Mid-30's, thoughtful, black, serious worker, cautious, alone, scientifically minded.

**SONIA** - Early-30's. Been through a lot. Has the look of someone who could work for a decorating concern. That is what she does.

## THE WATER TRIBE

### Scene 1

*(Fun night. Studio Apartment. Shabby. On the little table are pizza buns: toasted burger buns with tomato sauce and packaged cheese melted on top. Johnny plays with a knife. A wild animal video plays on the computer. Claudia likes it. Johnny figures out his next move.)*

CLAUDIA: You don't need a knife for pizza buns.

*(Johnny holds up the knife.)*

JOHNNY: It's not for pizza.

CLAUDIA: What's it for?

JOHNNY: These animal videos are boring. Switch back to the last one. I'll show you.

CLAUDIA: Put that down, Johnny. Kiss me.

JOHNNY: Okay.

*(They kiss.)*

CLAUDIA: Now I'll kiss you.

*(Claudia flips Johnny around and gets on top.)*

JOHNNY: Ow.

*(Johnny switches the video back to the last one.)*

JOHNNY: Look. Sometimes they just nick the clitoris. It's not even a full cut.

CLAUDIA: Yeah. And sometimes they remove everything, the labia, all of it, and sew the vagina closed. Look.

JOHNNY: They say these women don't enjoy sex.

CLAUDIA: After that? Who would!

JOHNNY: Before or after.

CLAUDIA: Women enjoy sex. You know that.

*(Pause.)*

JOHNNY: *(Getting into it.)* The men want power. I want power over you. It's more exciting that way.

CLAUDIA: I want you to have power over me. Sometimes.

JOHNNY: I control you, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: Yeah, right.

JOHNNY: I control you and there is nothing you can do about it.

*(Johnny holds up the knife.)*

JOHNNY: *(Half-kidding.)* Let me cut out your clit. Just a little.

CLAUDIA: Don't be stupid.

JOHNNY: You like stuff like this.

CLAUDIA: Not right now.

*(Claudia pushes Johnny away. Johnny puts down the knife.)*

JOHNNY: I did this for you, Claudia. Now what are we going to do?

CLAUDIA: *(Going for the computer.)* The animal videos are better.

JOHNNY: *(Stopping her.)* Nah, let's play Cave War.

CLAUDIA: *(Stopping him.)* That whole game was stolen from Dungeons and Dragons. It's not real. Look at those poor women.

JOHNNY: I am.

CLAUDIA: None of them will ever go to college.

JOHNNY: We didn't go to college.

CLAUDIA: We could have. Maybe. Look at that. That's nuts.

*(They watch. Captivated. Awful screaming. Claudia turns down the volume, ready for some fun.)*

CLAUDIA: Okay, you nasty man, all sweaty and powerful, I'm ready—Let's pretend you just cut out my clit. Just pretend. And now, it's all over and I can't enjoy sex and I really hate it.

JOHNNY: Great! And I crawl into your cow dung hut and I force myself on you?

CLAUDIA: Sure. It's all about your pleasure.

JOHNNY: You'd like that?

CLAUDIA: If you let me do it to you sometimes.

JOHNNY: I don't know why I want it so much.

CLAUDIA: It's an animal thing.

JOHNNY: To be a man is to be a man.

*(Pause.)*

CLAUDIA: Yeah? ... Give me that knife.

JOHNNY: Okay.

*(Johnny hands Claudia the knife.)*

CLAUDIA: Let's see how you like it.

JOHNNY: What are you doing?

CLAUDIA: Let's say we live somewhere where all the male babies get circumcised.

JOHNNY: I'm not circumcised.

CLAUDIA: It's about time then—

JOHNNY: I'm not Jewish.

CLAUDIA: Your mother is.

JOHNNY: Not really.

*(Johnny's mother, Sydelle, enters from outside the door with a basket of folded laundry.)*

SYDELLE: Look, I'm not one of those self-haters, but I don't believe in religion—

JOHNNY: You told us, Ma—

SYDELLE: Claudia, put down that knife. You'll take someone's eye out.

*(Claudia puts down the knife. Johnny changes the video.)*

SYDELLE: God, the machines here are so much better than the new place.

JOHNNY: Aren't the machines all new?

SYDELLE: They're cheap. They get clogged. *(To Johnny.)* You have to keep the kitchen clean. You'll get bugs, honey. Remember?

JOHNNY: Bye, Mom.

CLAUDIA: Bye, Sydelle.

*(Sydelle leaves.)*

JOHNNY: Let's play Cave War.

CLAUDIA: No. Don't change the subject. Your circumcision. Let's begin.

JOHNNY: My father was circumcised. By a rabbi, I bet.

CLAUDIA: How come you're not circumcised?

*(Sydelle reenters with an empty bottle of Stain Remover to recycle. Claudia gives up her game.)*

SYDELLE: I would never mutilate my child.

CLAUDIA: Isn't it like a ritual you're supposed to have?

SYDELLE: I don't believe in God. And neither should you. Bye, kids.

*(Sydelle exits.)*

CLAUDIA: Now that she's all moved into the other place, can't she just kind of stay there?

JOHNNY: She doesn't like the machines in her building.

CLAUDIA: They're all brand new.

