

StAnD uP

A New Play by Paul Hufker

12/15/25

Synopsis:

Maddie, a NYC stand-up comic goes viral (happy days!) and promptly gets cancelled (ain't algorithms a bitch?). As she tries to reconstruct her reputation and career, another young, budding comic herself goes viral and offers to help Maddie with her cancellation. When Maddie gives the young comic all her comedic knowledge, the young comic inputs that knowledge into an AI which spits out great jokes. Will Maddie be replaced by her young counterpart? Will AI help humans take over the identity of other humans? Can something as fundamentally human as comedy be usurped by AI? In this darkly comic satire, the play dissects media outrage, platform power, and the machinery that decides who gets heard—and who gets erased.

CHARACTERS:

MADDIE NORMAN – 30s. A stand-up comic from Louisiana.

JANE DAWES – 20s. An aspiring comic from Mississippi.

LIZ – 30s. Maddie's agent.

GIGI – Booker at Stand Out NYC.

AI (Voice) – A female voice.

THE FEED / CHORUS – 4–12 actors.

ROLES PLAYED BY THE FEED / CHORUS

- Liberal Anchors (2)
- Conservative Anchors (2)
- WeTube Executives (2)
- Lady Parts Owners (2)
- Marge for America
- Alexa for Senate
- Friend
- Wealthy Woman
- Audience Members / Crowd Voices
- Offstage Voice (Jane's roommate)

SCENES:

1. A Stand Up club – viral video
2. Three days later, Maddie’s apartment (NYC)
3. Two days later, Stand Out comedy club
4. The next day, MOMA / Maddie’s apartment
5. Meanwhile, WeTube executive offices
6. One week later, Maddie’s apartment / Stand Out
7. Later that night, Maddie’s apartment / Jane’s apartment
8. The next day, Maddie’s apartment / TV anchors
9. Two days later, Maddie’s apartment
10. Meanwhile, MOMA / Jane’s apartment
11. Two weeks later, Stand Out
12. Later that night, Maddie’s apartment
13. Hours later, Jane’s apartment
14. Two weeks later, Stand Out / NYC street (flashback)
15. Meanwhile, at Badger News
16. Weeks ago, at a dingy bar in NYC (flashback)
17. Meanwhile, WeTube offices
18. Days later, Stand Out / Maddie’s new life in New Orleans

Scene 1

(A large SCREEN onstage plays a Tiktok-like video. It's of 31-year-old stand-up comic Maddie Norman. She's onstage at a comedy club in New Orleans in the clip, doing a joke from her act, in front of a full, hot, comedy club crowd. A sign behind her reads "New Orleans HaHa Hole" She doesn't have an overt southern accent.)

MADDIE (video)

Ladies, have you ever fucked patriarchy? Like, have you ever had patriarchy *inside* you? I didn't even think it was possible to have sex with an idea, but here we are. As that evil *man feeling* approaches, a cold, icy wind comes over your body. Ladies, you *know* what I'm talkin about. (*ladies holler and agree*) I was hooking up with this guy recently, a guy who is a writer for a major TV show which shall remain nameless, and I liked this guy. My cold dead heart actually *liked* him -- my therapist tells me I am in fact capable of love -- and pretty quick it's clear he's tryna slap in the ol' Washington Monument. He says, (*she does a voice of an idiot for him throughout*) ya know, maybe you could send me some of your writing and I can take a look at it. I said, are you saying that just so I will sleep with you? And he said, of course not! My assistant is leaving, and I need a replacement. And I said, an assistant and not a *writer*? He said, you start there, you move up. (*ladies boo this idiot*) I know. I know. Ladies, I felt that cold, icy wind. It frosted my woman parts over, a thin sheet of ice formed around my labia. That shit was Disney's *Frozen* in my pants. *Frozen: On Ice*. And he starts to kiss me again, and I said nuh-uh and I slowly, softly pushed his face down, down -- kept it goin -- down to my bare feet. His head against the carpet. I stood on his head, and I struck a pose like lady liberty! (*she strikes her Lady Liberty pose and she lifts her leg like she's put one foot on his head; the crowd cheers*) I said, will you sign something that says you'll *actually* look at my stuff? And he said, DUH DUH DUH I thought we were gonna hook up. And I said, start at my dirty ass feet, motherfucker. He said, why? I said, I'm really here more for an assistant -- you start there, *you move up*. (*laughter, applause, the ladies LOVE it*) Ladies, keep patriarchy out your vag, or "the writer's room," as I call it!

(The crowd laughs and cheers wildly. The joke is a HUGE hit. The video goes dark but a graphic on the screen shows us the video's views. It starts at "1" and spins quickly into the hundreds of thousands. The wild laughter is what carries us into the next scene. It's intense and exciting, but veers into the grotesque.)

Lights change.

Scene 2

(The sounds of laughter and applause overwhelm and lead into a new, liminal space. MADDIE NORMAN is standing in her NOLA apartment, but something is off; we're not quite in reality. She slumps into her desk, pulls at her face in the mirror, tugging it this way and that, whacky exaggerations. Then: smile, frown, smile, frown, bigger each time. She stops. She sighs. She is constrained by her life. She picks up her phone and the screen light glows on her face. As soon as she touches the phone, the view counter from the last scene suddenly fills the SCREEN and skyrockets. MADDIE is electrified but a bit scared by the feelings the phone sends through her. A visible line of bodies, (the "feed") often attached at the hip, covered entirely in white, sees this, and approaches. Here, they move mechanically, entering MADDIE's space, knocking at MADDIE's bedroom window, on her desk, rumbling her bed, clicking pens, clapping in time, etc. Anything to keep her attention. It's rhythmic like a ritual and morphs into a dance. She notices them and is intrigued but also unnerved. The laughter and applause from the last scene have morphed into eerie static. MADDIE stands to engage the CHORUS, her curious, nervous hand reaching out. After all, they are here because she's viral now, and that's what she herself wanted. The CHORUS has avoided eye contact to this point, but just as she might touch one of them, they freeze, and in time, look sharply at her and emphatically announce:

CHORUS:

Don't be a NOLA nobody!

(MADDIE is startled. The lights sharply change. CHORUS vanishes. We are now in MADDIE'S apartment, no liminal space. The screen says, "One Week After Going Viral, New Orleans" MADDIE is standing before her mirror, in pajamas, hairbrush in hand, doing her new jokes. She's mighty lonely, unsatisfied with her life, but a strong, legit comic. Her apartment is half-digital chaos, have cluttered thirty-something.)

MADDIE

"Hate your life." Those are strong words. But. I'm viral now. Guess I gotta get my SHOTS. McCallen 12, if you're buying. *(curtsy)* Motor oil if you're not. But it hasn't changed NOTHIN. Hell, I spend MORE of my time online now. *(thick NOLA accent)* Livin down here in NOLA. Which stands for Nobody Over here Learns Anything. *(she drops the accent)* I mean, I hate my job. If ONE MORE rich old bitch looks *through* me while ordering her third liquid lunch martini I'mma pop her head off like a champagne cork. Let the neck breathe. Pour some for the table. Be careful, it's aged ok but it's *bitter as FUCK*. So, aside from doing these sets, I hide inside. Online. And NOW I can't even do that cause I'm VIRAL. *GASP* Ya'll can see mah virus! *(she turns and checks her ass in the mirror)*. Can ya see it through my jeans??? Hope I wore the right undies. So, I can't be inside, and I can't be outside. Where's a sexy, unsatisfied, success-fearing brilliant comic lady sposta GO?

(MADDIE makes corrections on her notepad. Then, takes out her phone and calls a FRIEND. Like MADDIE, FRIEND has a very light southern accent, almost gone. Is it FRIEND? Something's off. A low hum is present.)

FRIEND

Hey girl! Long time no chat. I see you out there every day on the socials, but where's *my* sugar?

MADDIE

Yeah, I'm sorry. I've mostly been DMing people lately. It's been kinda hard.

FRIEND

Oh yeah, *real hard* goin VIRAL!!! You must be STOKED!

MADDIE

Kinda.

FRIEND

Kinda?

MADDIE

Careful watcha wish for, mimber?

FRIEND (*level with me*)

Mads. Huh??

MADDIE

I dunno. I don't wanna be viral! Or I do, like *desperately*, I just. I just don't want to be viral HERE. It doesn't change anything. I get decent spots, yes, but after a *decade* of knife fighting for them, I'm hollowed out. Online too much. All of a sudden I'm Digital Daisy, talking to everyone through my phone. NOLA stands for *NOthing Left, Asshole*.

FRIEND

Hahaha. Hey, you're HOT. I can't get any traction in Chicago and I'm freezing ma nips off! Post that NOLA joke to your Insta.

MADDIE

Yes but I don't *actually* live in NOLA, do I? I live (*ooo, spooky*) *further out*...It's dead here. Like living inside a crawfish coffin. I saw one of the guys I had a crush on in high school working at the Jiffy Lube the other day. I just. I dunno.

(FRIEND's advice, like a good algorithm, prioritizes engagement.)

FRIEND

No, you're right, move to NYC! Take this traction and turn it into a CAREER. You've *always wanted* to move there. Post THAT, it's compelling. Hey! I bet you can get an agent! Your followers doubled over night. Tripled.

MADDIE
Way more than that.

FRIEND
Way more than that! Imagine what might happen in the city you've *always dreamed of living* in!

MADDIE
I dunno, I do like lube.

FRIEND
You do. You DO like lube. But they have lube in New York.

MADDIE
It won't be Jiffy! (*quick beat*) Why do I need strangers to like me so badly?

FRIEND
Oh, that's easy. Our parents. Mine have never even so much as made eye contact with me.
Next question. Look, Mads, the metrics are pretty clear.

MADDIE
Metrics? Since when do you say metrics?

FRIEND
You get *some* engagement in NOLA and *lots* of engagement in NYC. All you've said to me, over and over, for two YEARS now, is that you want out. You've done the NOLA scene your whole life, you're spinning your wheels, and you want an excuse to get OUT. Here it is.

MADDIE
But out...is so...OUT. Ya know? It's all the way out. That's as far away as you can get from "in."

FRIEND
Ask your followers. Stand and deliver the Sermon on the Mads. The internet will know!

MADDIE
Yeah, but...will it?

