

HOTDISH

"It's always cloudy in Minnesota"

Written by
Nicky Hawthorne

INT. THEATRE -- MIDDLE OF NOWHERE MINNESOTA -- NIGHT

WANDA POLK (55) walks onto an empty stage. Usually she's got life to her. Pep. A real showman. Right now, she might as well be goin' to a funeral. The clothes don't help. Baggy sweats. Baseball cap. No makeup. She's Lisa Kudrow when TMZ catches her on an already shit day.

Wanda looks out into the audience. No one's there. The theatre's like a bad high school auditorium.

But not to her. To her, this place is everything.

FLASH BACK to that same theatre, but now the stage lights blast, the orchestra wails. Wanda commands center stage. She's makeup'd out and wears a cape. A castle behind her.

WANDA

(sings)

LET ME IN, LET ME IN, LET ME IN.

Her singing's fine. Her acting is dope. The AUDIENCE (small town folks in flannel and blaze orange) watch, captive. The orchestra plays the run up for the big finish --

WANDA (CONT'D)

(sings)

FINE.

POOF. Smoke erupts. Wanda puffs her cape and disappears.

Under the stage, Wanda hits the crash pad. A trap door slams shut above her. The song finishes. Polite applause. For her.

Back to the present.

Wanda blinks out the memory. She sets a tin can onto the stage, digs in her pocket. Her eyes flick back to the stage beneath her. It's actually the orchestra pit. Just right now, it's all closed up.

SFX: Triumphant applause.

FLASH BACK. Same theatre only the orchestra pit's open and full of MUSICIANS. COG ANDERSEN (conductor, 40s) takes in the applause behind her like it's a roaring Broadway crowd. Cog is short, petite. Chin length hair that curls under just a touch. This woman is meticulous.

Wanda, on stage for curtain call. She's in a sailor costume. A big ship behind her. Wanda looks down to Cog in the pit. The two love at each other with their eyes. Bffs. Two peas in a happy Type A peapod.

Back to the present.

On stage, Wanda shifts her stance. Reconsiders. Is she being brash? Maybe there's another way out...

She fidgets with something in her pocket. Pulls it out.

A matchbox.

She flips it over.

Printed on the side is an amateur photo of a half eaten, Tater Tot casserole. A wooden spoon with beef stuck on it rests in the dish. Under the pic, in block letters: *HOTDISH*.

Her eyes tighten. Fury returns. *Like fuck if she'll b had.*

Wanda slides opens the matchbox, lights one up and chucks it into the audience. The flaming match drops in front'a the first row.

She waits. Watches. Nothin'.

Annoyed, she goes to light up another. But then, she smells --

Smoke. A plume of it grows in front'a that first row.

Wanda's brow softens. She watches, without apology, as --

That smoke turns into flames. Flames that zip up the theatre's middle aisle in a very distinct line. The fire heads straight for the open lobby doors just ahead.

Wanda grabs her can o' lighter fluid and skedaddles.

EXT. LAUREL STREET -- BRAINERD, MN -- DAWN

Blegh shops line a middle of nowhere town's main street. The road itself is covered in potholes. Huge ones. *The city doesn't have the money to fix 'em.*

Boom.

The front windows of the building on the left (the one with the theatre marquis) blow out and the whole thing explodes. For a blip, all you see is a fireball. Then the fire mushrooms, morphs into smoke and poops all that nasty into the sky.

Left behind is the theatre building. It's charred to shit but standing. Fire festers at the foundation line.

Flaming debris falls from the sky and hits the street,
decorating all those potholes like some fucked up, Christmas
themed war zone.

No one comes.

No sirens.

No people.

Nada.

Just a gentle breeze and the death of someone's dream.

MAIN TITLES

ACT ONE**EXT. 5TH STREET -- DOWNTOWN SAINT PAUL, MN -- DAY**

Cars cruise through the slush in both directions. Above them, a skyway. The street's flanked by historic high rises. SUPER: 4 months earlier.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
(sings)
*LET ME BE YOUR FREEDOM. LET
DAYLIGHT DRY YOUR --*

PUNCH IN on the banner attached to the building on the right -
SAINT PAUL CONSERVATORY FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS.

INT. BANQUET ROOM -- SAINT PAUL CONSERVATORY (SPC) -- DAY

TWO FEMALE SINGERS (20s) hold mics and face each other. Both are dressed up. One needs a haircut. The other wears pants. Behind them, show curtains. Somewhere, a pianist.

FEMALE SINGER 1
*-- TEARS. I'M HERE WITH YOU, BESIDE
YOU. TO GUARD YOU AND TO GUIDE YOU.*

The singer enunciates. Her partner stays present.

PAN THROUGH THE ROOM. The DRESSED UP/GRAY HAIREED AUDIENCE sit at foofy banquet tables. Everyone wears a badge.

INT. HALLWAY/SPC -- DAY

JULIA (33, Cuban-American) opens the heavyass doors. She's in a high collared button up, black skinny jeans and Everlane Babo shoes. Newly shined. The shoes are sexy and so is she. In that ultra conservative, repressed Minnesotan way.

Sound floods in --

FEMALE SINGER 2 (O.S.)
*SAY YOU LOVE ME EVERY WAKING
MOMENT.*

Julia goes inside. Propped on a T stand next to the door is an overthought, underbudgeted welcome sign -- *NATIONAL COMMUNITY THEATRE CONFERENCE.*

INT. BANQUET ROOM/SPC -- DAY

In the back, Julia scans the room. At the front, the singers keep on. There isn't a stage. Just carpet. Off in the corner, the PIANIST (50s) struggles to see her singers.

FEMALE SINGER 2
*TURN MY HEAD WITH TALK OF
 SOMMA'TIME.*

Julia spots, amidst the gray, a black haired woman --

KACIE SCHLUETER (27, Asian American) sips her coffee. Next to her is her mom, GINNY SCHLUETER (62, Caucasian, Orphan Annie hair).

FEMALE SINGER 2 (CONT'D)
 (loud)
SHARE --

Kacie blinks up from her coffee.

FEMALE SINGER 2 (CONT'D)
*-- EACH DAY WITH ME. EACH NIGHT,
 EACH MORNING.*

Ginny hangs off the singers every note. Julia slides out the chair across --

JULIA
 (whispers)
 Is someone sitting here?

Ginny responds -- *no and shhhh!* Julia sits, careful to not disturb the singers, who up the schmaltz --

FEMALE SINGER 2
SAY YOU LOVE ME.

FEMALE SINGER 1
YOU KNOW I DO.

Ginny, on second thought, looks back to Julia, tries to sneak a glance at her badge. Ginny's own badge has her name, a headshot and -- *BRAINERD COMMUNITY PLAYERS.*

Ginny attempts subtlety. Not her forte. She squints. Sees. Freaks. Pokes her daughter. Julia keeps her eyes trained on the wannabes up front --

SINGERS 1 & 2
LOVE ME. THAT'S ALL I ASK OF YOU.

PRE-LAP: That godawful, wambamy A CHORUS LINE audition song.

INT. DANCE STUDIO/SPC -- DAY

A DOZEN-ISH OLDER WOMEN in dancewear stand in a long line, their backs to us. They all whack their heads in semi unison to the brassy beat. Kacie, on an end, halfasses it.

Ginny fills her water bottle. The dancers flip around in odd chunks. Ginny watches them, considers re-joining. A stressful thought.

INT. HALLWAY/SPC -- DAY

Julia walks at a clip, eyes the opening to the dance studio. With her is a DAPPER LOOKIN' GUY (30s, Black). The two reach the studio. He defers to her. She enters first --

INT. DANCE STUDIO/SPC -- DAY

Ginny sips her water, eyes the dancers who abstract step touch their way downstage. Ginny tries to memorize the move.

JULIA (O.S.)
Well, you're the Chekhov expert.

Julia grabs a cup from the Culligan station. Ginny steps away from it to give her space. Julia's colleague stays close --

DAPPER GUY
Yeah and you're Miss Broadway.

Julia responds, modest. Fills her cup.

DAPPER GUY (CONT'D)
I'll meet'cha over there.

He scoots off. Ginny watches him head for the studio across the hall. Julia downs her water.