JOHNNY: Yeah, but they're government issued. They're cheap.

CLAUDIA: Is she lonely? What's going on?

JOHNNY: I don't know.

CLAUDIA: Johnny?

JOHNNY: Yeah?

CLAUDIA: Will you marry me?

JOHNNY: Yeah, sure.

CLAUDIA: But like how we talked about. It would be nice.

JOHNNY: Yeah, I'll ask you.

CLAUDIA: I'll leave Sonia's place. She could come to our wedding. Maybe other people, too.

JOHNNY: It's a good idea.

*(Pause.)*

CLAUDIA: Yeah, it is. You want to play Cave War? Go ahead.

JOHNNY: Okay.

*(Claudia stands up, puts down the knife and straightens out her twisted clothing.)*

CLAUDIA: Can I stay over tonight? I don't feel like going back to Sonia's.

JOHNNY: You don't have to ask.

*(Johnny plays Cave War on the computer.)*

CLAUDIA: Can I have the last pizza bun?

JOHNNY: Sure.

*(Claudia pulls out a phone charger and plugs in her old phone.)*

CLAUDIA: Who you playing with?

JOHNNY: That guy from Finland.

*(Johnny continues to play on his computer. Claudia eats. She watches Johnny.)*

CLAUDIA: I bet you win this one.

JOHNNY: You don't ever really win.

CLAUDIA: It just goes on and on?

JOHNNY: Yeah.

CLAUDIA: Don't you ever get tired of it?

JOHNNY: Shhh.

## **Scene 2**

*(Claudia and Sonia stand in front of the building where Claudia works. A small cement park. Sonia is Claudia's cousin. She has a lot of good hair. Her coat is almost expensive. Claudia holds a bottle of water with a bow on it.)*

SONIA: *(On her phone.)* I'll be there in fifteen minutes ... Yeah, everything's fine. Leaving the doctor's office now ... Need a coffee? ... K.

*(Sonia puts her phone away. Claudia hands Sonia a phone charger.)*

CLAUDIA: Here.

SONIA: Thanks.

CLAUDIA: Sorry you had to lie. About going to the doctor.

SONIA: I lie to them all the time.

CLAUDIA: You could have stopped at Johnny's. It's closer to your job.

SONIA: Oh, Claudia—

CLAUDIA: We'd love you to visit. You can stop by his place anytime.

SONIA: Yeah. I could.

CLAUDIA: Why do you hate it?

SONIA: I don't hate it.

CLAUDIA: It's been over two years, Sonia. I love him. So—

SONIA: Okay, okay. But Claudia—

CLAUDIA: What?

SONIA: You need to make some other friends. Join a group. Expand your world. Make it real. It can't just be you and Johnny. You might even find someone better.

CLAUDIA: That's a good idea, Sonia. We need some friends.

SONIA: Yeah, you do. Something else. Johnny—

CLAUDIA: I think Johnny would like that.

SONIA: For you, too, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: Just thinking about it makes me calm.

SONIA: Good. And please, don't take my phone charger.

CLAUDIA: I thought it was mine.

SONIA: Okay. But check. I have to go to work. So do you.

CLAUDIA: Don't go yet.

SONIA: I have to.

CLAUDIA: How's your job?

SONIA: Oh, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: So glamorous.

SONIA: You know I hate it.

CLAUDIA: I don't understand.

SONIA: I don't know anything about decorating.

CLAUDIA: You're so stylish.

SONIA: I'd rather work with a bunch of fishermen.

CLAUDIA: You always liked fish.

SONIA: I do. To eat. Maybe more.

CLAUDIA: Or you could be a designer, right?

SONIA: I really need to find something else. We'll see. I have to go.

CLAUDIA: You'll do great anywhere. Look at us, Sonia. We have careers. We did it. Girl power. Right?

SONIA: Yeah, yeah, we did it.

*(Sonia twirls the phone charger into her purse and leaves.)*

CLAUDIA: When is Carlos moving in with you?

SONIA: I don't ... I don't know. It's a mess.

CLAUDIA: Because I totally understand. The situation. That you want the place all to—

SONIA: I really need to go. I have to. Go to work. You're going to be late.

*(Claudia watches Sonia leave.)*

CLAUDIA: Have a nice day, Sonia!

*(Claudia heads off to work.)*

### **Scene 3**

*(Claudia is at work. She inputs data. She sits alone. She gets up and walks to the next cube. Brian is there. Handsome. Black. He drinks bottled water. He looks up.)*

CLAUDIA: Hi.

BRIAN: Yeah?

CLAUDIA: What are you working on?

BRIAN: Bytes per minute for the big guys.

CLAUDIA: I'm still inputting. I don't know if it's for the big guys.

BRIAN: Cool.

*(Claudia hands Brian the bottle of water with a ribbon on it.)*

BRIAN: What's this?

CLAUDIA: Water.

BRIAN: Why?

CLAUDIA: They were selling them across the street. You always have a bottle going.

BRIAN: Stay hydrated—

CLAUDIA: Yeah, but you go through ten bottles a day or more.

BRIAN: Yeah. I drink a lot.

CLAUDIA: So I got this for you ... Brian?

BRIAN: Yeah?

CLAUDIA: You don't have water where you live?

BRIAN: Partly true.