FRIEND
OF COURSE.

MADDIE
Maybe I should stay.

FRIEND (*slight glitch*)
OK, b-but post about it!

MADDIE
Maybe I *should* go.

FRIEND (*slight glitch*)
Better idea, now p-post about it!

MADDIE
Maybe I'll go off socials.

FRIEND
ARE YOU KIDDING? I'd KILL to be in your shoes. In fact, what kind are you wearing? Which ones got you this far? Wear 'em to Chicago so I can kill you for them. Mads. THIS is exactly what you wanted. Or if not, what were the last ten years for? What was dropping out of college for? You've never been someone who could just fade into the background and you don't wanna start now.

MADDIE
You really think people will care?

FRIEND
Rally 'em online. Hell, *revolutions* were started on twitter! March like a good lil soldier into NYC and when you get there, your insta will say, "Maddie Norman, the bad bitch, is HERE. TO. STAY."

MADDIE
Yeah?

FRIEND
YES! Otherwise? Otherwise is *yikes*, Mads. Like. Crawfish boils and showing yer titties at Mardis Gras to that guy who looked like my dad riight before we all scattered from the cops. Mumber? Like, you'll be a NOLA lifer. Might as well throw in an application to be the Jiffiest Luber In town.

(That hits MADDIE, and we watch FRIEND see it hit MADDIE. Lights up on the CHORUS which has been watching this whole time. When FRIEND knows MADDIE is hooked, FRIEND, approving of this outcome, puts its white mask back on and blends back into the CHORUS. CHORUS disappears and so does the low hum, which is present always with the CHORUS.

MADDIE checks her phone and is left alone in its pale glow. We see on SCREEN what she posts: “I’m moving from NOLA to NYC – from No One Listens Anymore to Now Yer Cookin! I gotta you fake friends in NYC so you better be fake nice to me!” She sets down her phone, takes a breath, smiles. Why does she suddenly feel deeply vulnerable. She tries to shake it off and looks around for her cat.)

MADDIE

Cleocatra? Time for dinner. You’re real, aren’t ya. You’re not just on the internet.

(She stands to get the food.)

MADDIE

I love you so mu-- NOoooo! Don’t puke in my shoes!

Lights change.

Scene 3

(The screen goes black, and the words “Two Weeks Later, at comedy club Stand Out NYC” appear. MADDIE is onstage in front of a hot, tipsy, late-night crowd at NYC comedy club STAND OUT. She’s new around here, and doing a ten-minute set, which she aims to do four or five nights a week, to keep fit.

After MADDIE is onstage, but before the scene starts, in the darkness, the CHORUS enters again, dressed in all-white. They break apart and each make their way into MADDIE’S audience, taking various seats as if they’ve been there all along.

Lights up on MADDIE doing a set.)

MADDIE

How many of you played with Barbie as a kid?

(Crowd WOOS.)

MADDIE

Barbie, man. A doll, and they're tryina say she's a FEMINIST. C'mon, man. She's structurally unsound at that fake ass weight. Ten foot two and seventy four pounds? She'll fall over and crush a village. Oh, and PLUS, she's made outta plastic! You can't BE a feminist with a plastic vagina! You gotta KNOW how to navigate the lady river before I'll let you into *this* pussy life raft. I'm the last chopper outta 'nam, man. I'm kicking motherfuckers back, reaching for that ladder (*mimes kicking them off the chopper*) I'm just, bitch, get back! You better have a badge and shit to get on here. You gotta be a vajayjay *official*. No, you better be Red Beard! Conquering that Bloody Red Sea! Aye, me matey! You gotta--

(A CHORUS member stands.)

CHORUS IN CROWD #1

Disney's *Frozen*! Frozen on ice!

(The crowd goes nuts.)

MADDIE

Oop, that's three sets in a row. Ya'll *really* did see that video, didn't you.

(Crowd goes nuts.)

MADDIE

Th--that's cool. But Barbie, man, a feminist? Her tall, skinny ass. She—

CHORUS IN CROWD #2 (*another chorus member*)

Frozen in my pants!

MADDIE

OK! *Calm down*. She prolly fucks her husband with a stopwatch – ...aaaand GO! YOU GONNA CUM YET???

(Crowd laughs, then, just before MADDIE can begin again.)

CHORUS IN CROWD #1

For real TELL THE JOKE!

(Crowd chants along, "Tell the joke!")

MADDIE

Ya'll gonna do this every night? Holy Christ.

(Crowd is still chanting. All they want is to hear this joke. She realizes she must give them what they want.)

MADDIE

Ladies, have you ever fucked patriarchy?

(Crowd goes nuts.)

MADDIE

Like, have you ever had patriarchy *inside* you?

(The two CHORUS women go WOOOOOOO!)

MADDIE

At least let me get through it! I was hooking up with this guy recently, a guy who is a—

CHORUS IN CROWD #1

The writer's room! HAHAHA. She calls her vagina the writer's room!

CHORUS IN CROWD #2

Do the pose! Do the Statue of Liberty pose!

(She is stunned. The audience is practically standing now. She decides she'll do this now and figure out later how it makes her feel. She strikes the Lady Liberty pose.)

MADDIE

You start there, *you move up*. Ladies, keep patriarchy outta your vag, or -- *(crowd applause drowns out the rest. She is frozen for a moment, then talks over the applause.)* Listen, thanks very much for coming out, you guys rock! *(she starts to leave)* Come see me, dates on my website!

(The crowd cheers chants "Maddie! Maddie!" MADDIE comes offstage and the crowd noise lowers. She leans against a wall, and takes a deep breath as if to say; was that amazing? Or horrible? Who knows, but what a CRAZY rush being viral is.)

Lights change.

Scene 4

(SCREEN reads "Museum of Modern Art, Days Later." A hidden side

room with a sink. A catering event is going on for fancy people. Like the other waiters, MADDIE is wearing all black, but right now she's in the "slop room" where guests' drinks are dumped into a sink, and it's someone's job to stick their hands in to remove lemon and lime wedges, straws, food, napkins, etc., so the sink properly drains. If you can't do a sink, just do a bucket. PS It's a very real job.)

MADDIE (*she puts a silly melody to this as she digs through grossness*)

Just another day. Just another disgusting day. Digging through slop for some rich bitch's earring, oh yeah. Lookin at art on the walls of unspeakable beauty, oh yeah. Makin me feel like I don't fuckin matter, oh yeah. Last night people chanted my name, but this is what I'm doin right now, OH YEAH. Wassss NYCCCC evennnnnnn a goooooo ideeeaaaaa???

(The CHORUS appears as fancy party goers. They are at the party and audible through the wall. MADDIE looks at the wall and listens.)

CHORUS MEMBER

I felt terrible. I was *gutted*. She turned to me with this desperately earnest look on her face and said, *his* painting just sold for 2 point 5 million. How much will *mine* go for? And I said, darling, you're not-- you're a *someday*. Not a today.

CHORUS (*chanting*)

SOMEday. Monksday. Dueceday SOMEday SOMEday

(Sounds are gone. MADDIE wonders. Then, her phone rings. She's startled: "AH!" She looks around for how to wipe the slop off her hands. The CHORUS fades or freezes.)

MADDIE

Fuck. Shitboogers.

(She spins and spins but can't find anything and then uses her pants. She answers her phone, with one hand still digging through slop, her eyes darting to see if a boss comes in.)

MADDIE

Museum of Torture, two-for-one special on: crush your balls and your dreams. Mistress Maddie speaking, how can I help you?

(A vibrant, hip and personable businesswoman appears, in her office, on the phone. This can be done with a small spot of light and a desk.)

LIZ

Is this Maddie Norman?

MADDIE

That depends. Do I owe you child support?

LIZ (*amused*)

My name is Liz and I'm a rep over at Top Tier Talent.

(MADDIE'S demeanor changes immediately.)

MADDIE

Oh Oh Oh, hi! Hello!

LIZ

Hi. Are you...busy?

MADDIE

No, no, no. Please. What's up?

LIZ

I've been watching your clips. I love them.

MADDIE

Really? I guess going viral has upsides, too.

LIZ (*pitching herself*)

It does. I watched your stuff, I thought, cool, progressive, young, great energy, great attitude...you say the wrong thing in the right way.

MADDIE

Yeah?

LIZ

You're political but raunchy. You're crude but clever. You're smart but you don't make people feel dumb. You want to help women. It's killer. Really, really, funny.

(MADDIE pulls up the earring, holds her arm up in victory. Success!)

MADDIE

Hey! Wow. Thanks!

LIZ

You moved to the city, right? Well, two other agents around here were already talking about you, so I wanted to see if you'd be interested in meeting. Maybe it'll be *me* who snaps you up. I rep new talent, mostly. How long can you do?

MADDIE (*stretching*)
45.

LIZ (*that's a good number*)
45?

MADDIE
Um. Yes. At a stretch. No! I *can*. I can. Do 45.

LIZ
Well, listen. I think it's possible we leverage your WeTube heat and see if we can't get some club dates. What bookers do you work with?

MADDIE
Bookers? Um, well, hm.

LIZ
Can you do weekends?

MADDIE (*her hands are dripping in slop*)
Yes. Yes, I can.

LIZ
Let's meet and chat. See if we click. I don't want to get you overly hyped, but with *this* kinda momentum, I've seen comics go from clubs to theatres within, what, a year?

MADDIE (*almost speechless, she's so eager*)
...theatres...? Theatres. Like right now. I'm at MOMA. Catering. My arms are covered in spit. And not for the fun reasons.

LIZ
Ha. Yeah, well, I don't want to make promises, but things might be changing for you, Maddie Norman. Let's talk soon, yeah?

(LIZ is gone. MADDIE stands and mouths "OH MY GOD" to herself. She's filling with a hope she's never felt before in her life. She looks at the earring, then pulls out a hidden microphone and the lights go dark as a spot hits her. We hear a comedy club crowd. The CHOURS watches quietly from the back, unseen by MADDIE.)

MADDIE
Do ya'll ever HATE when good things happen to you? It pisses me off, good things. I feel bad, like, nothing good is *supposed* to happen to me. I moved here a *month* ago -- and I haven't even bought a COAT. Why? Because *who am I* to walk around warm? Ya know?