GINNY
Weren't we at the same --

JULIA
(over the music)
Sorry?

GINNY
I think we sat at the same --

JULIA
Oh. Ya. Hi. How's it goin'?

GINNY
Good. Good.

Ginny eyes the dancers. So Julia does too.

JULIA
Looks hard.

GINNY
Ya -- .

Julia goes for more water.

GINNY (CONT'D)
Ya. It's hard. For sure.

JULIA
Well, good for you. I wouldn't even
try.

Julia drinks. Ginny tries to see her badge. Julia feels it.
Pretends to not. Nervous, Ginny looks back to the dancers.

GINNY
Did'I hear that you're from --

Julia looks over. Waits. *Makes Ginny say it.*

GINNY (CONT'D)
Well, I heard -- someone said --
that you might be from Broadway.

JULIA
Oh, uh --

Julia checks her badge. Flips it over so that the intel bits
face her. Hidden.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I am. Ya.

GINNY.
Oh my --

JULIA
But if ya don't --

The song ends. The dancers mill. The CHOREAGRAPHER (30s,
female, pudgy) rushes over to the stereo system.

CHOREAGRAPHER
Back to one.

JULIA
-- If ya don't mind, keep that on
the down low.

GINNY
Oh. Ya. Sure. Okie.

JULIA
Although apparently I'm teachin' a
class now later.
(off Ginny)
They had someone cancel, so --

GINNY
You're an actress?

JULIA
Director. How 'bout 'choo?

GINNY
Uh, -- I'm a --

The music restarts. Extra loud.

GINNY (CONT'D)
-- a librarian.

Julia tosses her cup, heads out.

JULIA
Well, good'ta meet'cha.

GINNY
I'm Ginny, by the way.

JULIA
Julia. Roberts. But not that one.

Julia departs. Ginny stands flabbergasted. She gets an idea,
looks for Kacie.

INT. BLACK BOX THEATRE/SPC -- DAY

Julia weaves her way through a room full of WOMEN. The women
all lay on their backs on the floor with their legs in the
air. Like upside down beetles. Julia's the only one standing.

JULIA
Dung beetles survive by --

Julia walks between Ginny and Kacie. Ginny tries to get
Julia's attention. Doesn't get it. Kacie hides her phone.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 -- eatin' the feces of other
 creatures.

A WOMAN IN A FUZZY SWEATER (60s) practices her insect eyes.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 So. Find that poop. Find it. Where
 is it?

The women look at each other. Fuzzy Sweater rights herself,
 scurries around. In search of poop. The others follow suit.
 Ginny works toward all fours. Kacie gets back on her phone.

KACIE
 (whispers)
 Weird. Ya'd think I could find
 somethin'. But Google keeps just
 givin' me stuff on the actress
 Julia Roberts. You sure that's her
 last name?

GINNY
 Ya.

KACIE
 Well, I can't find anything.

JULIA
 Dung beetles --

The class pauses, looks to Julia.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 They got an incredible sense'a
 smell.

Julia leaves it at that. The women take a beat. Then sniff.
 Themselves. Each other. Fuzzy Sweater Woman smells Ginny.

FUZZY SWEATER
 She teaches this exact same class
 at Tisch.

GINNY
 Oh. Tish. That in the cities?

FUZZY SWEATER
 It's in New York.

Fuzzy decides that Ginny's stank is not for her, sniffs
 elsewhere. Ginny don't care. She looks to Kacie all -- !!!

INT. SAME THEATRE -- 30 MINUTES LATER

TWO STARSTRUCK ATTENDEES depart from Julia. Ginny scoots in. Kacie hangs back. Julia pulls her coat off a chair.

GINNY
Wanted'ta tell ya, I loved your
class.

JULIA
Oh. Thought that was you.

Julia notes Kacie.

JULIA (CONT'D)
All that really can help in
roundin' out a performance. Just
gotta use a hint of it.

GINNY
Ya. This is my daughter. Kacie.

Kacie steps in. Julia nods politely, dons her coat.

GINNY (CONT'D)
Say, I was wonderin' if I could
pick your brain on somethin'?

JULIA
Um, --

Julia looks. Ginny reeks of desperation. Julia eyes the exit.

GINNY
Could walk with ya, if that's --

JULIA
Ya. Okay. That'd be good.

Julia grabs her bag, heads them for --

INT. LOBBY/SPC -- NIGHT

VOLUNTEERS hang sparkly balls from the ceiling. Others pour cheap champagne into plastic flutes. Ginny and Julia walk 'n talk. Kacie gets distracted by the bubbly.

GINNY
Started it, gosh, 5 year ago now, I
s'ppose. 'Ta raise money. 'Ta save
the library. And my job. But the
fundraisin' part hasn't been goin'
too well.

(MORE)

GINNY (CONT'D)

We do about four performances a year so we've only been nettin' -- geez. After everything, -- a few hundred bucks.

JULIA

Well, ya could start by addin' more performances.

GINNY

Ya. Just hard. Given everybody's volunteerin'.

JULIA

Right. How much is it that'cha gotta raise?

GINNY

Well, -- the city's in a real pickle.

Julia waits.

GINNY (CONT'D)

-- I think it's about -- 400 thousand.

Julia pauses her gait.

JULIA

Oh.

GINNY

Ya. I know.

Ginny deflates. Kacie ditches an empty flute, rejoins.

JULIA

Are you involved too then in your mom's --

GINNY

Ya. Kacie's the director.

KACIE

Mom.

(to Julia)

I'm the *assistant* director.

GINNY

I guess my sister-in-law's more the director-director. She stars in it too. And funds it. Thank gol.

(MORE)

GINNY (CONT'D)

But Kacie does a lot though. Wants
to do even more too, dont'cha?

Kacie ruffles. It's true but she doesn't want it public.

KACIE

(to Julia)

Do you think it's possible for a
local show'ta -- she tell ya how
much needs?

(off Julia)

And by the end'a the year.
Otherwise they're gonna shut the
library down.

(treads lightly)

Ya think it's realistic 'ta make --
a half million dollars off --

Ginny reddens. Both rage and tears form. Kacie sees. *Shit.*

JULIA

Anything's possible. It is,
otherwise I wouldn't be doin' what
I'm doin'. But the odds are, --
well, they're tough.

Ginny looks to Kacie like it's all her fault. Grasping at
straws --

GINNY

How 'bout a new musical? Had that
idea the other day.

Julia thinks. Ginny takes it as encouragement.

GINNY (CONT'D)

One about our town. Brainerd.
People from 'round the state might
come 'ta see that. Yano, that
CHURCH BASEMENT LADYS, they -- that
musical they did down in
Burnsville. That was local, I
think. And they play that all over
now.

JULIA

I love it. I do. But you'd lose
your fundin'. People don't like
puttin' money int'a new ideas. Just
ones they've heard of a bunch.
Feels safer. It's not but they
think it is.

GINNY
Fundin'. Ya mean 'ta make the
musical?

JULIA
Ya.

GINNY
No, my sister-in-law'd still fund
it.

Ginny double confirms with Kacie.

GINNY (CONT'D)
Ya. Long as she stars in it.

Taken aback, Julia thinks. Ginny gets hopeful, fast.

JULIA
I been tryin'ta get a new musical
off the ground for years in New
York. Money's always the hang up.

GINNY
No. Ya. No. Money's not a problem.

Julia considers. Then rifles through her bag.

JULIA
Then, keep me in the loop. If
what'chur sayin's true, might be
worth us havin' a conversation.

She hands Ginny her business card. Ginny tries to control her
extreme elation. Julia shares a look with Kacie, departs.

EXT. 5TH STREET -- SAINT PAUL, MN -- NIGHT

Through SPC's windows, we see Kacie reference the business
card, then type something into her phone (Julia's website).
Kacie -- *holy shit*. Kacie and Ginny have a moment -- !!!!!

Julia heads down the street. She turns onto --

EXT. SIDE STREET -- NIGHT

-- a side street, where Fuzzy Sweater Woman (from the beetle
acting class) gets up in her face.

JULIA
Woah. Hey. Back the fuck up.

FUZZY SWEATER

Not 'til -- where's my money?

Julia eyes her, then digs in her bag. And digs. And digs.