CLAUDIA: But you live in civilization.

BRIAN: It comes and goes. The water.

CLAUDIA: Okay. Look, I'm just going to cut to it. And it has nothing to do with the water.

BRIAN: What?

CLAUDIA: Do you feel like you're more tribal than white people?

BRIAN: Why?

CLAUDIA: I've never been in a tribe. We were watching videos last night—I'm just wondering.

BRIAN: I have to finish this.

CLAUDIA: Are you more tribal?

BRIAN: Absolutely not.

CLAUDIA: There must be something better about being black—

BRIAN: Why do you think that?

CLAUDIA: I think being black is better. It feels better to me. Like, what people want, how they really are inside. It's more popular.

BRIAN: *(Sarcastic)* Sure.

CLAUDIA: Maybe not.

*(Claudia goes back to her cube. There is a long pause while she thinks. She gets back up and walks to Brian.)*

CLAUDIA: You ever feel like you're dying or something? Not dying, that's crazy, but like, I remember when I was

a little girl, what it was like to look up at all the windows from the street. Or smell a skunk. There were other people out there and I could meet them. Felt good. Smelt good. I'm going to be thirty, one day. My cousin, Sonia, she's older than me. She has more choices. She has a good job, but she's looking around for something else, maybe. I don't know why I'm telling you this.

BRIAN: Is this some pick-up line? Because the black thing was better.

CLAUDIA: No, Brian. It's just—Did you know that little African children—if they're put in a race to win a pile of mangos they all run together so they can tie? They'd rather share the mangos than leave anyone out.

BRIAN: Cool. We should get back to work.

CLAUDIA: I would love that. Be so nice.

BRIAN: I don't know if that's even true, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: Yeah. Maybe people are just lonely. So they share.

BRIAN: Being lonely is the perfect way to repel other people.

CLAUDIA: That's awful.

BRIAN: A paradox.

*(Claudia goes back to her cube. They both work.)*

CLAUDIA: Hey Brian?

BRIAN: Yeah?

CLAUDIA: I'm almost, officially, getting married. He just has to ask.

BRIAN: To Johnny then?

CLAUDIA: Yeah. We talked about it a bunch of times. Last night, I was pretty straight forward. So—

BRIAN: Sounds like a good plan.

CLAUDIA: You ever going to get married?

BRIAN: I don't know.

CLAUDIA: When you get married, you always have this best friend.

BRIAN: Depends on who you ask.

CLAUDIA: Yeah. But no matter what anyone says, it's true.

*(Claudia works. Brian works.)*

CLAUDIA: He's fun. And he's sexy. And he doesn't do drugs. He's going to do something with his life.

BRIAN: That's good news. Good for you.

CLAUDIA: He doesn't have a father. He died. But that's okay. What do you want to do?

BRIAN: I'm doing it.

CLAUDIA: 'Cause I thought—you said you liked—

*(Claudia notices something sort of awful on her computer screen.)*

CLAUDIA: Did you just get an instant message?

BRIAN: From who?

CLAUDIA: My computer is going black in five, four, three, two—Huh.

BRIAN: Sorry.

CLAUDIA: I'm fired.

BRIAN: That's how they do it.

CLAUDIA: Can we still be friends? Are we friends?

BRIAN: Sure. Security is probably coming. Take care of yourself.

*(Claudia walks to the door. She sees security coming.)*

CLAUDIA: *(Toward the hall.)* Don't worry. I'm on my way out. *(To Brian.)* I'll call you. Bye.

*(Claudia leaves.)*

*(Brian is afraid the same thing is about to happen to him. He waits. It doesn't. Brian continues to work. Relieved.)*

#### **Scene 4**

*(Sydelle stands across from Johnny in his apartment. She takes out round containers of Indian food she brought in.)*

SYDELLE: So now neither one of you has a job. Maybe I should move back in, Johnny.

JOHNNY: I'll get one. Why did you name me John? Just John?

SYDELLE: It's simple. And strong.

JOHNNY: But we're Jewish.

SYDELLE: How many times do I have to tell you I don't care about that?

JOHNNY: You're the only Jewish person on earth who doesn't.

SYDELLE: I was born in this country. My parents were born here. My grandparents were born here. And back in the old country, there were no terrible stories. I have nothing to be Jewish about.

JOHNNY: What about Dad?

SYDELLE: Johnny—

JOHNNY: You don't have one picture of him?

SYDELLE: He snapped the photos. Fathers are never in the pictures.

JOHNNY: Sometimes when I look at Claudia, I can imagine what she's going to look like as an old woman.

SYDELLE: Don't do that.

JOHNNY: I can't help it.

SYDELLE: I want you to be happy, Johnny. Claudia, is she really—

JOHNNY: Yeah. She is.

SYDELLE: My son. My delicate son.

JOHNNY: I'm not delicate.

SYDELLE: I just want to make sure you're okay. Okay?

JOHNNY: Okay!

SYDELLE: Okay, okay ... Oh, damn.

JOHNNY: What?

SYDELLE: I ordered three different dishes and they all look like lentils.

JOHNNY: I like lentils.

SYDELLE: Get spoons.

*(Johnny gets spoons.)*

SYDELLE: Are you depressed?

JOHNNY: No.