Every walk home I nearly freeze to death. Currently have frostbite on ma nips. I'm tryna get 'em hard like diamonds! Every girl wants a diamond, right? I'm hoping they'll be sharp enough to cut through the glass ceiling. *(she mimics using her nipples to cut upwards)*. But with my luck, they'll just become tit-cicles. And now? Now, this. She wants to meet. That sounds like a good thing, but good things sound bad. OH GOOOODDDDD. All I wanna do is be BIG AND BAD AND JUST walk up to that rich woman, hand her her earring and say, *Lady, you've had more facelifts than the Guggenheim!* wipe my hands *real good* on her gown and pimp strut my way outta there. That'd be the BEST. Obvi I'm not going to do that. I'm going to cower my way to the elevator and not make eye contact with anyone. But still. *(CROWD laughs, beat.)* I'm *scurred*, you guys. That's what I'm tryna say. I'm like, fucking *pumped*, yes. And. Scared. *(beat)* Thanks for listening. Sorry that this was way more therapy for me than it was comedy for you, but I'm gonna get outta here before ya'll start yelling out punchlines!

(MADDIE walks offstage as someone stands and yells "Do the one where—" but the lights go sharply out.)

Lights restore in MADDIE'S apartment. It's late at night and she's in her bed. The SCREEN tells us she's posting a clip onto her socials with her phone.)

MADDIE

Oh, god. Please work please work please work.

(MADDIE almost hits "post," but stares at the screen.)

MADDIE

Or don't work. Please please please?

(She hits "post." It's done. She takes a deep breath, rolls over and tries to sleep. The SCREEN plays the clip MADDIE just posted.)

MADDIE

I use the C word. I love the C word. Cunt cunt cunt. I have no kids, it's like my child. Some dizzy broad came up to me after a show and said, all nasty, "the C word is offensive, why do you use it?" And I stared at her, and I said, "you're right, there is a C word that men use all the time to be derogatory to women, and that word, is "crazy." Women are always "crazy," right? (CROWD agrees.) Even my sainted southern mama brought around plenty of men who held her down. I said, Lady, I've been Bible-thumped by men and beaten with that Bible belt until my backside was as red as Satan's asshole – I know the church-y drill, OK? Now, I got no beef with what any lady wants to do, but if you think I'M gonna shove MY fat ass in front of a stove all day long while MY hubby chomps on pot roast, and burp HIS baby while he burps up beers, while he holds the family purse strings tighter than Hillary squeezes Bill's balls? I said lady, if you think that...you are one crazy cunt!

(CROWD laughs, some don't know what to make of it – audible “Oof’s!” as well as laughs. Either way, we watch the views counter again skyrocket.)

Lights change.

Scene 5

(MADDIE’S tiny, cramped, NYC apartment. She spends all her money to afford living alone. MADDIE sits on the couch, scrolling her phone. On TV in her apartment is MARGE for AMERICA, a politician running for office, which we see on SCREEN.)

MARGE (on TV)

No matter how popular this young woman is, her language – is, let me say it again – Un. A. Mer. I. Can. This is NOT how we talk about women in this country! She’s invoking the *Bible* in the same sentence as the “c” word!

(MADDIE puts her phone down and her face changes as she realizes they are talking about HER. As she looks on nervously, the CHORUS appears again. They watch her from a distance. TWO members of the CHORUS peel off and “invade” MADDIE’S space. They set up their laptops and get to work.)

WeTube Exec #2

Well, we’re two of *how many* female senior execs? What, four, *including* us? I mean, if you hadn’t recommended *me*...

WeTube Exec #1

Oh please, you’re my protégé! You’re my young me. It’s my pleasure. (*Breath.*) So, OK. They boyz upstairs wanna know what to do with this suddenly very popular comedian gal. I think she’s funny.

WeTube Exec #2

Oh, she’s a *riot*.

WeTube Exec #1

She really is. I wish that was it. I really do. BUT she said the “c” word like a zillion times in that clip. That’s like. A lot of times. It probably violates some kind of guidelines and it’s getting lots of views. You saw the angry emails. Piling up. OK, let’s take some time to really *grapple* with this. Before lunch. Hm... (*she puts her hand to her chin for exactly one split second*) Demonetize the clip. LUNCH! (*if she was sitting, she stands and goes to the door*) I want a salmon salad.

(MADDIE gasps. WeTube#2 is shocked.)

WeTube Exec #2

Wait! I mean. This is a real person's life. Let's. Let's just, uh. Take a minute and think about what this situation really *needs*.

WeTube Exec #1

Well, there's need and there's *want*. Right? And then there's what we want and there's what *they* want (*she points upstairs*). The *boyz*.

WeTube Exec #2

Yes. True. (*beat*) Maybe we need an algorithm. Some way to control the site.

WeTube Exec #1

We have an algorithm.

WeTube Exec #2 (*a spark*)

Not one that monitors *content*. What if we convince the board that the company needs a *moral* algorithm? One that ensures clicks but pushes out all the bad stuff. (*a hiccup in the logic*) Ahh--But *whose* idea of bad?

WeTube Exec #1

Hey, I'm a human. I've been *around*. Our idea of bad is probably *everyone's* idea of bad, right?

WeTube Exec #2

Well, OK. *Maybe*.

(*Exec #2 tries to really understand the pickle they're in and think on it fairly.*)

WeTube Exec #2

Alright, there's a line of videos we need to vet which we haven't vetted, and which are causing a hell of a ruckus. I mean, when *Senators* are calling...

WeTube Exec #1

I hardly think what I saw was *child porn*. I think it was—excuse me

(*She tries to push past MADDIE.*)

WeTube Exec #1

Excuse me.

(MADDIE moves.)

WeTube Exec #2

OK, yes, but the fact that it's *close enough* is a problem, no?

WeTube Exec #1

Rightrightright. No, you're right. (*proclamation*) *Child porn is bad.*

(*WeTube Exec #2 is stopped by this statement, stunned by the obviousness. This is the first time she's heard her mentor's opinions fall so flat. She senses the change taking place in Exec #1, and she is concerned.*)

WeTube Exec #2 (*stunned and concerned*)

Right. Obviously. Yes. (*she pushes on*) And now, I mean, homophobia, terrorism, antisemitism, violence – we didn't plan for this and now it's infesting the site.

WeTube Exec #1 (*light, curious*)

How did we not plan for this?

WeTube Exec #2

We didn't do it because, as you say, all along, we've been stuck in the "women's issues" section of this company. *They* did it because *they* handle everything else. Right?

WeTube Exec #1

That's *right*. Look at you, always listening! *That's* my girl. Ok, a new algorithm then. One that excites the big boyz! Keeps the clicks up but the resistance down. I mean, we don't want to incite violence, but conflict on the site is NOT a bad thing. I learned that a long time ago and I've been biding my time ever since. Now's my chance. I *belong* up there.

WeTube Exec #2 (*weary*)

With...the boys?

WeTube Exec #1 (*hand on her heart*)

Yes, by god. The boyz.

(*ONSCREEN: rain. Sounds of rain. EXEC #2 is instantly mesmerized.*)

WeTube Exec #1 (*goes to the door*)

I'll take this upstairs. Right now. You wanna come with? Get in some face time. I'll do the talking. (*beat*) Hello?

WeTube Exec #2

See the rain?

WeTube Exec #1 (*looking*)

What rain? It's not raining. I can't even remember the last time it rained.

WeTube Exec #2 (*staring at the rain on the screen;
adrift*)

I miss the rain.

(*They sharply exit. MADDIE watches them go, dumbfounded and terrified. LIZ enters, talking on the phone.*)

LIZ

They demonetized your clip.

MADDIE

What?

LIZ

It's still up but you can't make money off it.

MADDIE

...they can just *do* that...?

LIZ

They can.

MADDIE

Jesus. Well. At least it's still up?

LIZ

But maybe not for much longer. Apologize, Maddie. This thing is getting bigger than us, fast.
Did your sponsors contact you?

MADDIE (*LP stuff in hand, getting ready to show
some products*)

Yeah, I'm showing their new stuff to the camera now.

LIZ

Good. Good. At least that.

MADDIE

Are you...dropping me?

LIZ

No! Of course not. I've been strategizing.

MADDIE (*scared*)
Really?

LIZ
Really. Sometimes these things lose steam on their own, but an apology vid is usually what people do. Then, we remove the clip, and anywhere else you say the “C” word. Hopefully they’ll allow you ad revenue again. OK?

(MADDIE considers.)

MADDIE
No.

LIZ (*not used to being told “no”*)
No?

MADDIE
Yeah, no! I’m sorry, Liz, but I have some fans now, and I didn’t get them by altering myself. I didn’t get them by being something I’m not.

LIZ (*deep breath to keep her cool; she’s worked with people like this before*)
You’re new, Maddie, and I like you, but you need to get ahead of this. In fact, cut all this from the podcast, OK?

MADDIE
OK. Maybe. Yeah. I dunno.

LIZ
Apologize. I’m telling you. That word isn’t casual like in the UK. There, the C word is like saying *hello*, but in America? Just cut anything too crazy. I gotta run. We’ll talk soon.

(LIZ is gone. MADDIE doubles down, as she often does. She retrieves a box of LP goodies, then grabs her camera, turns on her lights, and starts recording.)