FUZZY SWEATER (CONT'D)

You better fuckin' have it.

JULIA

I do. It's just -- I re-organized.

Julia rummages on. And on. Idea. She pulls out a watch bag.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Could pay ya with this instead.

She shows Fuzzy the pouch. Says *HERMÈS* on it.

JULIA (CONT'D)

You'd be getting way more, but -- .
It's a stupid expensive watch. It's
worth like 3 grand.

FUZZY SWEATER

Then why don't you want it?

JULIA

I don't do pink.

Fuzzy does. See her sweater. Julia notes the car parked across the street. In the passenger seat, Dapper Guy (Julia's colleague from earlier) watches them.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Even splitting the profits, it's a
way better deal for you guys. I
don't really wanna deal with any
more Craigslist.

Fuzzy blows by the dig, takes the bag, heads for the car.

Julia -- *boombambaby*.

Fuzzy stops, opens the bag.

Julia -- *shit*. She hurries it to her car parked nearby. A 2007, red mustang. There was a time this car was cool. That time isn't now. Especially not with all those scratches.

Fuzzy looks into the watch bag. Inside is, a beautiful, glistening --

Rock.

Fuzzy -- *the fuck?! Dapper Guy* sees her face.

The trumpets of Demi Lovato's song *CONFIDENT* boom in.

Fuzzy looks for Julia but it's too late. Julia's in her 'stang. She flips a U and flies by two hella pissed marks.

Peace out suckas.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO**EXT. LAUREL STREET -- BRAINERD, MN -- DAY**

A Ford Contour clunks over a pothole as it cruises past a brick building. Etched into the stone above the building's front doors -- *BRAINERD CITY HALL*.

Pan right. This is the same main street from the teaser. Only right now, that theatre isn't burnt.

Back on city hall. Off that --

INT. WANDA'S OFFICE -- CITY HALL -- DAY

Wanda, at her desk, finishing up a call. Multitasking, she punches numbers in her heavy duty calculator and writes out a check. The placard on her door says *FINANCE DIRECTOR*.

WANDA
(in the phone)
Ya and put it all in the RSCDA
account. Okie doke. Bye now.

She hangs up, rips out the check. Cog enters. (The conductor from the opening. And Wanda's bff. Also, the city's accounts payable admin.)

COG
Wanda, sure hate'ta bother ya today
of all days, but --

WANDA
Ya, -- Tryin'ta scoot here.

Wanda shuts her laptop, stands.

COG
I just -- don't know how'ta respond
to this letter we got.

Cog holds a piece of paper. Wanda slides her computer and that check into her briefcase-y bag. Nice bag. Not too nice.

WANDA
Who's it from?

COG
City manager over in Alexandria.

WANDA
Ya? What's he want?

Cog tightens. Wanda notices. She puts on her coat.

COG

Uh -- well, he thinks it's kinda weird we got such a deficit here in our budget. Cuz apparently over there, they're runnin' at a pretty big surplus. Have been for years now. Yano, with their budget.

WANDA

Well, la dee da for them.

COG

Ya. He makes a point though. Cuz yano, we're about the same size city as them, with the population and that. Get about the same budget every year and. But we keep gettin' more and more in the red. And they're -- well in the black.

WANDA

Maybe folks are nicer over there. Don't demand as much'a the city. Maybe we should think about movin'?

Wanda shoulders her bag, walks over. Cog hands her the letter. Wanda skims it.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Maybe there's somethin' we can learn here. Okay.

Wanda slides the letter into a side pocket of her bag.

COG

Oh, I can respond. I just didn't know exactly how'ta put it.

WANDA

I don't mind. Just take me a minute'ta get'ta it. It's probably a political move or somethin'.

COG

Yeah, --

Wanda zips up her bag. Cog follows her out.

INT. HALLWAY/CITY HALL -- DAY

Wanda shuts her door behind them.

COG
-- you got a lot on your plate
right now though.

WANDA
And you don't? How is Todd? Any
update?

Cog caresses her wedding ring.

COG
No, no. Just more tests.

WANDA
Still no idea what's causin' the
seizures?

COG
Nope.

Wanda walks them down the hall.

COG (CONT'D)
Did put 'em back on those meds
though.

WANDA
Geez.

COG
Ya. It's like bein' married to a a
zombie.

BJORN OLSEN (60s) comes outta the break room with a fresh
coffee. A bland guy. Short. Well dressed though. For here. He
treats his coffee like the precious gem it is.

COG (CONT'D)
But it's that or let the next one
eat away at what he's got left up
top, so --.

They reach Bjorn.

BJORN
(to Wanda)
Say. Heard who ya got comin' today.

WANDA
Ya. Ya. Pretty neat, huh?

Bjorn lets the ladies go first down the hall.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Maybe can get'cha on stage this
year.

BJORN
(sing-song)
Oh, I don't know.

That's Bjorn for no. He veers into his corner office. The
door says *MAYOR*.

WANDA
Well, we'll always take those flute
skills'a yours.

BJORN
That I can do. Missus dudn't take
too well 'ta to the practicin'.

WANDA
Okay then.

Wanda and Cog keep on down the hall. After a beat --

WANDA (CONT'D)
Seriously though Cog, if there's
anythin' ya need, -- How's your
treasurer's report comin'? Can I
finish that up for ya?

COG
No. Ya can't. It's mine.

Cog loves her work. Wanda knows it. They stop at Cog's
cubicle. It's small, shitty. But homey. And organized.

WANDA
You were there for me. When Ron
died. Not sayin' that --

COG
I know. It's fine. Go on. You got --
call me afterwards.

Wanda gets butterflies. She pushes them down. Keeps on down
the hall. Cog sits at her desk. Wanda puts a hand on her
briefcase-y bag. On that side pocket where the letter is.

WANDA
'Member'ta *call* up any'a the
statements ya need.

COG
Get outta here.

Cog is firm but playful. Wanda leaves, closes up that side pocket. Crisis averted.

SFX: A LOUD, BLARING SMOKE ALARM.

INT. WANDA'S BREAD -- DAY

Wanda wades through the back of her bakery. The whole place is full of smoke. Can just make out main street through the windows up front.

WANDA
(over the alarm)
Mark! Mark, are ya --

She coughs. Accidentally runs into the work table in the middle'a the room. Some shit goes flying off of it.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Mark?!

Wanda checks back up front. Ya. Parked right there is Mark's green pickup. She looks, finds, on a shelf -- a fire extinguisher. Grabs it. Someone coughs in the back.

MARK POLK (30s) keels over the commercial sized oven as he hacks up a lung. Wanda rushes over, fire extinguisher in tow.

WANDA (CONT'D)
You okay?! Should I call the --

MARK
No, Mom. Just go open the --

He coughs, points to the back door. She goes, opens it. Fresh air whooshes in. She hurries back to Mark.

WANDA
What in heck happened? Was there a
fire?!

She helps him to the door. He breathes in the clean air.

MARK
No. I --

He coughs, eyes a side table. She follows his gaze. On the table, next to the oven: a burnt loaf of artisanal bread. Wanda's eyes narrow.

MARK (CONT'D)
I was -- tryin' somethin'.

WANDA
'Ju did this on purpose?

MARK
No.

Evading mom, he ducks back inside, goes for the far window.

WANDA
20 years I never once had the smoke
alarm go off. So howd'ju manage it
in week two?

Mark cranks his window open. Wanda gets one near her.

MARK
Forgot a loaf in the way back.

WANDA
That's why ya write it down.

Mark breathes. He hates being told what to do. The smoke
alarm blares on. He grabs a stool.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Maybe we should talk about hirin'
someone --

MARK
No. I, --

Mark climbs up on the stool, smacks the off button on the
alarm. The thing keeps on. Brutally loud.

WANDA
Ya gotta store full'a bread that
now smells like barbecue. So,
unless ya can sell that 'ta folks --

MARK
I'm sorry, okay.

Mark rips the alarm from its socket. Works to take the
batteries out. No easy fight. In the battle, he drops it. The
batteries poop out. The alarm stops.

MARK (CONT'D)
It won't happen again.

Wanda knows he means that. Whether it's true or not is a
whole other shabang.

MARK (CONT'D)
It won't. I --

WANDA
Don't imagine my order came out
unscathed.