SYDELLE: You seem depressed to me. Not clinical, so I'm not too worried. You just need a job, Johnny. You're really smart. That's really all. You can work.

JOHNNY: Of course.

SYDELLE: Life is simple. Right? Claudia seems to know that. Work. Eat. Take care of yourself. Be nice to people. You can make things better for yourself. I know you. You can.

JOHNNY: Okay, mom. Okay.

*(The door opens. Claudia enters with a white paper bag of food.)*

CLAUDIA: I bought meatball heroes.

SYDELLE: I hope you got one for me.

CLAUDIA: I didn't know—

SYDELLE: I'm joking. It's okay.

*(Sydelle covers her food up and packs it away.)*

JOHNNY: You don't have to go.

SYDELLE: I can't make you eat these lentils ...

*(Big pause as they all look at each other. What's next?)*

SYDELLE: I'll take them home.

CLAUDIA: Bye, Sydelle.

SYDELLE: ... Okay.

JOHNNY: Bye, Mom.

*(Sydelle leaves.)*

CLAUDIA: Why is she always here?

JOHNNY: She's not.

CLAUDIA: She's here a lot.

*(Claudia crawls on top of Johnny and then rolls him over on top of her.)*

JOHNNY: Ow.

CLAUDIA: Stop complaining. Come on, take it!

*(Claudia tickles Johnny.)*

JOHNNY: Ow. Stop. Stop it, Claudia. Stop!

*(Johnny pushes Claudia off. She thumps.)*

CLAUDIA: Ow.

*(Pause.)*

CLAUDIA: That didn't even hurt. I was just surprised.

JOHNNY: Let's eat.

CLAUDIA: Okay ...

*(Claudia grabs Johnny extra exuberantly.)*

JOHNNY: What are you doing?

CLAUDIA: Hugging you.

JOHNNY: That's not fun, Claudia.

*(Claudia releases him. She opens the bag of sandwiches and throws one at Johnny.)*

JOHNNY: We're adults now, Claudia. Let's, you know, it's time to act like adults.

CLAUDIA: I couldn't agree more. Let's grow up. Make some friends. Take a trip to the mountains.

*(Claudia takes a bite of her sandwich.)*

JOHNNY: Sorry about your job.

CLAUDIA: It only took me nine months to find that one. So, you know—

*(Pause.)*

JOHNNY: Will you marry me?

CLAUDIA: Johnny?

JOHNNY: This work thing. You must feel awful.

CLAUDIA: This is the big romantic night? You're really asking?

JOHNNY: Yeah, I want to marry you. Let's—I'm asking you—Officially.

CLAUDIA: So like, when I'm down, that's when you want to marry me?

JOHNNY: I don't want to marry you because you're down.

CLAUDIA: Fuck!

*(Claudia punches her sandwich and makes a mess.)*

CLAUDIA: Fuck, fuck!

JOHNNY: What's wrong with you?

*(Claudia leaves to get something to clean up the mess. Johnny sits there looking at the mess. Claudia returns.)*

CLAUDIA: Here's the thing. Something's wrong. We've been together for almost three years and we never go out.

JOHNNY: We don't have any money.

CLAUDIA: But we need friends, Johnny. Like a group, right? Or some, I don't know—something bigger than watching videos and playing Cave War. Your mother always around. Something, like—something! It'll be good for us.

JOHNNY: I'm not enough?

CLAUDIA: You are! But, we need, we need friends. Like be in some sort of tribe. One that wants to change the world for the better. We could be part of it.

JOHNNY: Religion makes people happy.

*(Claudia looks at her meatball hero. She picks it up and she holds it.)*

CLAUDIA: I don't understand religion.

JOHNNY: Okay. I hear you. I found you a new one today.

CLAUDIA: What?

JOHNNY: A lion eating a baby zebra.

CLAUDIA: We've seen that one before.

JOHNNY: Not this one. A zebra gives birth and within just ten seconds, a lion jumps the baby zebra and eats it.

CLAUDIA: Turn it on.

JOHNNY: Okay.

*(Claudia and Johnny sit on the couch and watch the computer while they eat their meatball heroes. They are returned to their most natural state. They both take bites of their sandwiches and keep watching.)*

CLAUDIA: I love you Johnny.

JOHNNY: I love you, Claudia.

*(This video gets them hot. They put down their sandwiches. They start making out. It gets wild and heated. There's a lump under the cushion. It's the Bible. Claudia pulls it out from under the cushion and tosses it across the room.)*

JOHNNY: Hey.

CLAUDIA: Bite me.

JOHNNY: Okay.

*(Johnny bites her on the arm.)*

CLAUDIA: That feels good ... I'll talk to Sonia. And my friend Brian, first.

JOHNNY: What for?

CLAUDIA: Dates and stuff. For our wedding. Make a plan. We'll have people there—

JOHNNY: Okay.

*(Claudia stares at Johnny.)*

JOHNNY: Come here.

*(Claudia takes off her shirt. She bites Johnny once.)*

JOHNNY: Ow ...

*(Johnny flips Claudia over and pins her.)*

CLAUDIA: You're a monster!

JOHNNY: My father was a monster.

*(The computer screen catches Claudia's eye.)*

CLAUDIA: Wait! Wait!

JOHNNY: What?