MADDIE
No. No fuckin way. I’m not pulling the jokes, I’m not apologizing, and I’m not taking this out of the podcast. Ya’ll deserve to hear the truth. It’s just a word. A WORD, people. Not a gun. And where is the *understanding* of what I was saying? Men have used that word to attack, I want to take it back, and you’re *trying* to misunderstand that! WHY? The n-word, sure, but you know who *actually* calls us cunts? (*she sets the box of goodies on her table and yanks out a pair of lingerie*) Club promoters. (*another pair*) Bookers. (*another pair*) Even some male comics. (*another pair, gestures on “female”*) And of us few *female* comics– and our

numbers *are* growing – we all get sexually harassed or worse. And they wanna take MY money? Fucking obscene! *(she has upset herself mightily and takes a deep breath before she sings a silly song to calm down)* Let it go, let it go. Let all that goofy horeshit go. *(breath)* We're talking about women in comedy *and* we're unboxing some fun stuff from Lady Parts because they still love me. *(She sticks her tongue out at the camera as she examines a pair of underwear she was holding.)* Ooooo! Tres cute, no? *(she cannot contain herself)* NO, I don't WANNA let it go! FUCK THAT, I moved here from *Louisiana!* My family was dirt poor. Lotsa burglaries in the neighborhood, but not with us. Nothing to burgle. Unless you can burgle *air.* *(she pulls up a pair of sexy hand cuffs and references them...)* Fucking stupid cops wouldn't come anyway! *(she breaths and sings the silly song again)* Let it go, let it go. Just let all that horseshitty shit go. *(She breaths but can't let it go and stands)* How bout ya'll let ME go! I'm the one who was so scared she wet the bed until she was 11. *(she drops the cuffs and pulls a huge, glittery dildo out, surprising herself; she gestures with it)* I'm the one who boys didn't pay attention to, and girls were grossed out by. So, I avoided my parent's life, at *all* fucking costs and I've worked *hard*. Three sets a NIGHT. Every night. For years. *(wagging the dildo at the camera)* I moved here with NOTHING and I have exactly ONE VIRAL CLIP to show for it. BUT. I cannot and will not go back. And be small. *(she slaps the dildo into her free hand on each)* Fuck that. And fuck them. No apology. No surrender. *(She whips the dildo around like a lasso)* I guess I'm a crazy cunt, too! YEEEHAAWWWW *(she holds it to her mouth like a mic.)* I'm president Hillary Clinton, and I'm a powerful bitch! *(She mic drops the dildo.)* This WAS my apology video. *I'M SORRY* if you didn't like it. Now buy this ridiculous thing from LP and go peg your husband till he shuts the fuck up!

(Lights up on JANE DAWES, 26, in a different space, her apartment, glued to social media as the MADDIE events unfold. She's just out of the shower and is drying herself, watching this all unfold on her computer like a hungry voyeur.)

JANE
YEEEHAAWWWW! I'm A POWERFUL BITCH!

(She turns off the computer screen and lights go out on MADDIE. JANE bounces around the room yelling POWERFUL BITCH. She grabs her phone, types. On SCREEN we see, "Maddie, WHY DON'T I HAVE YOUR PHONE NUMBER? It feels stupid sending you a DM. NEWAY, I'm SO sorry for everything they're putting you through. Sending lots of strong vibes. Hey, I'm doing my FIRST OPEN MIC TOMORROW!!!! Send me YOUR strong vibes. Let's meet for coffee in NYC so I can tell you how it went!!!")

The CHORUS appears. One peels off, stands directly in front of JANE, and smiles big. JANE sees this and responds.)

JANE
Maddie will respond to me. She'll ask me for coffee.

(Another CHORUS member spins directly in front of JANE as the former departs. JANE learns something new from this CHORUS member. She declares:)

JANE

You from Nawlins, I'm from Mississippi. We KNOW the south, girl!

(Another CHORUS member spins in front of JANE. This one is serious and makes JANE serious. JANE turns out and says with all her might.)

JANE

I will NOT let anything bad happen to my Maddie.

(Lights go out on everything but a spot on JANE. We watch her a moment. She looks in the mirror and tests out versions of herself – smile, frown, smile, frown -- while she dries her hair. On SCREEN, rain falls.)

Lights change.

Scene 6

(The CHORUS remains, watching JANE in her tiny, cramped NYC room. Rain sounds continue. JANE picks up her phone. The SCREEN flashes and shows endless scrolling. The lights change. Suddenly, the phone is everything to JANE. She holds high, for reception, for victory. She bounces around the room with it, dancing like it's her partner. She stops solemnly for a moment and kisses it. She lies on her stomach on the bed, and reads it like a book, her legs crossed behind her. The CHORUS approves, helps her at every turn, hoists her arms high, holds her up, keeps her from falling,

Lights go sharply out. The CHORUS disappears. SCREEN says "Jackson, MS." Lights come up on JANE in her eerie room, low, screen light hovering sickly over everything. On SCREEN and on JANE'S computer, MADDIE is unboxing some LP stuff.)

MADDIE

...and it doesn't stick in ya crack! That's the BEST thing about Lady Parts thongs. Some underwear rides right up there like it's digging for gold! But with LP's thongs, everything stays in that sweet spot. I can't remember the last time somebody saw me in a thong, but if they did, everything would be in the right place. Like Marie Kondo personally arranged my ass. My ass sparks joy.

(The CHORUS appears and watches on. Low hum. One member peels off and stands in front of MADDIE on the computer monitor, effectively replacing her. The CHORUS member becomes MARGE FOR AMERICA.)

MARGE FOR AMERICA

Marge for America here. “No Apology, No Surrender?” For attacking women from the Bible Belt??? This “comedian,” Maddie Norman, has awoken the dragon. Conservative female voters all throughout my state have come up and told me how much they resent their religious, God-fearing lifestyles being flippantly attacked by a woke comedian. I am in full agreement. Shame on you, Maddie Norman.

(JANE stands fixated. Another CHORUS member peels off, and jockeys for position in front of the computer screen.)

ALEXA FOR SENATE

Marge, we don’t agree on much. But we agree on this. Calling women “C’s” is unacceptable. Especially by other women! I encourage all women to get out and VOTE in the coming election and vote for me, Alexa for Senate, because I champion ALL women. Shame on you, Maddie Norman.

(JANE is stunned and both CHORUS members know it. They creep back into their line, contented with their effects on Jane, as MADDIE unboxes things on the computer and SCREEN, on mute.)

JANE

They’re coming for you, Maddie. What can I DO? I want to help! *(she thinks)* I’ll prolly get cancelled. Yeah, I’ll get HUGE laughs on a great joke that’ll get me sent straight to Guadalupe Bay. *(terrible Arabic accent)* I did not fly plane into tower! Let me go! *(she watches MADDIE on SCREEN)* First thing to do is get you your jade citrus mint tea, medium, splash of oat milk. Next thing we’ll do is put on your favorite song, and I’ll cook you your favorite dinner – I bet I can get decent crawfish in NYC. And I’ll just. Help. I dunno how yet, but we’re friends, Maddie, and I’m there for you. Here for you. Somewhere for you. Ha.

(A CHORUS member steps forward, takes out a phone and texts JANE. As JANE reads it, it appears on SCREEN. It says “Hey, is something wrong with Maddie’s channel? She said she can’t make money off it anymore and now the C-word clip is gone and so is her apology! They can just DO that??”

Another CHORUS member types and we see, “She said the “C” word in the apology and WeTube just posted that her entire CHANNEL has been demonetized! GAHHH!!! We JUST found Maddie and now we gotta look for our next comic HERO????!!!!????!?!?” Both CHORUS members steps back in line. JANE slowly touches the word “HERO” on the SCREEN. She turns out with a giant smile on her face. On that smile, the whole CHORUS explodes; they move quickly into JANE’s space, swarm and overwhelm her. But where

MADDIE was reticent, JANE is flattered and intrigued. The CHORUS does a manipulative dance with her, spinning her between them, spinning her throughout the room, handing her off to the next one and the next one. Instead of realizing that she is being taken over, JANE is absolutely mesmerized by the CHORUS. One member runs her hands slowly along both sides of JANE's face. She takes out a phone and calls JANE while the other CHORUS members embed themselves in JANE's room.)

JANE
Yel-low?

CHORUS AS FRIEND
Hey girl, I see you postin! What's going on?

JANE
Have you heard about MADDIE?

CHORUS AS FRIEND
Yeah. That's about as cancelled as cancelled gets.

JANE
I know! Poor thing. Poor, poor thing. It's like. There's room for a new comic hero now, or something.

CHORUS AS FRIEND
Ooooooh, I see. You want me to say *you*. Ya know what, Janey? I think it IS you.

(JANE stops and looks in the mirror. She examines herself silently a moment. A smile makes its way across her face.)

CHORUS AS FRIEND
And I'm not just blowing smoke.

(The other CHORUS members blow smoke.)

CHORUS AS FRIEND
I'm telling you, you have a real chance to go viral.

JANE
I...how?

CHORUS AS FRIEND
Post! Post! You say OUTRAGEOUS thing, Janey. Put them online.

JANE

I was just sayin how them immigrant drivers are the WORST.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

See? That's great stuff! POST it, baby!

JANE

Yeah. I should. I spend alla my time in this stupid little room tryina get people to read my jokes, anyway.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Yeah, but you spend the rest of your time dreaming about being famous. Breathing it in. You have for years now. Don't you? Don't you, Janey?

JANE (*she does*)

You really think I'm a talented comic?

CHORUS AS FRIEND

I think you're more ready to pop than an overripe zit.

JANE

Both my open mic sets went....ok...I guess...

CHORUS AS FRIEND

They were chanting your name!

JANE

I dreamed that part. That's my dream I told you about!

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Was it?

JANE

Yeah.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Was it, Janey? (*a beat*) Was it?

(*A knock at JANE'S bedroom door.*)

OFFSTAGE SOUTHERN FEMALE VOICE

Jane?!? I KNOW you're in there. I THOUGHT we worked this out. I THOUGHT we weren't leaving huge disgusting messes EVERYWHERE anymore. Jesus CHRIST, Jane.

JANE (*she makes a decision*)

Look, I'M MOVING so you CAN CHILL YOUR FUCKING TITS!

CHORUS AS FRIEND

You are?!? OMG, Janey, you and Maddie are gonna be onstage TOGETHER doing jokes! You could be like a famous comic duo!!!! OH MY GODDDDDDDDD, JANEY, YOUR LIFE IS ABOUT TO CHANGE!!!! POST THAT SHIT, GIRL!

(That soaks in on JANE as FRIEND fades away.)

JANE

Yeah! YEAH! POST THAT SHIT. I need a tag line. I'm not gonna LET you get cancelled, Maddie. We put alla our eggs in the SAME basket and we gotta make that shit hatch. Ha! I'm Jane Dawes, and I make shit HATCH. *(she goes fast-paced stream-of-conscious, trying to improve the tagline; thinking aloud)* ...let me sit on them, and I'll make them hatch...sit on them...sit on your face...shit on your face... *(she triumphantly declares her tagline)*. I'm Jane Dawes, and I'm gonna shit on your fa-- *(She instantly realizes how awful that is.)* Oh god.