She picks up the *WANDA'S BREAD* to-go bags that fell when she ran into the table. The logo on the bags is a picture of her. All smiley. Whitened teeth.

Mark looks at her. He forgot the to-go order she called in last night. She sees. Blinks to keep from strangling him.

EXT. CORNFIELDS -- DAY

MUSIC: *SHE'S KEROSENE* by The Interrupters.

A BMW coupe zips down a country road flanked by cornfields.

INT. JULIA'S RENTAL -- DAY

Julia drives, rocks out to the song. Checks her GPS. Gettin' close. She throws a high necked sweater on over her booby tank.

Up ahead, an odd clump of evergreens butt up against the cornfield. The trees hide --

EXT. MANSION -- DAY

-- a mansion. A fucking huge one. Especially for middle'a nowhere.

Julia eyes it as she pulls up the circle drive. It's way bigger than she thought it'd be. She looks. Just beyond it, is a second one. A second fucking mansion. Nearly identical.

JULIA
The fuck.

An excited Ginny comes outta the main one. Julia parks.

INT. ATRIUM -- MANSION -- DAY

A PLUMP PERSONAL STAFFER departs with Julia's light jacket. Julia follows Ginny deeper into the house.

GINNY
Oh. Careful there.

Julia looks. On the floor are a pile of lemons.

GINNY (CONT'D)

It's art.

Ginny takes them into --

THE LIVING ROOM --

Open layout. High end shit everywhere. And a fuckton of art. All modern. Abstract. Bright colors. Happy. But weird. Like the human-sized Buddha. He's smiling and hides behind a wall.

GINNY (CONT'D)

So you remember Kacie --

Julia looks from Buddha to --

IN THE KITCHEN --

Kacie, who stands up from an uncomfortable looking stool.

JULIA

Ya. How's it goin'?

Kacie nods all awkward/cool. Ginny looks around.

GINNY

Wait. Where did --

IN THE HALLWAY --

A woman in a Gucci robe (with sparkles and planets on it) does a shake out. That theatre exercise meant to get your energy up. Basically, she shakes her hands and feet a bunch.

IN THE KITCHEN --

Julia declines a cocktail from ANOTHER STAFFER.

GINNY (CONT'D)

Gol, she was just here a minu-

Wanda enters. In that robe. Only she could pull it off. She looks fucking great. Gaudy. But in theatre that works.

WANDA

Hi-hi-hi.

GINNY

Oh.

(to Julia)

This is Wanda. Like I's tellin' ya about.

JULIA
Hi. I'm Julia. Good to meet'choo.

WANDA
Wanda. Same.

They shake hands. Wanda lays on the charm.

JULIA
Thank you for having me. Your home
is beautiful.

WANDA
Oh. Ya. Doin' okay.

JULIA
I'd say more than okay.

WANDA
Ya. Ya. Don't know how all this
happened.

Neither do Kacie or Ginny. Although they have theories.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Grateful though. Ya.

JULIA
Well, your bread is amazing.
There's one up by my dad. That
cinnamon raison ya got -- oh.

WANDA
Shoot. Had planned'ta have that
here for ya. Lunch. But, -- just
let my son take over the local shop
and we're workin' out some kinks.

Ginny and Kacie share a look. Mark fuck shit up? SHOCKING.

JULIA
Oh, that's actually better. I'm
supposed'ta take my dad out 'ta
lunch later and I'd spoil my
appetite. Prolly gotta get goin'
here in about an hour.

WANDA
Oh. Geez. Better get to it then.

Wanda eyes Ginny.

GINNY

Ya. Okay. If ya wanna follow me
then.

Ginny heads the gang deeper into the house. Kacie pops off to the kitchen, snags a refill on her cocktail. Wanda slides in next to Julia.

WANDA

Kacie showed me your website.

JULIA

Oh. Ya. Ha.

Julia plays bashful, looks to Kacie in the kitchen, but then pivots the moment to do a quick scan of the place. *Jackpot.*

INT. WANDA'S SECOND MANSION -- DAY

Ginny and Kacie trickle past Julia, who stands in awe. Wanda slides on the pro lighting. The whole mansion's just a single room. Stupid high ceilings. Wood floors. Mirrored walls. A ballet bar.

WANDA

It's our rehearsal space. Ya.

JULIA

Geez.

WANDA

Had it modeled it after a New York studio. For Broadway. Maybe you know the place.

JULIA

Which one?

WANDA

-- Gosh, I'd have'ta check.

Ginny goes over to the fucking gorgeous grand piano. Julia looks. It's a *STEINWAY*. That thing's worth 100 grand.

WANDA (CONT'D)

(to Julia)

Um. But if ya wanna have a seat --

Wanda gestures to the lone chair at the front'a the room. It's beautiful. Vintage. Mustard yellow. Velvet.

WANDA (CONT'D)

We got somethin'ta show ya.

Julia obliges, sits. Wanda rolls a chair to the middle of the room. This one's more functional. So the focus stays on her. Kacie preps the lighting board.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Ginny and I got 'ta talkin' after
you two met. Which wasn't hard.
She's more like a sister'ta me.
Well, technically, she is still, I
think, right?

Ginny stands up from behind the piano.

GINNY
Ya. Ya. 'Course.

WANDA
(to Julia)
My late husband was Ginny's
brother. Rick.

JULIA
Ahh.

WANDA
So. Anyway, we started
brainstormin' 'bout that new
musical idea. See how that might
shake out here in Brainerd. And,
well, we got pretty inspired.

Wanda glances at Ginny. So excited. They both are. Wanda handles it better.

WANDA (CONT'D)
We actually wrote a song and we'd
like'ta show it to ya.

That Kacie's cue. She switches the lights. They dim. Ginny quick sits, looks to Wanda, who sits in her chair, prepares her pose.

JULIA
Sorry.

Julia stands. Kacie sees. Doesn't know what to do. Wanda looks up from her concentration.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Could I -- This is awesome. ---
Could I use the bathroom first?

Julia apologizes. Deep down she's thinking -- *fuuuuck this.*

INT. BATHROOM -- WANDA'S MANSION -- DAY

Julia stands just inside, ready to shut the door. Kacie walks toward the kitchen.

KACIE

Yeah. Somethin' about the New York studio didn't have a bathroom. I don't know.

JULIA

Oh. Okay.

Julia shuts the door. Kacie keeps on, gets a drink refill.

Finally alone, Julia looks around. The bathroom's a lot. Every nook has some sort of cutesy/artsy shit in it. Like the little footprints that lead from the door to the toilet.

Julia waits by the door. Listens.

Sounds in the kitchen. Then --

Footsteps pass by the door. They head toward the studio.

Julia stays put. Listens. Hears the subtle sound of the slider door opening -- and then closing.

She gives it one more beat, then --

INT. WANDA'S KITCHEN -- DAY

-- pops outta the bathroom. She quick looks to the studio.

THROUGH THE GLASS SLIDER DOOR --

Kacie, drink in hand, walks the stone pathway back to the studio.

Julia scans for staffers. All clear, she snatches Wanda's glitter cased cell phone off its charger and --

-- books it down the stairs next to that Buddha statue.

INT. WANDA'S BASEMENT -- DAY

Julia rounds the corner at the bottom of the stairs and we see the basement at large --

A fucking hoarder level situation of musical theatre shit.

Props. Sets. Costumes. It does not end. And there's like 12 of everything. Need some Marie Kondo up in hur.

Julia breezes past all of it, heads for the back. Scans as she goes, but knows what she's looking for --

Leaned against the middle wall: an Old West-style door. Julia sees it, beelines for it. She turns the handle of the door. It opens *to the inside*. It's a functioning door. Julia goes into --

INT. WANDA'S SECRET ROOM -- DAY

-- the secret fucking room. It's ugly. Dank. Cement floors. No windows. Just a desktop computer and a filing cabinet. It's the only room in either house that isn't decorated to kingdom come. This room is straight up sad. Like the person who made it knows what they're doing is wrong.

Julia sees the computer -- *Got'cha bitch.*

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE**EXT. FLYING P -- DAY (FLASHBACK)**

The Minnesota we know: snow. In the periph -- a truck stop. Right off a highway exit.