CLAUDIA: *(Off the computer.)* Look at that baby zebra.

JOHNNY: Chewed in half.

CLAUDIA: Never even had a chance.

*(Johnny takes off his shirt. He looks down at her.)*

CLAUDIA: Okay. Now.

JOHNNY: *(Going for it.)* That's right.

CLAUDIA: Yeah, Johnny ... Yeah, I'll marry you.

## Scene 5

*(Evening. Claudia and Brian both arrive at the same time in front of the building where Claudia used to work. The small cement park. Brian from inside the building. Claudia from one side. Claudia holds a bottle of water with a ribbon on it, hands it to Brian.)*

CLAUDIA: I got you another one.

BRIAN: Funny.

*(Shadows of people walk by.)*

CLAUDIA: I like this park.

BRIAN: They have to build a certain amount of public space ... They didn't replace you. Upstairs. Budget cuts. There's not much work.

*(Pause.)*

CLAUDIA: So you're in that room all alone?

BRIAN: Yeah.

CLAUDIA: Must be awful.

BRIAN: I don't mind.

CLAUDIA: Brian ... Are we friends?

BRIAN: I think so.

CLAUDIA: But I mean, like, real friends.

BRIAN: Depends on what you mean.

CLAUDIA: I don't know. I'm not so good at this. My parents died.

BRIAN: I didn't know that

CLAUDIA: I mean, they died when I was young. When I was, well, actually—

BRIAN: It's okay.

CLAUDIA: My dad died when I was twelve. My mom, she's still alive. Somewhere. But really, it's like she's dead because, well, it's like she's dead.

BRIAN: I still see my mom. My dad took off.

CLAUDIA: Sorry.

BRIAN: People have a hard time staying together.

CLAUDIA: It's tough.

BRIAN: It is. So I keep myself on the straight and narrow.

CLAUDIA: Yeah, but—

BRIAN: There's not a lot of room ...

CLAUDIA: So what's the deal with your water situation?

BRIAN: You can't drink it in our neighborhood. There are problems. Pipes.

CLAUDIA: Sorry ... Can we be friends?

BRIAN: We are Claudia.

CLAUDIA: I don't really know you. I know you don't have a father—now. You watch science shows, you said—what else do you like?

BRIAN: I like to get a paycheck. I watch some TV. I like to read about how the world works. Geology. Plants and animals. I like philosophy. Honestly, there's not much to know.

CLAUDIA: You're nice. I always wonder, like, can someone be nice but still be exciting? And I think you might be that way. Kind of nice and exciting. Full of possibility.

BRIAN: Claudia, I feel like you're coming on to me. And it confuses me because you're going to marry this guy.

CLAUDIA: Yeah, it's official.

BRIAN: Then what's going on?

CLAUDIA: I'm not coming on to you Brian. I just—  
(*Truly vulnerable.*) I just want to know if you'll be my friend.

(*Brian puts his hand on Claudia's shoulder.*)

BRIAN: Sure.

CLAUDIA: Thank you. I don't really trust women.

BRIAN: They can be tricky.

CLAUDIA: My mom—

BRIAN: I understand.

CLAUDIA: My cousin, Sonia, she's my family I guess, but not a friend. She says we need friends.

BRIAN: So we'll be friends then.

CLAUDIA: But not like American friends. Because American friends are, well, everyone drinks and runs around, and they post it online.

BRIAN: But we're Americans.

CLAUDIA: I was thinking we'd be more like in a tribe with a few other people. That's why I'm asking—

BRIAN: I'm not much of a joiner.

CLAUDIA: Everything will be built in. We could do things, you know, that help each other.

BRIAN: I don't think I need help—

CLAUDIA: Everyone needs help. Like, Johnny and I could bring you water. We could make sure you always had clean water to drink. How's that?

BRIAN: You don't have to do that.

CLAUDIA: Johnny, he's really reliable. You could always count on him.

BRIAN: Yeah, but I can just go to the store and buy water. The big box store sells water.

CLAUDIA: But someone else could do it for you sometimes. And you could do something for them. You know, make a meal. Or patrol the area. We could do things—together.

BRIAN: Sure.

CLAUDIA: You have a girlfriend? She could be part of our tribe, too, you know?

BRIAN: No I don't.

CLAUDIA: Are you gay?

BRIAN: My girlfriend broke up with me.

CLAUDIA: Sorry.

BRIAN: She ran off with a doctor.

CLAUDIA: Sorry.

BRIAN: It's okay. He was a smart guy. Further along than me.

CLAUDIA: Listen—you're going to meet Johnny. We'll have you over for dinner or we'll have some lunch, first and then have you over for dinner. We'll do good things.

BRIAN: Okay.

CLAUDIA: That's great.

BRIAN: Great ... You sure you aren't all twisted and fucked up and just trying to get into my pants, Claudia?

CLAUDIA: I'm not. No.

BRIAN: 'Cause let me tell you something. I think you're probably a good person. But I also think you're a little crazy.

CLAUDIA: Really?

BRIAN: But I can't tell what kind of crazy you are and I have seen some crazy in my life. So I think maybe you aren't crazy yet but maybe you will be crazy in the future and this is what crazy looks like before it hits thirty. You want me to be friends with you and this phantom Johnny and all I can think is maybe you both want to get in my pants. Is that what's going on here, Claudia? Because people do some weird shit and I need to get back to school and get a real degree—

CLAUDIA: Okay—

BRIAN: —and I need some more money so I have to keep things on the straight and narrow.