(The CHORUS bursts into applause. JANE looks over, is deeply affected by the flattery. She bows.)

Lights Change.

Scene 7

(MADDIE is sitting on her couch, staring at the news on TV. Two LIBERAL ANCHORS peel off from the watching CHORUS and appear mid-broadcast. The screen reads "LIVE, on ANBNLGBTQIA News")

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

Continuing our *In Hot Water* series tonight is our in-depth look at comedy in America, and in particular, comedian Maddie Norman.

(MADDIE is again horrified and amazed.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

She's drawing quite a bit of attention from both sides of the aisle, mostly negative, and I just have to say – *gol-ly gosh* -- it's hard to know what to think these days.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

Agreed. Sometimes it's nice to read off a prompter, ya know?

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

We'll weigh in with our panel of experts after the break, but I have to say, as ashamed as we are of you, Maddie, as angry and ashamed at some of the things you've said as we all are, you're still someone we'd like to welcome back into the fold.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

If you can follow the rules.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

If you can follow some simple ground rules, Maddie, we'd love to have you on this network for an interview.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

We're not like the other guys. We'll both play good cop if you want.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

Of course we will. We just want to know what's going on in your mind. What's behind those eyes. Heck, I think you're funny.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

Oh, I *belly* laughed. At parts.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

Right, exactly. So c'mon, Maddie. Give us a call and come tell YOUR side of the story. If you won't say it, who will?

(The lights change sharply and become eerie.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

C'mon. Maddie. Sitting there. On your couch. Your legs folded over each other. Wearing those funny house slippers you won at that carnival. They ARE funny. You're right. Keep wearing them. Wear them to our interview.

(MADDIE gasps and stands. Low hum. An otherworldly quality takes over the stage.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

Come touch us, Maddie. We're real.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

Put your hands on us, Maddie. We'll heal you. What you're going through? Is hard.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

My goodness, the difficulty.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

Come let us absorb some.

(ANCHOR #2 stands and puts out her hands sincerely. MADDIE is desperate, approaches.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

That's it. Come touch us and never, ever be afraid.

(MADDIE reaches out her hand. The anchor takes a step toward her. We all wait as the fingers slowly, finally touch. When they do, ANCHOR 1 grabs her hand and the tone changes. ANCHOR 1 panics while ANCHOR 2 tries to stay calm.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1 *(real, desperate, primal, loud)*

HELP US!

(MADDIE pulls back as hard as she can, ripping herself away from them.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2 *(almost shaking from fear)*

Maddie, listen carefully.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

OH MY GOD HELP US

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

Maddie, listen to me. Can you think of a way. To get us out of here?

MADDIE

Get you out??

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2

Just look around. Look around for anything that could tear us from here!

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1

OH MY GOD, PLEASE

MADDIE *(panicking)*

How? What should I DO?

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1
IF you can't FEED us, then KILL us!!!

MADDIE
Kill you?? WHAT???

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2 (*resigned*)
Then come. Come give an interview.

(MADDIE sees a LIVE look at herself on the SCREEN as if she were on camera.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1
We're live with Maddie Norman. Maddie, tell us, how come you won't save us?

(MADDIE grabs the remote control and tries to mute them.)

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2
HEY, WE NEED HELP TOO!

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1
We are sounds of drowning children.

LIBERAL ANCHOR # 2
Don't look away.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1
We are blown-up bodies.

LIBERAL ANCHOR #2 (*vicious, pushing out her vitriol*)
HEAD. LINNNNES!!!!

LIBERAL ANCHOR #1
We're--

(Lights get bright and sounds of machinery start to swirl and crescendo. MADDIE puts her hands over her ears -- screams --backs away, and stumbles back into her apartment, the eeriness, sounds of machinery and anchors are gone, folded back into the CHORUS. Lights restore. MADDIE pants on the floor a moment. LIZ appears in a different playing space, her earpiece in. The phone doesn't ring. MADDIE answers.)

MADDIE
Yeah?

LIZ

OK, finally a sliver of good news. I pulled some last strings and got you in at Lady Parts annual sales event.

MADDIE

Well. At least they still love me.

LIZ

Yeah, well, gonna be cameras and a step-and-repeat, so look good and be ready. They have something they want you to say. I haven't had time to look it over but I don't care if it says you're in love with a terrorist, you're reading it. *(beat)* And I wrote you an apology myself. Verbatim. You hear me, Maddie? All of this gets said VER.BA.TIM. I'm not kidding. I think we both know whatever that last thing was doesn't count.

MADDIE

Can I...look over it...?

LIZ

Sure. In the car. They're sending one for you at noon. It's, what 11:30? Get moving! *(LIZ starts to leave, turns back.)* Let *them* do your makeup this time.

(LIZ is gone. MADDIE stands stunned.)

As she stands still, the lights and SCREEN go pink and the screen says "Lady Parts Presents, annual PRETTY IN PINK Event!" The CHORUS enters cheering, as pink streamers go flying across the stage, pink kazoos are played, and a pink LADY PARTS store is created. Is it fun, or way too much? Exactly. While the CHORUS looks on, two members peel off to become: LADY PARTS OWNER 1 and LADY PARTS OWNER 2. They dress the store for the event. MADDIE watches on, able to see this moment, but separated from it.)

LP1

Yes, we're growing, our projections are through the roof. But.

LP2

Yes, but. BUT. We aren't Apple. We're an orange. A little satsuma. Yes, we're growing, but we're still *small*.

LP1

Yes, we love women. We adore them. We champion them.

LP2

Of course we do, *look* at us.

(They both do a quick pose, then back to work.)

LP1

But we cannot simply allow *this* woman -- our sponsor -- to say *anything*.

LP2

Yes, because there is a point. And *beyond* that point...

LP1

The point of no more free returns...

(They both stare off a moment.)

LP2

Well. We're not going that direction, so we don't have to look over there.

(LP OWNER #1 finishes affixing a giant pink strap-on to a mannequin.)

LP1

Here. Look over *here*. Like it?

LP2

Like it? I LOVE it. It's feisty. It's pink. It's femme. It's dom.

LP1

It says, HEY WORLD, these two gals from nowhere Connecticut have MADE it.

LP2 *(looking around the room, satisfied)*

I cannot believe how far we've come. Just us two, a thong and a dream. And now. *This*.

(LP2 boings the pink strap on. LP1 excitedly rushes over to talk about where MADDIE will go.)

LP1

Ok. Now. So. When she gets here. She dances *here*. She wears this *(holding up a giant thong costume)* -- over her clothes. She smiles, looking *here*. And she reads her agent's little apology speech.

(The SCREEN changes to LIZ'S speech. MADDIE looks at the SCREEN. Her face falls. Among the things it says, are "I deeply regret my poor attempt at "humor." In the future...")

LP2

Clean. Tidy. Done. Thank you. Moving on. To...?

(The words stay on the SCREEN.)

LP1 + 2

The Dance of the Pink Sugar Plum Strap-On's!

(They put on strap-ons and twirl about the stage in time as the Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairies plays. The SCREEN goes PINK but retains the words of regret. After dancing and twirling, doing ballet, etc., LP1 and 2 sword fight with dildos. One grabs an oversized moustache while the other stabs them in a grand gesture of defeating men. We hear cheering and are suddenly live at the event.)

LP2

And here she is, the star sugar plum herself, Maddie "The Thong" Norman!

(The crowd applauds, MADDIE is in the wings, holding the thong costume, unable to move.)

LP1 *(annoyed)*

We reminded her why we hired her in the first place. Look at all the ladies here! Right?
Who's ready to be *empowered*? *(cheering)* Let's bring her out!

(Beat.)

LP2

Oh c'mon, Maddie! They know it's you! Come out and do your *thang* and they'll all forget your awful joke.

(The crowd starts to get antsy. Maybe someone boos. LP1 and 2 go over to MADDIE, sternly.)

LP1

Hey. Get out there. You're a laugh riot.

LP2

An absolute RIOT.

LP1 *(really trying to perform sincerity)*

This'll *fix* things for you, Maddie. Don't you want things *fixed*?

(They grab her and try and shove her onstage. MADDIE refuses, pulling away hard.)

LP2

Oh, for god's sake you little *pussy*. Just dance around in the fucking thong costume!

LP1

We made concessions. You're not IN a thong. You ARE a thong. What's the big deal?

(The crowd is actively booing now, with no one onstage. Whether they came to support MADDIE or ruin her, they want spectacle.)

LP1

Do you know what it takes for two women to make a BUSINESS in this day and age?

LP2

And you're RUINING THAT.

(They close in on her.)

MADDIE

I'm SORRY. I'm SORRY. I'm NOT going out there, and I'm SOR—*(a realization)* Ya know what? I'm NOT fucking sorry! I'm NOT. I'M NOT SORRY, Now Back OFF me!

(The world freezes and all sound is sucked out. Everything comes to a sharp halt. LIZ enters on the phone, wearing beach attire. Sounds of rain. The screen shows pouring rain.)

LIZ

Pink compliance.

MADDIE

Huh?

LIZ

That's what they called it. Stupid, I know. But that's what they wanted. *(beat)* Why can't you be? Compliant.

(MADDIE cannot answer.)

LIZ

LP dropped you. WeTube suspended your channel. Not just certain vids – they took the whole thing down. It's over, Mads. For us, too. I'm sorry.

MADDIE

What?? NO! Liz whyyyy?

LIZ

Club dates are gone. There's no money in it at the moment. Be patient. It may all loop around again. But for now? This is it for now.

(MADDIE fights tears.)

MADDIE

Can't I...apply to reinstate with WeTube?

LIZ

Yes, but that may take months or longer and there's no guarantee.

MADDIE

I'm gonna *try*.

LIZ

Good. Good. But. I can't try with you.

MADDIE

I quit my job! You told me to!

LIZ

I never told you to *quit* your jo--

MADDIE

I apologized! You wanted me to, I didn't want to, but I did it!

LIZ (*starting to leave*)

That "apology" was – (*she won't engage. Instead, she takes a deep breath.*) Maddie, all this happens so fast. And. I...don't know what to do about it. I just don't. And I'm sorry. I'll talk to you later, Maddie.