INT. LOUNGE/FLYING P -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

A TRUCKER WITH A MUSTACHE re-reads a glossy pamphlet. He and a FEW OTHER TRUCKERS sit in stadium style seats. Fucking weird given the rest'a the lounge is a dump. The TRUCKER WITH A BELLY pulls out his checkbook. Mustache notices. Considers.

IN THE STORE AREA --

SHERRIE (36) comes in from the cold. A vagrant instability to her. And an oomf. She's Ronda Rousey but no charm. This bitch'd cut'choo in an instant. Sherrie goes over to the REGISTER CLERK.

IN THE LOUNGE --

POV of an unknown person. Unknown stuffs pamphlets into an Everlane bag. The bag and the hands tell us this is a woman. Unknown sees Mustache get up, head for her. But something beyond him catches her eye --

IN THE STORE AREA --

Sherrie hassles the clerk.

REGISTER CLERK

Never heard'a anyone by that name.

Sherrie stiffens.

IN THE LOUNGE --

POV. Unknown. Sees Sherrie. Breath tightens.

QUICK FLASH BACK to Sherrie in prison beating the shit out of a fellow FEMALE INMATE. Unknown watches from her cell as her cellmate Sherrie pummels a chick who needs no more pummeling.

Back to the present.

In the truck stop lounge, Unknown books it for the store area up front. Mustache just misses her.

IN THE STORE AREA --

Sherrie stands in front of the obstinate clerk.

FEMALE CLERK

Don't know what 'ta tell ya. But I
think it'd be best if ya leave.

Done with this bitch, Sherrie reaches in the back of her
waistband where she's stuffed -- a knife. Oop. Nope. A shank.

Unknown sees. Double times it. Unknown wears a little, beige
pencil skirt and a tight fitting sweater.

Sherrie sees Unknown. She knows her. And so do we.

It's Julia. Lookin' sex'd out. Lotta makeup 'n hair.

JULIA

Hey! Oh my god, hi.

Julia puts her hand over Sherrie's, the one with the shank.

FEMALE CLERK

Tracy, you know her?

Sherrie -- Tracy?

JULIA

Ya. Ya, we go way back. Don't we?

Sherrie tightens her jaw.

FEMALE CLERK

Oh. Well, that case -- she's
lookin' for'a Melissa Alvarez.

Julia blinks that out. Wtf Sherrie. Usin' her real name?!

FEMALE CLERK (CONT'D)

But, --

JULIA

Ya. Huh. Dunno.
(to Sherrie)
'Ju park out front?

Julia eyes Sherrie like -- *do not make a scene*. Sherrie makes
no promises.

EXT. FLYING P -- DAY (FLASHBACK)

Julia and Sherrie stand out front'a the truck stop, just
'round the corner. Out of eyeline of that clerk. Julia bops a
little to keep warm.

JULIA
Good'ta see ya. It is. But'cha
can't be usin' my real name.

Julia blows into cupped hands. Sherrie stands unapologetic.
If anything, more aggravated. Julia notices. Lets it go.

JULIA (CONT'D)
When'ja get out?

Nothin'.

Well, not nothin'. Sherrie's a steel trap ready to snap.

JULIA (CONT'D)
We should catch up. But, uh -- I
got some shit goin' in there, so --

Julia scurries back toward the truck stop.

JULIA (CONT'D)
How 'bout I finish up, then we grab
beers. On me.

SHERRIE
I called 'ja.

Julia stops.

JULIA
Ah shit. I changed my number.

So convincing. Still, Sherrie's not buying it. Rightfully so.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I got a Wall Street area code.
Helps with the sell in there. Uh, --
there's a bar. Just one exit down.
Meet'cha. K? Like -- half hour.

Sherrie stays put. Where she can see Julia and her 'stang.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Or you can wait there. Up to you.

Sherrie chooses here. Julia -- *god damn it.*

EXT. TWISTED SISTERS -- NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

An ice fishing house stranded in the tundra. It's a bar, but
looks more like the former. Save the parking lot. The 'stang
and one other beater in it.

INT. TWISTED SISTERS -- NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Julia and Sherrie sit at the bar. The place is a shack. The few knickknacks make the space look even more bare. The OWNER (30s) drops a second round in front of our two's unfinished first. Julia nods a thanks at him. They're fucking.

JULIA
 (to Sherrie)
 So ya, got my Ponzi shit goin' back
 there and then Joe here hooks me
 up, -- so -- things are --

The owner Joe goes back to watching football. On a tiny TV. He would be cute. If he trimmed the beard. And the pony.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 -- okay. 'S new with you?

Sherrie sips her beer. She's like a living storm cloud. Lightening bolts and all.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 Bet it feels good to be out. What's
 the plan? Ya goin' home?

SHERRIE
 Got an idea.

JULIA
 Cool.

Julia feigns interest, downs her beer. Starts on the second. Let's hurry this shit along. She looks to Joe. No more beers. He's too busy with the game.

SHERRIE
 Need'jur help.

JULIA
 Oh.

SHERRIE
 There's money in it.

Knowing Sherrie, not much.

SHERRIE (CONT'D)
 I'd do it myself. Just'ta --

Drive the knife in.

SHERRIE (CONT'D)
 -- but won't work.

JULIA
Sounds complicated. What's the --

SHERRIE
Gonna fuck my mom.

QUICK CUT to Wanda in her studio. She's in her rolly chair, practicing head tilts. The move is Fosse meets -- Wanda.

Back at the bar.

JULIA
Kinda Oedipus-ish. Sorta.

SHERRIE
Money. She's got it. Gonna take it.

JULIA
Can't she just give it 'ta you.

SHERRIE
Said she can't be associated any more.

Sherrie holds her beer, 'bout ready to break it.

JULIA
I thought'choo two were --

SHERRIE
We were. We're not. She's a cunt.

JULIA
Well, fuck her then.

Partner secured, Sherrie relaxes.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Only thing is I don't do family shit. Doesn't ever work out for the non family one.

SHERRIE
She's got a lotta money.

Well, that's news to Julia. 3 years in a cell together. You'd think that'd come up. Maybe it's a bluff...

JULIA
Thanks for thinkin'a me but I got shit goin' and --

SHERRIE
Your cut'd be 350.

JULIA
Ya, see I can make that in like --

SHERRIE
350 thousand.

Julia drops in.

JULIA
You wanna run a 700 thousand dollar
job against your mom?

Sherrie affirms. Julia thinks it through.

JULIA (CONT'D)
You don't wanna do that.

SHERRIE
The money -- it's not even hers.

END ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**INT. WANDA'S SECRET ROOM -- DAY**

Back to the present. Julia at the secret computer. Wanda's glitter cased cell phone at the ready. Hella focused, Julia clicks around.

ON SCREEN --

PIIONEER BANK's website loads. In the top right, the username and password autofill.

Julia -- *this is too easy.*

She clicks the big, green *SIGN IN* button. The new page loads.

Julia checks over her shoulder. Listens. Nope. It's just her and all that musical theatre shit.

The page loaded. She perks up, scans. Her face falls. She scrolls down. Scrolls up.

ON SCREEN --

Four bank accounts. All with zero dollars in them.

Julia -- *mother fucker.*

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- DAY

Wanda spins in her chair. Ginny ha-cha-cha's on the piano. Kacie fights suicide. She's seen this way too many times.

WANDA

(sings)

-- AND THEN HE SAYS TO ME,
'WHAT'CHA WANT THAT FOR? WHAT'CHA
NEED THOSE FOR? WHY CAN'T YOU BE
HAPPY WITH JUST ME?!'

Ginny does a wambam bit on the piano. Gets really into it.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Hey. No. Ya gotta save it.

Ginny pulls way back. Wanda stands, walks behind her chair. She doesn't go full out either --

WANDA (CONT'D)

(sings)

*BUT LISTEN, I SAY TO HIM, 'IT'S MY
CHOICE. BACK OFF, LET ME USE MY
VOICE. IF I WANT A MILLION THINGS,
LET ME OR FUCK YOU.'*

Wanda slides all Fred Astaire away from her chair. Kacie admires the blocking. It's hers. Wanda stops.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Let's do it again. I didn't --

Kacie -- *omg kill me.*

KACIE

Gonna go check on Julia.