CLAUDIA: You have a cool imagination. Thank you for being so honest. But Johnny and I don't want that, Brian. I think our tribe could be a tribe of people who are honest, all the time.

BRIAN: So this isn't about sex?

CLAUDIA: I want you to meet Johnny.

BRIAN: Okay.

CLAUDIA: And as a friend, you could let me know what you think of him. And if you like him, you can join our tribe.

BRIAN: Okay. Sorry.

CLAUDIA: We could meet you for lunch? We could meet you here.

BRIAN: Okay.

*(Claudia gets real close.)*

CLAUDIA: No one has any friends anymore.

*(Claudia's phone makes a sound. She looks.)*

CLAUDIA: I got a job!

BRIAN: Great, Claudia. What is it?

*(Brian goes to hug her in congratulations. In her excitement Claudia misses his approach.)*

CLAUDIA: Marketing. I'm so glad we're friends. I can't wait to tell Johnny. Okay?

BRIAN: Sure.

CLAUDIA: Thank you Brian. Thanks for seeing me. Bye.

*(Claudia shakes Brian's hand and runs off.)*

## **Scene 6**

*(Sydelle wears a thirty-year old wedding gown. Johnny tries to zip it up the back.)*

SYDELLE: This is stupid. I'm too fat.

JOHNNY: No you're not. Wait.

SYDELLE: You're gonna rip it.

JOHNNY: No I won't.

SYDELLE: Thirty-two years ago. I was just a girl. I was tiny. *(She twirls.)* Get me out of this thing. I don't want to do this.

JOHNNY: What did Dad wear?

SYDELLE: A blue suit. Stop it, Johnny. This isn't—

JOHNNY: Were you married by a rabbi?

SYDELLE: It was quick. Don't get married Johnny.

JOHNNY: And there're no pictures?

CLAUDIA: *(Unseen, coming up the apartment stairs.)*  
Johnny!

JOHNNY: Oh my God.

SYDELLE: Oh my God. Get this off me.

JOHNNY: It's too late!

SYDELLE: Get it off. This was an awful idea, John!

*(Johnny works on the zipper.)*

JOHNNY: It's stuck.

SYDELLE: What?

*(Claudia works the lock outside the door.)*

JOHNNY: It won't go up or down. Maybe you should hide.

SYDELLE: She'll be here all night.

JOHNNY: I don't know what to tell you.

*(The Door. Claudia enters.)*

CLAUDIA: I got a job.

SYDELLE: That's great.

CLAUDIA: *(To Johnny.)* I think you should apply, too, Johnny! Everything's working out!

SYDELLE: That's wonderful Claudia.

CLAUDIA: *(To Sydelle.)* What are you doing in that dress?

SYDELLE: This smelly old thing?

JOHNNY: It's stuck.

CLAUDIA: Why are you wearing that?

SYDELLE: I found it during the move—

CLAUDIA: Why do you have it on?

SYDELLE: Johnny?

JOHNNY: 'Cause—I thought—

CLAUDIA: *(To Sydelle.)* Did Johnny tell you we were getting married? We didn't announce—

SYDELLE: I'm sorry. Johnny?

*(Sydelle turns her back to Claudia. The dress is bulging.)*

SYDELLE: Just rip it off me. It's stuck. The zipper is broken. Just rip it.

*(Claudia rips it.)*

SYDELLE: Thank you.

*(Sydelle goes into the kitchen to put on regular clothes.)*

CLAUDIA: Sydelle, is that your old wedding dress?

SYDELLE: *(From kitchen.)* God, I'm sorry—

CLAUDIA: *(To Johnny.)* What are you doing?

JOHNNY: You didn't tell me not to tell her.

CLAUDIA: Who else did you tell?

JOHNNY: The Finnish guy I play Cave War with—why is this such a big deal?

*(Sydelle, dressed, enters with the wedding dress balled up. She leaves it.)*

SYDELLE: Have a good night. I'm, I'm going.

CLAUDIA: *(To Johnny.)* The Finnish guy? He's a stranger.

SYDELLE: *(To Johnny.)* I told you this was a terrible idea.

JOHNNY: We've been playing Cave War for a long time. He's my friend.

CLAUDIA: He's not a friend! He lives in Finland!

SYDELLE: *(To Claudia.)* It is his friend.

CLAUDIA: That's not a friend! Sydelle, I respect you because you're going to be my mother-in-law. And I think you're maybe kind of lonely—

*(Pause.)*

SYDELLE: Mm-Hm.

CLAUDIA: And we want you in our lives ...

SYDELLE: ... Mm-Hm.

CLAUDIA: But you're here all the time ... Johnny?

SYDELLE: He thought maybe you would like my dress.  
We thought you would be home later. That's all. It was  
a mistake.

CLAUDIA: We're just going downtown.

SYDELLE: I don't know if it's a good idea—

CLAUDIA: You'll join us. You'll be a witness, then.  
Okay?

SYDELLE: I mean—the wedding.

JOHNNY: It's a good idea.