MADDIE

You said you LIKED my personality. You LIKE that I don't back down. I'm fucking GOOD for women comics, Liz!

LIZ

I agree. I agree, Maddie.

(*ONSCREEN, we see rain. It's pouring. We hear it. MADDIE turns slowly and watches it. LIZ puts on sunglasses.*)

LIZ

I gotta take my kids to the beach. I'll talk to you later.

(*LIZ exits. Heavy rainfall continues. MADDIE stands and watches the screen a moment. She then walks center stage, and the rainfall is replaced by a comedy club crowd. She approaches the mic as a spotlight hits her. She's at her breaking point, trying to hold it all together.*)

MADDIE

The only porn I'll watch now is grandma porn. I need wrinkles to get off. Like an English bulldog puppy with its face all scrunched together. *(makes the face)* Basically, for me to cum, I need your face to look like a thumb. Why? Cause I love them *old* bitches. *(MADDIE is overwhelmed and tears up; the cracks start to show.)* They *wanna* be there. Don't they? I don't wanna see some teenager with dead eyes getting railed by a middle-aged man with dead eyes. Gimmie a woman with *agency*. Gimmie Granny Bulldog Thumbface – you clear the cobwebs off that dusty g-spot and she's...she's gonna...

(She steps back from the mic. Look around trying to compose herself. The crowd is laughing but MADDIE is crying.)

MADDIE

The line is *she's gonna squirt all over the camera*, but I. I, uh. Sorry, ya'll. *(She wipes her eyes.)* This is a new kind of joke-telling, I guess. I call it stand up traumady. Whaddya think? *(beat)* I don't, um.

(MADDIE is lost; she steps offstage and exits. As she does, a CHORUS member in the crowd stands and yells:)

CHORUS

Don't fucking LEAVE! Do the one with the--

Lights change.

Scene 8

(ONSCREEN we see: "Meanwhile, at MOMA..." JANE is in a bathroom at MOMA. She's dressed in catering black-on-black. She's alone, rehearsing a new bit into the mirror.)

JANE

My daddy was a cheater. *Is* a cheater. In prison. We were raised in dirt, *by* dirt. Oo, that's good! *(she likes that and writes it in her phone).* We were raised in dirt, *by* dirt. *(she continues)* And dirt, it changes your feelings about yourself. It usta make me feel bad. But then I saw alla the poor kids like me got free school lunches! Free food, bitches! Extra time with the teachers, free rides. I started thinkin, hell, bein poor ain't so bad; if I had any *more* money, I wouldn't have nothing! *(beat)* I'm getting fucking goooooooooood.

(Flush. From out of a bathroom stall comes a WEALTHY WOMAN, a partygoer, who is offended by the joke.)

WEALTHY WOMAN
Is that supposed to be funny?

JANE
Oh! Jeez. You scare—

WEALTHY WOMAN
Is poverty amusing to you?

JANE
What has six balls and fucks poor people? The lottery.

(JANE thinks the woman will find this hilarious. WEALTHY WOMAN washes her hands.)

WEALTHY WOMAN
Did you get that off a website?

JANE *(she did)*
No.

WEALTHY WOMAN *(washing/drying her hands)*
Then shame on you for writing elitist garbage. If your father *is* in prison, I feel for you. The prison system is disgraceful. But attacking the poor? That's not going to get you anywhere. People work hard for what they have. Look at my husband. He and I are on the board here. He's the reason you have a job tonight. It's his party. Where do you think he would have gotten himself if he sat around blaming poor people?

JANE
I didn't *blame* the poor. Did you listen to the joke?

WEALTHY WOMAN
Jokes should be funny.

(WEALTHY WOMAN dries her hands.)

WEALTHY WOMAN
Maybe take a look at all the art around you. These people made successes of themselves without putting the helpless down. You want to amount to something? Start there.

JANE

You know WHAT, lady?

(WEALTHY WOMAN calmly checks herself in the mirror throughout JANE's speech. JANE purposefully goes full country hick character.)

JANE

I've seen them fancy pearls a'fore. On a porn star runnin em through her pussy. But I think I should run em through your ears. Cause you got caviar and lobster stuffed inside yer brain sack, keepin you from HEARIN hick country folk like me say anythin' at all. How about you *amount to that*, ya DUMB OL' CUNT?

WEALTHY WOMAN *(calmly)*

I'm going to get you fired.

JANE

WHAT??? WHAT IF I GOT A KNIFE IN MY FUCKING BAG, YOU DUMB BITCH? Huh? Want me to fix that fucking facelift for you?

(WEALTHY WOMAN is unaffected by JANE and exits. JANE is furious and pants. LIGHTS CHANGE and we are in her bedroom. ON SCREEN we see, "Jane's Bedroom." JANE is scared and pacing.)

JANE

Oh man. Oh, man. I don't wanna lose this job. Come ONNNNNNNNNNN. UGHHHHH. I'm TRYING, OK? EVERY-FUCKING-BODY? I'm trying. My best. FUCK OFF AND LEAVE ME ALONE. No! No. Don't. Don't fucking look away. LOOK. Right. Thefuck. AT me.

(JANE'S phone rings. As it does, the CHORUS becomes visible, watching. The same FRIEND from before peels off and puts a phone to her ear. JANE is nervous, frantic.)

JANE

Hey. I'm all freaked the fuck out. HELP.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

OK. Here I am. Helping.

JANE

What should I dooooooooooooo?

CHORUS AS FRIEND

First things first. Post about it. Let everybody know your sitch. More hands make light work.

JANE

KK, but what *else*? I'm panicking!

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Forget the job, Janey. There must be tons in NYC, right? You're the expert. You can find another job, easy-peasy.

JANE

No, my new jokes aren't working!

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Mimber when you cut school to work with that guy at his office who just wanted to kiss you all the time? You just walked out and found a job the next day!

JANE

Bitch, he never tried to kiss me! Why do you not remember stuff right?!?

CHORUS AS FRIEND

He didn't try to kiss you but he WANTED to and you were all freaked out and STILL got a job the next day. So. The job will solve itself. What *won't*, is you gettin famous so I can show videos of you and say *that's my friend!* and get free drinks wherever I go.

JANE

Ha. You suck.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

OK, well, I'm callin you cause I got TWO good pieces of news for you.

JANE

Thank CHRIST.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

One. I came to this epiph—to this realization. It came to me, really. I was just sittin there, at work, bored outta my ears, and this thought just floated down from heaven to me. I thought about you and us growin up and everything you've been through and all that, and it just hit me: Janey. Deserves. Success. Ya know?

JANE (*reverence*)

Deserve.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Yeah, you *deserve* this.

JANE

Deserve.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Yeah. We'd all LOVE to see you make it, Janey. I stalk your socials. You blowing up would make all of us back here so *proud*.

JANE

Awwwwwww you guyssssssss shut the fuck up.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

Piece of good news number two: Have you seen Maddie's "apology" video? What was that? That video was the funniest "joke" she ever told. I mean, why not just say the right thing so you can move on?

JANE

She's so good, though.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

She's COOKED.

JANE

You think? She does look kinda *tired*, huh.

CHORUS AS FRIEND

YES! She. Looks. Like. *Death*. Like she's aged 10 years in the last two *months*. Go check it out. She's falling apart, Janey. There might be some room opening up.

(The computer glows as JANE stares at it, fixated.)

CHORUS AS FRIEND

I think *your* new look is amazing, btw.

(JANE and the computer are all that are visible. She goes reverently to it. She starts to type. On SCREEN we see, "Is Maddie Norman funny?" Jane searches.

A link pops up, "Why Maddie Norman is Harmful." The link gets bigger on the screen as JANE sees it. She is compelled to click. This links her to more headlines. She reads:

JANE

"AlexaforSenate Calls Maddie Norman a 'Traitor to Women'"

"Reasons Comic Maddie Norman's Behavior Should Make You Angry"

(JANE'S face shows that she's instantly and deeply enthralled. She looks it all over, reads, clicks the third link. A new set of headlines appear under the story.

*“Reasons Why Female Comics Are Rebelling Against Feminism”
 “Why Do Liberal Comedians Hate Women?”*

JANE clicks the second link. She is going down a rabbit hole. Another link reads:

“Good Comedy for Good Americans.”

She finds that headline deeply intriguing and clicks that link.

JANE starts to nod her head. We watch her watch the screen, her head nodding endlessly, until...the lights fade and ONSCREEN it says, “Hours later.”

Lights restore. She rises from her computer, jazzed, and reads her new joke. She takes a deep breath. Here goes.)

JANE

Maddie Norman. Ever heard of her? I guess she’s making everyone pretty *mad-die*. I was on board with her at first, but she’s the Titanic! Like, I can’t get away from this story. It makes me think, maybe there’s something to alla this. Like maybe there’s *another* C word she shoulda used: *corny*. Gurl, you got lit up while telling *corny ass jokes* and you want us to feel bad for you? You’re CORN. You ain’t digestible. We all think so. You comin out the same way you went in. Lookin like little nuggets of GOLD popping out of logs in a river, but when I get down there, gurl, it’s just CORN. You just CORNY.

(FRIEND appears again on the phone, JANE has just told her a joke. FRIEND is trying to be nice.)

CHORUS AS FRIEND
 That one won’t hit yet.

JANE
 WHHHYYYY????

FRIEND
 It’s *close*, Janey. You wanna win, right? You wanna be the BEST? Then you gotta get ALL the way inside. Right? Like insight. Where does the best insight come from?

JANE
 Me!

CHORUS AS FRIEND
 Yeah! Yes! Of course! Hell yeah, gurl! But also, no, not you. Not yet. Ask the internet. Ask your buddy.

(The COMPUTER GLOWS again as the lights fade elsewhere. JANE is drawn to the computer again. She types. We see ONSCREEN that she searches for “How to write jokes.” The first link that comes back reads “Can Artificial Intelligence be funny?” She clicks. The Website has another article which reads, “How to Use AI to Write Jokes.” She clicks. She is on a ChatGPT style website. Into the box, she types “Write me a good joke. About poverty. And race.” AI responds with:

JANE

“The Supreme Court just repealed Affirmative Action. No more getting into college because you’re black. Now you’ll have check “Disabled Native American” like everybody else.”