Kacie grabs her empty drink, heads off. Ginny and Wanda share a look. The lack of sleep and intense pressure they've put on themselves shows.

INT. SHERRIE'S SHITTY MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Sherrie sits on the bed, cell to her ear. McDonalds remnants abound. McFlurry included. Intercut --

INT. WANDA'S SECRET ROOM -- DAY

Julia, on her cell, paces in front of the secret computer.

JULIA

There's no money. None. Who keeps
zero dollars in multiple bank
accounts?!

Sherrie's brow furrows. This doesn't add up.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Is there somewhere she would've
moved it to, or --

Julia looks. Just outside the room, there's that ship set piece from the opening. An elaborate paint job on it.

JULIA (CONT'D)

-- or maybe she spent it?

SHERRIE

No.

JULIA
Well, she's in'ta buyin' shit.

Sherrie thinks.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Whatever. It's not here, so --

Julia -- *fuck*. What was she thinking linking up with a nutter?! This is what she gets. Pissed, Julia tries to open the filing cabinet. It comes right open. Of course.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Is there somewhere else you think
it could be?

She looks in the cabinet. The files are all stupid organized. Color coded. By month and year.

SHERRIE
Her work computer.

Julia pulls out one of the files. Inside it is a big stack of deposit slips.

JULIA
Ya? Okay. Where does she keep that?

Julia flips through the slips. They're all endorsed by Wanda. She looks at one. It's a deposit for 423K. *Dang*.

Julia checks the next slip -- 667K.

The next -- 702K.

408K.

503K.

984K.

Jesus. Julia takes out another file.

SHERRIE
If it's at home, --

This file has neatly stapled papers in it. The top page says *ACCOUNT SUMMARY*. Julia looks -- *FIRST NATIONAL BANK*. A different bank.

SHERRIE (CONT'D)
-- it'd be in the office. Top
floor.

Julia hears something upstairs.

JULIA
Shit. I gotta go.

SHERRIE
Third room on the --

Julia hangs up, quick scans the ACCOUNT SUMMARY doc --

-- C/O WANDA ANN POLK --

Further down -- RESERVE SEWER CAPITAL DEVO ACCOUNT --

Then Julia sees it -- AVAILABLE BALANCE.

She eyes the corresponding number --

\$42,763,441.05

Holy mother of all the shits.

END ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE**INT. KITCHEN/WANDA'S MANSION -- DAY**

Kacie stands just outside the bathroom door, works to wrangle the nerve to knock. Opts instead for --

KACIE
Uh -- Julia?

She calls out like Julia could be anywhere.

JULIA (O.S.)
Yeah-yeah.

Julia pokes her head out from the kitchen.

KACIE
Oh.

JULIA
Ya ready?

Julia grabs her refreshed drink from the counter. Behind her, the glitter cased cell phone sits back on its charger.

JULIA (CONT'D)
'Ju need another one?

Julia dances her drink around.

KACIE
Uh -- I'm okay.

JULIA
I shouldn't either. And yet I am.

Julia bops off for the studio. Kacie follows. Stops. Looks back to the bathroom door. It's closed. *Shouldn't it be open?*

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- DAY

Lights dimmed, Wanda sits in her rolly chair. She wears a Fedora. Ginny, at the piano, smacks the opening chord. Wanda does her head tilt --

WANDA
(sings)
BUT THEN HE SAYS TO ME, 'WHAT'CHA
WANT THAT FOR?

She discards her hat --

WANDA (CONT'D)
WHAT'CHA NEED THOSE FOR?

-- her earrings --

WANDA (CONT'D)
*WHY CAN'T YOU BE HAPPY WITH JUST
 ME?!*

She spins in her chair, then walks behind it. Full out. Kacie works the lights like a dj. Julia watches all Simon Cowell.

WANDA (CONT'D)
BUT LISTEN I SAY TO HIM, --

She talks to the chair.

WANDA (CONT'D)
*'IT'S MY CHOICE. BACK OFF, LET ME
 USE MY VOICE. --*

Wanda caresses the back of the chair --

WANDA (CONT'D)
*IF I WANT A MILLION THINGS, LET ME
 OR FUCK YOU.'*

She sends the chair flying as she Fred Astaire-s away.

WANDA (CONT'D)
*PERMISSION IS THE PROBLEM HERE. I
 ASK WHEN I DON'T NEED IT. STILL A
 LITTLE CHILD IN THE EYES OF MY
 FATHER.*

Wanda breathes, scared. Because the character is. Wanda's in her fuckin' element.

WANDA (CONT'D)
*PERMISSION IS THE THING TO BE BEAT.
 TO LISTEN TO MY OWN HEARTBEAT. TELL
 ANYONE WHO SAYS OTHERWISE --*

Boom. Silence. Wanda commands the stage like a boss.

WANDA (CONT'D)
TO SUCK ON MY CLIT.

She saunters at Julia.

WANDA (CONT'D)
YEAH, SUCK ON MY CLIT.

She gets down on all fours and crawls toward Julia. Half sex, half craze. This is Wanda's one shot at Broadway in Brainerd.

WANDA (CONT'D)
YOU CAN SUCK -- ON -- MY --

Ginny throws down for the big finish. She's Elton John if he was a 60 year old librarian. Wanda on her knees before Julia:

WANDA (CONT'D)
-- CLIT.

Wanda holds it. Milks it. Thrives in it. Ginny goes fuckin' apeshit on the keys. They both hold it for one more beat. Each feeds off the other's energy. Even Kacie's impressed.

And release. Wanda plops onto her butt. Ginny stands. Wanda sees, stands too. Julia remains -- *unreadable*.

JULIA
(beat, then)
You two wrote that?

WANDA
I did the words and Ginny did the tunes.

Ginny affirms, eager/spent. Julia stays pensive.

JULIA
Who's the song about?

WANDA
I guess it's about my husband, if I'm bein' honest.

Julia processes.

WANDA (CONT'D)
We were havin' problems right before he -- before he died.

Wanda gets overcome with emotion. Tears flow against her will. This is a woman who rarely cries.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Uh -- Oh -- Huh. -- Uh --

Ginny hurries over. Kacie takes a few steps in.

WANDA (CONT'D)
I don't know -- I never -- Well, geez.

Overwhelmed, Wanda fights the tears. It's a mix. Both being ultra amped right now but also never having grieved the loss of her husband. Until now apparently.

JULIA
It's okay.

WANDA
Um, --

KACIE
(to Ginny)
Do you have a tissue?

GINNY
In the house.

WANDA
I'm okay. Thanks. Uh, --

Wanda pushes down her emotions. Something she's very good at. Or usually she is --

WANDA (CONT'D)
Ya. So. Anyway.

And the woman who runs a small bread empire and some sheisty fuckin' shit on the side -- *is back.*

WANDA (CONT'D)
What'ja think?

Beat.

JULIA
I loved it.

WANDA
Ya did?

JULIA
Ya.
(to Ginny & Kacie)
Do ya guys have more? Songs?

WANDA
Yup.

Ginny -- !? (They don't have more.)

JULIA
Are they all that personal?

WANDA
Yup. You bet'cha.

Ginny tries to bluff with Wanda. She's shit at it. Julia sees.

JULIA
Well, this is somethin'. Ya. A
musical about your town. Brainerd.
The stories of the people in it.
That's a show.

Julia thinks. Milks the moment. She too is a performer.

JULIA (CONT'D)
I'm in. If you'll have me. To
direct, that is.

GINNY
Oh my --

The color leaves Ginny's face. Even Kacie excites. Maybe that bathroom door just blew back closed...

WANDA
'Course. You kiddin?!

GINNY
Oh my gosh.

Wanda and Ginny grab hands. Ginny forces Kacie in. Julia scoots in too. They happily include her.

JULIA
Just gonna need'a place'ta stay.

Wanda laughs, gestures all -- *mi casa es su casa*. Julia -- *perfect*. Off the celebration.

EXT. WANDA'S MANSION -- NIGHT

Cars line the drive. Lotta Fords and Chevys. Freshly washed. The mansion and the rehearsal studio are both lit up.