SYDELLE: *(To Johnny.)* You can't take care of yourself.  
You were arrested for stealing.

CLAUDIA: He was arrested for being a vagrant.

SYDELLE: You were living in someone's car!

CLAUDIA: He was traveling.

SYDELLE: He was homeless!

CLAUDIA: He's not homeless now!

SYDELLE: Because I gave him this apartment!

JOHNNY: That was two years ago! I was just in jail one night. And it wasn't even hardcore. You have to stop worrying, Mom. I can take care of myself.

CLAUDIA: We can, Sydelle.

SYDELLE: Okay, listen to me. I didn't have good luck with being married so maybe I don't know anything, but you're young, you're both unemployed—

CLAUDIA: I got a job!

SYDELLE: A temporary job?

CLAUDIA: So what?

SYDELLE: Just—whatever you do—Don't have children.

*(Sydelle exits.)*

CLAUDIA: She's here all the time.

JOHNNY: I—

CLAUDIA: And it's weird. And now I have a job, so I bet you don't want to marry me anymore.

JOHNNY: Why not?

CLAUDIA: Because when I'm down, you get in the mood. But when things go my way—

JOHNNY: You know what, Claudia? That's just not fucking true.

CLAUDIA: What?

JOHNNY: You go up and down so much—

CLAUDIA: That's just normal.

JOHNNY: —it's like random numbers being spit out in a computer program. I'm just being me, Claudia, and you, you try to tell me what I am based on this wild ride you're living?

CLAUDIA: Your ride is wild, too, Johnny! You go up and down. You waste time playing Cave War. You play dress-up with your mother. She bugs me. I don't know why. But now I do. You tell me I can stay over but I can tell you just want me to go back to Sonia's so you can play games.

JOHNNY: That's just normal! I don't do what I do because you have a job or you don't have a job. Or you're up or you're down or whatever the hell is going on. It's not weird to have my mother visit us.

CLAUDIA: You don't know what you're doing.

JOHNNY: Oh, eat my pussy.

CLAUDIA: Eat MY pussy!

JOHNNY: No, you eat MY pussy.

CLAUDIA: I'll eat your fucking pussy.

*(Claudia jumps on top of Johnny and knocks him onto the couch.)*

JOHNNY: Yeah?

CLAUDIA: Yeah.

JOHNNY: Yeah, baby?

CLAUDIA: Yeah. So who's gonna eat whose pussy?

*(A long pause. Claudia really looks at Johnny—taking him in.)*

CLAUDIA: We're good together.

JOHNNY: Yeah. We are.

*(A long pause. Claudia really stares at Johnny. Then, Claudia sits up and she pulls Johnny toward her.)*

JOHNNY: What are you doing?

CLAUDIA: Shh.

*(Claudia pulls Johnny harder, down into her lap.)*

JOHNNY: Claudia?

*(Johnny lies in Claudia's lap. She strokes his hair.)*

CLAUDIA: I'm going to take care of you.

JOHNNY: I don't need—

CLAUDIA: Yeah you do. We both do. We'll prove your mother wrong.

JOHNNY: Sorry. It really was my idea. I thought maybe you'd like her old dress.

CLAUDIA: It smells. It's yellow. And now it's ripped. Crazy idea.

JOHNNY: She has the dress, but no pictures.

CLAUDIA: I told someone, too. I hope that's okay.

JOHNNY: Who?

CLAUDIA: Brian. From my old job.

JOHNNY: That's okay.

CLAUDIA: But only because I want you to meet him.

JOHNNY: Okay.

CLAUDIA: Now I'm going to take care of you.

JOHNNY: I'll take care of you, too.

*(Claudia continues to stroke Johnny's hair. He turns around and starts unbuttoning her pants.)*

JOHNNY: What's your job?

CLAUDIA: It's in marketing.

JOHNNY: That's a good job. I'll get a job, too.

CLAUDIA: I know you will. We're gonna be fine. And we're going to get married. Let's fuck.

*(They get ready to fuck.)*

## **Scene 7**

*(Next morning, Sonia stands in the middle of the room checking her phone. The Bible is on the table. Sonia stares at the distasteful apartment. Claudia enters from the kitchen side with two cups of coffee.)*

CLAUDIA: I got a new job.

SONIA: When do you start?

CLAUDIA: Right after the weekend. It's in marketing.

SONIA: Great. What is it?

CLAUDIA: I'm going to be a Liker. Thanks for coming over.

SONIA: What's that?

CLAUDIA: It's an internet thing Sonia. It's not a big job. But I think it's going to last a while. And I get to work from home.

SONIA: Good.

CLAUDIA: So, I wanted to ask you—

SONIA: Where's Johnny?

CLAUDIA: He had to have one of those unemployment meetings to prove he's unemployed.

SONIA: Okay. Thanks for the coffee, Claudia, listen, I came over because I need to tell you something.

CLAUDIA: I need to tell you something, too.

SONIA: But this is pretty important so I had to tell you in person.

CLAUDIA: So, Sonia, get ready—

SONIA: It's not great news—

CLAUDIA: Just hold on. Listen. I'm getting married.

SONIA: Claudia?

CLAUDIA: To Johnny. We're getting married.