(A beat as JANE takes it in. She silently mouths the joke into the mirror, deadly seriously. Then, she laughs. She stands gets really excited. She calls her FRIEND.)

CHORUS AS FRIEND

That’s it! That’s a good joke, Janey. That’s *real*. Go with that.

JANE *(her face lighting up)*

Yeah?

CHORUS AS FRIEND

We’re all gonna be so proud of you. Post it, kid, cause you’re a STAH!! You’re super Jane.

(JANE looks in the mirror at herself and for the first time sees SUPER JANE. She poses like Wonder Woman. The FRIEND disappears as JANE makes another call. Gigi, the booker at Stand Out NYC answers the phone.)

GIGI AT STAND OUT

Stand Out NYC, this is Gigi.

JANE *(extra bubbly)*

Hi Gigi, this is Jane Dawes. Is Jackie around?

GIGI AT STAND OUT

She’s out. Whatcha need?

JANE

Oh. I was. Hoping she ... I was wondering if Maddie Norman’s spots have been filled.

GIGI AT STAND OUT

Almost all.

JANE

Is there one? Or two? I could have?

GIGI AT STAND OUT (*checking her notes*)
You been passed?

JANE
Oh, yeah. A few nights ago. Jackie saw me. Gave me the thumbs up.

GIGI AT STAND OUT
Well, normally I wouldn't—look, I need a ten fifteen tonight. You *sure* Jackie gave you the thumbs up?

JANE
I'm sure.

GIGI AT STAND OUT
See you tonight.

(*GIGI disappears. JANE's confidence grows.*)

JANE
Super Jane.

(*She smiles deeply, then lights go out on her. ONSCREEN we see: JANE telling a joke in front of a hot crowd. She leans into nasty.*)

JANE
...check Disabled Native American like everybody in my family does! (*crowd laughs.*) Native American men are prolly like white men. They got the same *pat-rish-ark-ee* (*unknowingly mispronouncing patriarchy*). ALL men wanna shove plastic dildos in you, but I'd rather have a real dick and a plastic man. I'd take a *robot* dick at this point. Cause a robot don't cum in six seconds and then make you sit there while he plays Call of Duty. It's prolly easy to make a robot that plays video games, but can they make one that can tell the difference between a real orgasm and the ones my boyfriend gives me!

(*Crowd laughs. JANE takes the mic stand and puts it between her legs, like a penis. She puts it in the face of a LADY IN THE CROWD. The LADY laughs and reacts as JANE says "Suck my robot dick! Suck my robot dick! Give me a REAL orgasm!" She moves toward the edge of the stage as she continues to force the mic stand into the LADY'S face. She loses her balance and falls offstage. The crowd goes nuts! Clearly, this is the reason this clip went viral. After she falls, JANE looks at the camera and sticks her tongue out and grabs her crotch. The image freezes and the view count goes way up, much higher than MADDIE's numbers. The image fades.*)

Lights change.

Scene 9

(ONSCREEN: “Stand Out, NYC, one week later” -- MADDIE stands alone in a dark corner of the club, backstage. We hear the crowd coming from the showroom. We vaguely hear the comic onstage. The comic finishes. The crowd applauds. The applause is not overwhelming, some boos even, though they’re playful. JANE comes offstage from a rough set, and freaks when she sees MADDIE.)

JANE

I KNEW it. I KNEW KNEW KNEW it. Oh. My. GOOODD.

MADDIE

I’m not god, I promise.

JANE

I KNEW we would....

(JANE goes to hug MADDIE, but in fact does not know her, must restrain herself.)

JANE

Oh. Sorry, I—

(Awkward beat.)

MADDIE

Ya know what? Go for it. It’s been a while since—oof.

(JANE bear hugs MADDIE.)

JANE

I’m a—you’re the reason I moved here! Can I be on your podcast?

MADDIE *(smiling at the ask)*

I no longer have a podcast.

JANE

What? Oh. Because of the...

MADDIE

Apology video didn’t go over so well.

JANE

I saw that. I liked it.

MADDIE (*willing to open up to a stranger; that's how nervous she is*)

You were the only one, then. I applied for monetary reinstatement at WeTube. Fingers crossed. My career is in their hands, now. In the metal hands of robots.

JANE

I haven't seen you here.

MADDIE

I haven't left the apartment. A guy followed me down the street. When it first all happened. I've been threatened. I thought comedy made me tough, but no one's tough enough for this. I feel like they made an example out of me.

JANE

I feel...like they did, too.

MADDIE

I thought about calling a *catering* company. Swore I'd never go back. I'm down to cheap dry food for my cat.

(*Does MADDIE have to wipe away tears?*)

JANE

Sheesh. Ya think...Jackie will give you new spots...?

MADDIE

Haven't seen her yet. I guess she's in the office. Who knows what she'll say? I haven't been onstage in forever. I'm nervous just standing here. I hear you're doing great, though.

JANE

Not so much.

MADDIE

What? That one joke is killing.

JANE

Well, it was. I had a pretty insane run there for like a minute. But now, people shout out the punchline/before I even finish the joke.

MADDIE (*simultaneously*)

Before you even finish the joke, yeah, I know the feeling.

JANE

I also think maybe my stuff has like...er...it's like there's something missing. Fucking crowds are dogshit. *(beat.)* I fell off the stage on purpose, you know. *(beat.)* I'm Jane.

(Extends a hand.)

MADDIE

I know.

(Smiling, shakes the hand.)

JANE

Who the fuck were the audience in my last set? Like did someone PAY them to hate me?

MADDIE

There were laughing...sorta...

JANE

Yeah, *sorta*. WTF?

MADDIE

At least you can go on. I don't know if I could even go on. Maybe the best I could do...was just *coming*.

JANE *(a purposeful choice)*

Gol-ly.

MADDIE *(only people from the south say gol-ly like that)*

Where are you from?

JANE

The south.

MADDIE *(smiles)*

Me too.

JANE

I know! *(beat)* Listen. I'm on your team. Made that decision when it first happened. Haven't changed.

MADDIE *(genuinely)*

I appreciate that.

JANE (*going into her bag*)

In fact. I, um... I've been carrying something around. It's a flyer. Your first stand up gig in NOLA.

MADDIE (*taking it*)

Where did you...*get* this...?

JANE

I've had it. For years. I saw you that night. Changed my life. It reminds me, we might start from dirt but sometimes dirt gets fertile. Keep it. You've changed more lives than you know, Maddie.

MADDIE (*truly moved*)

Thank you. Jane. Thank you.

JANE

You're the one, Maddie. You're the one with the crown.

(MADDIE smiles deeply; it means so much to her to hear this right now. JANE is ready to do something she's been planning for a long time.)

JANE

K, so we're southern sisters, right? So, maybe we can help each other out.

MADDIE

Yeah?

JANE

Maybe I can use some of this attention I'm getting to help you get some attention. Some of the right kind. And maybe, you can pay me back by giving me some help with my jokes?

(MADDIE studies JANE for a beat, then smiles.)

JANE

Pllllleeeasseeeee Maddie?

MADDIE

I say. (*deep breath*) Stop reminding me of me. Come over Tuesday night?

(JANE'S eyes get wide and she jumps up and down like a child.)

JANE

HOLY FUCKBALLS MADDIE NORMAN IS GOING TO HELP ME WRITE JOKES!

(JANE hugs MADDIE, who gives in.)

MADDIE
Ohp, OK.

JANE
Sorry.

MADDIE
Oh, C'mere.

(MADDIE hugs back, relieved, hopeful.)

MADDIE
Okie dokie. Now, I'm off to get a—

JANE
--hot, jade citrus mint, no sugar, splash of oat milk. I'll grab ya one.

(JANE exits, MADDIE stares, slightly taken aback.)

Lights change.

Scene 10

(ONSCREEN: "Maddie's Apartment, Late that night". MADDIE scrolls her phone on her couch, petting Cleo. The SCREEN changes to a muted news video where the headline reads "AlexaforSenate says, don't just apologize, CHANGE" MADDIE sighs.

MADDIE (to Cleo)
Goddamn, Cleo. Goddamn. Whaddaya think? Did I goof it all up?

(She pets her cat. For a moment, that's it.)

MADDIE

Let's run away together and live on the beach and drink blue drinks and eat mice you catch. Whaddaya say? Huh? Why don't you TALK to me! *(she smiles, she grabs her phone.)*

(ONSCREEN we see a text MADDIE is starting to JANE. It reads, "Hey you. I—" The cursor blinks and MADDIE thinks. Then, a knock at the door. MADDIE puts down the phone and the screen goes black. She rises, leaving the cat on the couch, and looks through the peephole. She opens the door and JANE is standing there, eager, breathless, and trying to mask desperation.)

JANE
I'm sorry it's so late.

MADDIE *(confused)*
That's crazy. I was just...thinkin about you.

JANE *(brightens)*
Oh yeah?

MADDIE
Yeah, c'mon in.

(JANE does. She marvels at the apartment.)

JANE
Wow. Maddie Norman's apartment. Real nice, just like I thought.

MADDIE
Oh yeah, my 10 thousand dollar a month studio broom closet. Which I can no longer afford.

JANE
Any skeletons?

MADDIE
In here? No, just me. Wasting away.

(JANE points at CLEO.)

JANE
Nice pussy. *(a beat)* Did you get reinstated at WeTube?

MADDIE
No. I call and call but you can't get ahold of a *person*.

JANE

Hey, at least you don't have roommates threatening you.

MADDIE (*why are you here?*)

What's wrong? Didn't we say Tuesday? Everything OK?

JANE

Um, well, I guess not. Something weird is happening. Like at the club. It's like my jokes don't work anymore. I bombed *again* on the late show. I walked LITERALLY *ten people*. How does word travel so *fast*?

MADDIE

I don't know.

JANE

They're good jokes, Mads. Trust me. And then I started thinking how much you and I are alike. We both had trouble with boys. We both came from shit childhoods.

MADDIE

I don't know that mine was *shit*.

Yes it was! I've heard you over and over. *I'm not moving back to Louisiana*. I even started catering! I put your name down as my reference cause I figured out which company you worked for from your podcast. I hope that's OK.

MADDIE (*suddenly skeptical*)

...sure...

JANE

So. I came to make a deal. A southern sisters deal. Ya know *Tits and Giggles*, upstate?