INT. LIVING ROOM/WANDA'S MANSION -- NIGHT

A party underway. The whole town's here. EVERYONE's dressed up, so -- flannel, loafers, button ups, all from Kohl's. Folks drink wine and try not to spill anything.

Wanda directs CATERERS carrying Tater Tot casserole and Snickers 'salad' toward the studio. Cog approaches. There's a weight to her. Wanda doesn't notice. Too busy.

WANDA
Geez, I didn't call ya. Sorry. It's
been a whirlwind.

They hug.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Got news for ya.

COG
I heard. Amazing. Really.

Wanda bristles. *That's it?!*

COG (CONT'D)
Wanda. Uh, --

Then Wanda sees it. The weight.

COG (CONT'D)
I gotta talk'ta ya about somethin'.

WANDA
Oh, -- Okay.

Cog gets even more uncomfortable.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Ya. Sure. Um, --

Wanda hurries them into a side room.

INT. WANDA'S HOME OFFICE -- NIGHT

Wanda shuts the door. Cog stands, super freaked out.

WANDA
Is it Todd? What happened?

COG
No, Todd's fine. Well, he's not,
but -- he's at home.

WANDA
Then -- ?

Cog gathers her thoughts. Doesn't wanna say the wrong thing.

COG

Well, -- A couple hours ago I saw Kacie's Facebook about the big news, so I didn't wanna be late tonight but I was behind with my report at the office.

Cog tries to slow down her thoughts.

COG (CONT'D)

So instead'a callin' up what accounts I needed, I just, -- had them send 'em all up.

Wanda -- *shit*.

COG (CONT'D)

Just easier, yano, cuz I was rushin' 'ta get here. For you. Um, but --

Cog digs in her purse. Wanda braces for impact. Cog pulls out a piece of paper. Wanda eyes it like it's a noose.

COG (CONT'D)

-- I found this account for the city I never saw before. This RSCDA account.

Cog shows Wanda the paper.

COG (CONT'D)

-- I mean, 20-some years in accounts payable and I've never seen this. D'ya know it?

Wanda looks closer. Stalling.

COG (CONT'D)

It's a city account, see. Reserve Sewer Capital Devo Fund. But there's some pretty big withdrawals comin' out of it. Like huge ones. See.

Wanda doesn't need to fuckin' see. She knows what it is. She looks anyway.

COG (CONT'D)

Now I prolly should'a gone straight 'ta Bjorn about this, but --

WANDA

No. Let's, uh --. Huh.

COG
Ya. Gotta be somethin' we're
missin', right?

WANDA
Oh ya. Ya, no. For sure.

Cog waits for more. It doesn't come.

COG
Have you seen this account before?

WANDA
It's not ringin' any bells.

Cog eyes Wanda.

COG
Really? Cuz your name's listed as
the sole proprietor of it. See --

Cog points at the page.

COG (CONT'D)
Says -- City'a Brainerd and then
care'a -- just you. That should
mean you made all these
withdrawals, but -- ?

Wanda fights to keep her face still. Calm. Blank. Hard given
given the monkeys on the inside are screaming -- *U SO FUCKED*.

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- NIGHT

A big line for food. Julia, Ginny and Kacie stand near the
end. With them are the mayor Bjorn and his wife MILDRED (60s,
taller than him). A heated debate underway.

GINNY
How 'bout *BRAINERD'S BABES*? That
sounds like a musical title.

JULIA
Ya. --

BJORN
Could call it *MY WAY*.

MILDRED
That's a Frank Sinatra song.

There's a bite to her comment. Mildred and Bjorn should've
divorced eons ago. And yet, they refuse.

Ginny spots a CATERER who passes with a casserole refill.

GINNY
How 'bout *HOTDISH*.

Julia considers. Ginny takes that to mean she likes it.

GINNY (CONT'D)
Oh! Cuz our stories, they could be like -- ya know when ya make a hotdish, ya put'chur leftovers at the bottom'a the pan. Well, the leftovers, they're kinda like us. Our stories, yano?

KACIE
And then the singin's the cheese?

Ginny has never loved her daughter more.

GINNY
The singin's the cheese. Oh my gol. That's it.

JULIA
Wow. Ya.

Julia pretends to get a call.

JULIA (CONT'D)
Oop. 'Xcuse me a sec.

She steps away. *Fuuuuck this*. Kacie watches her go.

EXT. REHEARSAL STUDIO -- NIGHT

Julia stands in the yard, eyes the main house. How's she gonna boop out 42 mil?! 750K is a lot less red tape... Kacie comes outta the studio. Julia pretends to end a call.

JULIA
Hey.

KACIE
She keeps the good stuff inside.

Kacie keeps on for the main house. Julia's phone legit buzzes. She looks. *SHERRIE*. Ugh. Julia lets it ring.

KACIE (CONT'D)
Where in New York do ya live?

The question's pointed. Julia feels it.

JULIA
Brooklyn. Ya ever been?

KACIE
No.

Kacie hasn't gotten out much. She can still smell a wolf.

JULIA
Ya should. It's awesome.

Onto this bitch, Julia glances inside.

THROUGH THE WINDOWS --

Ginny gushes to everyone within earshot. So happy.

Julia looks back to Kacie, who also saw Ginny.

JULIA (CONT'D)
You should come sometime.

Kacie smiles, polite/awkward. She heads inside. Julia's phone buzzes again. *SHERRIE*. Annoyed, Julia lets it ring. Not now.

INT. WANDA'S HOME OFFICE -- NIGHT

Cog holds that lethal piece of paper. Wanda stands unfazed. She's actually terrified. That paper is the crack in her empire. One built on fabrication. Or rather, embezzlement.

COG
Just can't think'a what this could
be then. Cuz these withdrawals --

The office door opens. Bjorn enters. He sees Cog, lights up.

COG (CONT'D)
Uh, so --

He looks. Sees Wanda. Decides to stay by the door.

BJORN
Ya havin' a meetin' without me?

WANDA
Oh ya. You know it.

Wanda takes the paper from Cog. Cog hesitates but lets her.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Practicin' my speech for later.
Wanna hear it?

Cog -- ??

WANDA (CONT'D)
 (to Bjorn)
 For the musical announcement. Gonna
 be extra excitin' this year.

BJORN
 Ya. Heard the rumors.

WANDA
 Oh shoot. Really?

BJORN
 Ya. Cat's out.

Cog -- *why would Wanda lie?!*

WANDA
 Gol dang it.

BJORN
 Well, I'll leave ya guys to it.

Bjorn turns to go. Cog starts to say something. Bjorn, of his own accord, stops.

BJORN (CONT'D)
 Say where's your bathroom at again?
 Don't matter how many times I come
 here --

COG
 Uh, actually --

WANDA
 Next one over.

Bjorn looks to Cog. She decides on -- silence. She freezes.

BJORN
 Okie doke.

He departs. Door shuts.

WANDA
 Shouldn't worry him, yano. Not til
 we know what in heck this is.

COG
 -- Ya.

WANDA
 What do I always tell ya?

Cog hesitates. Doesn't think it's true here.

WANDA (CONT'D)

Cogy?

COG

That anything can be fixed.

WANDA

That's right. But let's tackle this tomorrow. Tonight's time for champagne.

Wanda smiles, heads them out. Beneath that smile, way deep down, beyond the layers of 'show', is one terrified woman.

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- NIGHT

LOCALS overeat, gorge on the free booze. Wanda enters, sees the crowd. Usually hosting makes her heart sing. Right now, all she sees are people who are about to *fucking hate her*. Once they find out what she did to them. To this town...

Mark spots his mom, comes over.

MARK

Hey. I heard. Congrats.

WANDA

Ya. Ya. Pretty neat-o.

Wanda tries so hard to phone it in. For once, she can't.

MARK

Mom?

WANDA

Mm?

Wanda looks past Mark to -- Cog, who scarfs food on one end. On the far other stands Bjorn and his wife. Wanda's safe. For now.

MARK

Gotta enjoy this. This sorta thing doesn't happen 'ta people. Here. --

He darts off for champagne. Hurries back with two glasses. Almost drops one. The flutes themselves are stupid nice.

MARK (CONT'D)

Cheers. 'Ta you.

They cheers. She breathes. Grateful for her son. He looks at her, so proud. This kid idolizes his mom. His mom who's about to fuck up his life too. Guilty by association.