SONIA: Oh, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: He's looking for a job, Sonia. He wants to be something, really. And we have fun together. We love each other.

SONIA: Johnny's nice ... I can't pay for it, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: No, no, that's not it.

SONIA: Don't do it, Claudia. It's—it's impulsive. And, why don't you get a degree instead? In anything. Nursing.

CLAUDIA: I don't want to be a nurse. I'm good with computers and organizing. I don't have money for school.

SONIA: You could be head nurse. You could run a department. More sugar?

CLAUDIA: I'll get it. So this is the question, ready?

SONIA: Sure. But—

CLAUDIA: Will you be my maid of honor? Be in the wedding pictures? Be in our group?

SONIA: How are you going to afford it?

CLAUDIA: It only costs sixty bucks at the courthouse. And then we're going to have a nice dinner. Johnny's mother will pay for it. Something—You like French food?

SONIA: Yeah—

CLAUDIA: Great. And you can bring your fancy boyfriend.

SONIA: Claudia, I don't even know if—

CLAUDIA: We're building a tribe, Sonia. Witnesses. Your idea. And we'll all know each other forever. You're my family and Johnny has his mother—she's around too much, but I don't hate her, well, I hate her a little, but I think that's normal—and then there's this guy Brian from work.

SONIA: But you work from home—

CLAUDIA: He's from my old job. He's really nice. You can bring Carlos. Then there'd be like six of us. You said I should have more people around—

SONIA: When is it, Claudia?

CLAUDIA: Well, I thought I'd ask you when is good for you? You'll bring Carlos?

SONIA: Sure, I can bring Carlos. If we're still together.

CLAUDIA: What?

SONIA: The noise. He's loud. I don't know.

CLAUDIA: But you're still a couple, right?

SONIA: Claudia—It's all falling apart. You can't, I can't—Don't use me as your role model. Listen—

CLAUDIA: It's not about that—

SONIA: I just think—I need to leave this town. Give it all up. I'm hanging on by a thread here.

CLAUDIA: You have your great job.

SONIA: I hate my job. They're all experts. They all know what's beautiful. They have art history degrees. Some went to business school. I feel like an idiot.

CLAUDIA: You're so beautiful, Sonia. You fit right in.  
So when are you free?

SONIA: Well, there's the foundation meeting next week.  
And then—

CLAUDIA: No, this summer. Let's do it over the  
summer.

SONIA: I have a trip. I'm going to Milan with my boss  
for a week in July. I don't know which one yet. And  
there's the big fundraiser for the autism thing. She has  
not one, but two kids with autism. Then Carlos wants to  
go to Puerto Rico for a week to see his mother. I don't  
want to go. I really don't.

CLAUDIA: Well, how about August for the wedding?

SONIA: Yeah, maybe late August—I might be free the  
second half of August.

CLAUDIA: Okay good. I can plan it for then. Like  
August twenty-something. Would that work?

SONIA: Sure, sure, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: 'Cause I want you to be my maid of honor.  
And we'll all go out as a group. To celebrate. You  
probably should meet everyone first. I can have  
everyone over for dinner.

SONIA: I understand.

*(Pause.)*

SONIA: Your life has no context, Claudia.

CLAUDIA: What do you mean?

SONIA: This room—Like at work, we always refer to something—we ground our stuff in an environment people know and understand. A Provençal summer evening, international hotel chic, the faded romance of the Etruscans.

CLAUDIA: Is that how a design site works? What are Etruscans?

SONIA: They were absorbed by the Romans, they tell me. People need a point of reference. Our site caters to people who have done well. They own a boat, or they have three houses. We know what their world is and we know what defines that world and we service it, in context.

CLAUDIA: How did you learn all that?

SONIA: I didn't. I don't really know the exact style of anything. My boss, she does. She knows everything. She studied it.

CLAUDIA: How did you get this job?

SONIA: My boss likes to have assistants that look like her. I've been told. But she doesn't like them to be a threat.

CLAUDIA: That's crazy, Sonia.

SONIA: Yeah, but that's something else. You need context. This place, this room, this—

CLAUDIA: Is context about money? I need a permanent job. I'd love to do what you do.

SONIA: No you wouldn't. It wouldn't suit you. You need to do something more grounded. More practical. Like a skill. Bus driver. Dental records. You need context.

You need a world to understand, Claudia. This room. This—are you going to live in this room with Johnny after you get married?

CLAUDIA: Yeah.

SONIA: And this is going to be your world? This room?

CLAUDIA: People in Africa have it worse. People in Asia live in boxes. This is going to be great.

SONIA: No it isn't.

CLAUDIA: Sure it is.

SONIA: It's nowhere, Claudia. You live—this is nowhere. And I'm not being a bitch here. Just, you need something more defined. Something real. Even our little place in high school was better than this.

CLAUDIA: Your mother—

SONIA: Yeah. She did the best she could. Gone forever. Claudia—

CLAUDIA: Don't be so sad, Sonia. Come to dinner one night to meet everyone before the wedding. I want you to meet Johnny's mother. We can all sit down with our calendars.

SONIA: I've met his mother.

CLAUDIA: But really meet her. And Brian from my old job. Carlos. It'll be fun.

SONIA: Okay. Sure.

CLAUDIA: Thanks, Sonia.

**END OF SAMPLE**