Nope. No can do. Wanda's gonna find a gd way out. Somehow.

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- MOMENTS LATER

Julia speaks to the room. The whole town listens as if she herself is a Broadway show. Wanda, Ginny and Kacie stand next to her.

JULIA
I'm honored 'ta help tell the
stories of Brainerd. And with these
fine women at my side --

She eyes the gang. Wanda seems out of it. Julia notices.

JULIA (CONT'D)
-- My cohorts, if ya will.

Wanda racks her brain for a solution...

JULIA (CONT'D)
We are gonna make a dang good
musical. You should see what
they've already come up with.

Wanda eyes the crowd. Nothing's changed. A lotta flannel and nice/fat people. Her eyes land on Mildred. Crabby per always. Wait. Where's Bjorn?

JULIA (CONT'D)
Shouldn't be surprised though. Cuz
if there's one thing I know about
bein' a Minnesotan. Although I am
from Duluth.

Wanda looks for Bjorn. Gettin' food? Nope. Potty? She looks through the windows to the main house --

JULIA (CONT'D)
But Minnesotans, in general, --

-- where she catches the tail end of not only Bjorn *but also* Cog heading inside. Together. Wanda shits herself.

JULIA (CONT'D)
-- are stronger than anyone likes
'ta admit.

JULIA (CONT'D)
How else could we handle 20 below?

Light laughter. Wanda feigns a laugh, looks back to the main house. Inside, stand Cog and Bjorn. Talking. Seems serious. Wanda's entire life flashes before her.

JULIA (CONT'D)
So. Auditions next week. Anyone interested, please prepare a monologue. Prefer ya write it yourself, if it's not too scary. Have it be about your life here in Brainerd. We are gonna save this library.

Applause. Julia eyes Wanda who looks like someone who just caught stage 4 cancer.

INT. SHERRIE'S SHITTY MOTEL ROOM -- NIGHT

Sherrie watches tv. The sound's off. She likes it that way. What she doesn't like is Julia not answering her fucking calls.

Sherrie eyes her flip phone. Opens it. Nothin'.

Yano what? Fuck this shit. Sherrie gets up.

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- NIGHT

Ginny rambles into the mic. Kacie tolerates. Julia pretends to care. Wanda fantasizes about her doomed life in prison.

GINNY
Thank goodness I got all that strength from my daughter here 'ta go all the way up 'ta the cities for that conference. 'Cuz if I hadn't --

Wanda falls deeper into her thoughts. She can hear the police sirens already.

GINNY (CONT'D)
Can ya imagine? Now that's a lesson there. Go live your life.

As if to seal her fate, Wanda looks past the fading crowd, to the main house. But this time, she sees something different.

GINNY (CONT'D)
 Cuz look. Ya can end up makin' a
 musical with -- Julia Roberts.

Wanda blinks. Not able to compute what she's seeing --

IN THE MAIN HOUSE --

Cog and Bjorn, huddled off in a corner. Barely in view. But still, you can see -- they're --

Kissing.

Like old people. Ultra soft. Fuckin' Lutherans with their pent up want of sex but guilt over it.

Wanda -- ?!?!?!

EXT. SHITTY MOTEL -- NIGHT

Sherrie hot wires a pickup. Hops in. Takes off in it. The pickup rails toward the highway.

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- NIGHT

Still processing, Wanda looks back.

IN THE MAIN HOUSE --

Cog and Bjorn, all conservative sexy, sneak off into the bathroom.

IN THE STUDIO --

Wanda -- ?!?!?! Ginny, at the mic, takes Julia's hand.

GINNY
 (into the mic)
 I feel like I know her already.

Wanda thinks. *Cog wasn't ratting her out. She was cheating on her dying husband with the town mayor!!* This just might be the get outta jail free card Wanda needs...

GINNY (CONT'D)
 (into the mic)
 Ya know when that happens. When ya
 feel like ya know a person. --

Wanda eyes the crowd. They are so over this.

GINNY (CONT'D)
But'cha really don't.

Wanda steals the mic.

WANDA
(into the mic)
And now, we got a little show for
ya.

Ginny and Julia drop hands, back up. Wanda snags Julia.

WANDA (CONT'D)
Oop. Gonna need 'ju.
(off mic)
Just go with it.

JULIA
With what?

Wanda's back. And it feels good.

WANDA
(into the mic)
Now if any'a you are on the fence
about auditionin', we are gonna
change that right here, right now.
Julia and I -- are gonna write and
perform a song for you.

Julia -- *what the absolute fuck.*

INT. SHERRIE'S STOLEN PICKUP -- NIGHT

Creepy music. Sherrie listens to it as she drives. Rain trickles on the dash. She eyes it. Thunder. She eyes that too. Ready to fight both if necessary.

EXT. HIGHWAY 169 SOUTHBOUND -- NIGHT

The stolen pickup flies past a green road sign --

BRAINERD: 10 miles.

INT. WANDA'S REHEARSAL STUDIO -- NIGHT

Julia stands with Wanda at the mic. Wanda nods to the caterers who bring out dessert for everyone. Folks are now all the more interested in this show.

WANDA
(into the mic)
Okay. A little singin' improv for
ya.

JULIA
I'm a director.

WANDA
Ya. So. Show us how it's done.

Julia -- ??

WANDA (CONT'D)
(into the mic)
Can I get a suggestion from the
audience?

Someone shouts POTATOES.

WANDA (CONT'D)
(into the mic)
Okay, potatoes. There we go.
Potatoes.

Wanda hands Julia the mic.

WANDA (CONT'D)
You can start.

Julia -- ?!

Wanda looks back to the audience, fluffs them. Her chest all puffed. She fucking loves this. The attention? No. The power.

Julia -- *Game on bitch.*

JULIA
(to Wanda)
Singin' improv?

WANDA
Ya. Ya know it, right?

JULIA
Oh ya.

The town leans in, noms on chocolate as Julia prepares.

JULIA
(to herself)
Potatoes.

Julia -- *fuck it.*

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (sings)
I LIKE 'EM FRIED.

Julia can sannnnng.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (sings)
I LIKE 'EM DICED.

The song's jazzy. Ella adjacent. Sexy. Wanda can't compete with sexy. Not when Julia's 20 yrs younger. Fuckin' ageists.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (sings)
*BUT MORE THAN ANYTHING, ANYTHING,
 ANYTHING.*

So jazzy. So sexy. Wanda -- god damn it.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (sing)
*WHERE ARE THEY FROM? DON'T NEED NO
 ORGANIC.*

The audience is enamored. In love. And they've forgotten entirely about Wanda.

JULIA (CONT'D)
 (scats)
NO NO NO NO NO NO NO.

Wanda fumes. Tries to not. Can't. Fuck this cow.

JULIA (CONT'D)
*ALL I CARE ABOUT IS IF THEY'RE FROM
 HERE. GROWN IN THIS SOIL I LOVE.*

Wanda grabs the mic.

WANDA
SOIL I LOVE.

Wanda can't hold a candle to Julia's voice.

WANDA (CONT'D)
SOIL I LOVE.

The moment falls flat. Wanda refuses to stumble. Instead, she works with what she's got -- showmanship.

WANDA (CONT'D)
THIS SOIL IS BRAINERD'S SOIL.

JULIA

MM. MM.

Wanda moves further from Julia. So Julia can't get the mic.

WANDA

*BRAINERD MAKES THE BEST LITTLE
TATERS THAT YA EVER DID SEE.*

Wanda sings low, gets low. Julia copies her. Julia does it better.

WANDA (CONT'D)

WHO'S FROM HERE?

JULIA

ME?

WANDA

NO.

WANDA (CONT'D)

WHO'S FROM HERE I SAY?

JULIA

I AM.

WANDA

NO, YOU'RE NOT.

Wanda stands.

WANDA (CONT'D)

*I'M THE ONE FROM HERE. I KNOW THESE
TATERS, YES I DO.*

The audience looks to Wanda with glory again. Julia stands. Plants. And belts her fuckin' face off.

JULIA

*BUT MAYBE I CAN SHOW YOU A THING OR
TWO.*

Off Wanda, this cunt is goin' down.

BAD GIRLS by M.I.A. over credits