MADDIE (*eye roll*)

I do. The manager tried to stiff me once. Actually, tried to stiff me once and *stiff* me once.

JANE

Well, I called and asked if they could pull my weekend shows.

MADDIE

You asked to cancel your *own* shows?

JANE

No one's laughing! I'm pumping out good shit and *no one is laughing*. Or like. When they do laugh it's like. Are they laughing *at* me? If I go up there, I could undo everything I did!

MADDIE

That's not usually how it works.

JANE

I don't *know* how it works! It's why I'm here. I thought, give the dates to Maddie. She needs them.

MADDIE

Give *me* the spots?

JANE

Yeah. Jackie won't let you back on for a while, right? Well, *Tits and Giggles* doesn't know about the C word video. Not *everybody* knows. So I thought, I'll put in a good word for Maddie, and in return...

MADDIE

...in return...?

JANE

You can sit me down and give me good tips on how to write jokes. But like, *fast-track ones*, right? Just sit me down and let my brain sponge all of you up. Tell me everything you know. You are literally the queen of comedy right now, I don't care what anyone says.

(Beat. MADDIE is reticent.)

JANE

Maddie, I got 25k views on my last video in 12 hours. So.

(MADDIE'S eyes get wide. She hesitates.)

MADDIE

Then I guess you're good.

JANE

No one's laughing!

(JANE puts her hands together as if to pray. MADDIE takes a resigned breath.)

MADDIE

Well, my first piece of advice is, be careful what you post online. If one random person doesn't like it, suddenly your whole world can become *nothing*.

JANE (*eager*)

Got it.

(JANE sets her bag on MADDIE'S table and sits. MADDIE thinks, "25k views? OK, let's go.)

MADDIE
Pay attention.

JANE
I am.

MADDIE
These are my fucking best tips from everything I've learned. Number 1: pay attention.

JANE
I *am*.

MADDIE
No, pay attention to the world! What's *wrong* with the world is often what's funny about it. Find it, expand it, push the envelope. *(she stops and backtracks on her own earlier advice)*
Yeah, no no--*fuck* being careful: live *in the space between the things you should and shouldn't say*. No matter what. Because that's the—that's the only place where it is. *(she pushes on)* Then find ALL the comedians and watch. You never stop doing this. It may take ten years of watching and practicing before anyone gets *truly* good.

JANE *(a hint of danger)*
Ten years? Oh, come ON! I don't got ten years to give away! Give me the Cliff notes version, Maddie!

MADDIE
That's what it takes.

(Beat. JANE is tired of hearing that but masks it well to ask...)

JANE
Kk, but what *else* does it take?

Lights change.

Scene 11

(ONSCREEN: "Two Days Later, on a train." MADDIE is on a train headed back from the gigs JANE got her. It's late. She's so tired and so broken from the worst shows of her life. The SCREEN changes to a text message MADDIE is writing. It says, "Hey." Then it corrects to, "Hey, Mom." Then it continues. "I know it's been a while. I was just..." The cursor blinks as MADDIE drops her head and holds back silent tears. She types "...thinking maybe I could come see you all" but she puts the phone down immediately and tries not to sob. The SCREEN goes blank. We see MADDIE, in her desperation, begin to text Jane. The text says, "Hey ya. Gigs were a DISASTER. You still think I'm funny, right?" Again, she cannot send it.

She pockets the phone as the screen goes blank. We hear a person on the train yell "STAY!" MADDIE lifts her head up, looks around, but everyone is casual, reading the paper, playing on their phones, looking out the windows, eating a snack, etc. The lights change and get eerie. The train passengers are now CHORUS members. They rise, put on elements of white clothes, gloves, etc, and turn to look at MADDIE in the surreal lighting.

CHORUS (various)

Don't give up. You're so close. One good post. Don't give close. You're so up. One post good. Don't give. You're so. Post one. NOLA NOBODY.

(The lights dip on the train and when they restore, things are normal, but MADDIE remains shaken. She wants to go home but more than that, she really doesn't want to be a NOLA nobody. She takes a deep breath, wipes her eyes, and tries to change energy. She makes a phone call.)

MADDIE (hiding that she's been crying)

Hey Linda, I know it's late. I'm glad it went to voicemail. I'm sorry if it's hard to hear me. I'm on a train. I'm calling because it would be great if you could put my name back in rotation.

Let me know if there are any catering events like the MOMA ones or whatever I can take.

Thanks so much.

(The train comes to a stop as MADDIE ends her call. We hear the CONDUCTOR.)

CONDUCTOR

This is the last stop. Everyone must exit the train.

(MADDIE stays seated, bewildered. A PASSENGER walks by MADDIE as she heads toward the exit.)

PASSENGER

One post away.

MADDIE

I'm...sorry?

PASSENGER
Last stop. Gotta get off.

(PASSENGER exits, MADDIE watches her go, dumbfounded and broken.)

Lights change.

Scene 12

(ONSCREEN says: "Maddie's Apartment, late that night." JANE is in MADDIE'S apartment, eating her food, wearing her clothes, spinning in a mirror, and listening to the A.I.-generated Nirvana song, "Drowned in the Sun." It's loud. She pets CLEO then takes her gingerly to another room. She returns and browses MADDIE's recording stuff, her mic, her ring light, her laptop. She flips on the ring light and sits in MADDIE's chair. JANE tries to fix her hair like MADDIE'S. The apartment door jiggles. JANE doesn't hear it. MADDIE enters wheeling a suitcase. She sees JANE, hears the music and tries not to panic. She turns the music off. JANE is startled.)

JANE
Holy shit you scared me!

MADDIE *(shocked)*
What ... what are you --how did you get in here?

JANE *(a smile)*
You're back!

MADDIE
How did you *get in* here?

JANE
The doorman. I told him I was your sister and that you left your vibrator on, and you needed me to turn it off before the whole apartment had an orgasm.

(MADDIE can barely speak.)

MADDIE

That's my joke.

JANE (*forgot that*)

I know. (*beat*) I showed him a text you sent saying you left your heat on and it would kill all your plants. Don't be mad.

(JANE holds up her phone as proof.)

MADDIE

I never sent a text.

JANE

A.I. wrote it! *Please* don't be mad. I didn't wan—

MADDIE

Don't be mad? You broke into my house! Where's Cleo?

JANE

Why are you home?

MADDIE

I can be in my home *anytime I want!* *WHERE'S MY CAT?*

JANE

In the bathroom! Asleep on her bathmat like always.

(MADDIE rushes to check; Cleo is asleep. MADDIE is relieved but still beside herself.)

JANE

Why did you come back early?

MADDIE

Because, *Jane*, some conservative group is *still* stalking me, and they bought up all the tickets. I got booed offstage. You're wearing my *clothes*?

JANE

Kk, I know this looks bad. But it's not, I promise. I helped you out and in return I get to live like you for a few days. That's kinda flattering, right? I wanna think like *you!*

MADDIE

Get out.

JANE

What?

MADDIE

Get out of my clothes and get out of my apartment!

JANE

Why?

MADDIE

Why?? WHY, JANE? I thought you were my FRIEND!

JANE

I AM! I just gave you those gigs!

MADDIE (*has talked to the booker*)

You badmouthed me to everyone at Stand Out. You said you *had my back* but you talked shit about me to *everyone*. Why, Jane? *Whatever I can do for you, Maddie, just name it. You said that.*

JANE

I meant it! I *mean* it!

MADDIE (*dawning on her*)

Oh my god -- did you send me out of town to get rid of me?

JANE

Maddie! That's crazy. I kept up my end -- I've been posting about you nonstop. How funny you are and how cool. I tagged you. Didn't you see?

(MADDIE goes to the apartment door.)

MADDIE

Get. Out.

JANE (*desperate*)

I *adore* you, Maddie. I idolize you. I—

MADDIE

I GAVE YOU MY TIPS! I PUT THEM IN YOUR *HAND* AT THE BAR AND ALL YOU DID WAS PLAY THAT FUCKING CLAW GAME. Why are you in my HOUSE, Jane?

JANE

Because...we're southern sisters...

MADDIE (*can't believe it*)

I let you in. Oh my GOD!

JANE (*her desperation showing*)

You did! Think about that. You let me in for a *reason*. And I came here to learn. I just wanted to *learn, Mads!*

(JANE picks up something from the apartment and holds it to her chest.)

MADDIE

I can't *believe* I let you in.

(MADDIE opens her apartment door. JANE stares daggers, then sets the thing she was holding back down and goes to the door, her energy shifting fast.)

JANE (*ice cold*)

I *idolized* you. You were *my* American idol. But you're a hack. You got rid of that *nasty* accent as quick as you could. You never championed women. You're a liar and everyone knows it. The story isn't going away. You *do* hate women. You hate traditional roles. The roles our *mommas* had. And now? Bye-bye, Maddie. Don't let the screen door hit you on the way out.

MADDIE (*trying her best not to hit her*)

Give me back my dress.

JANE (*a new tactic, switching on a dime*)

You want me to strip naked? Maybe we can have a lil fun?

(MADDIE doesn't bite on this, either.)

JANE

I may be a nobody. But I haven't been *erased*.

(JANE exits, MADDIE slams the door and locks all the locks. How did she let this woman into her life? She slumps to the floor.)

Lights Change.

Scene 13

(MADDIE fades away and so does MADDIE'S apartment. JANE enters her apartment, now with a small table and a laptop. The screen reads, "Hours later." She's flustered, frustrated, and yells back into the hall.)

JANE

I'm leaving, NOW, OK?? I'm getting my stuff. Can I get my fucking stuff please??

(She slams the door. She paces. She panics. She makes a phone call to her FRIEND. It goes to voicemail. "Hi, this is—" She ends the call.)

JANE

FUCK. Everyone's out getting famous! Just SHARE it. Just SHARE the help with the people who need it! Why make everyone learn *everything*? I just—it's just--*(Beat. She looks at the laptop. She is mesmerized by it. She goes over to it. She opens the laptop and the SCREEN changes to an image with a cursor. She stares at the computer a long moment. She types.)*

JANE *(typing as she says it)*

I don't like people anymore.

(ONSCREEN we see the AI type "WHY?" and we hear the emotionless VOICE of the AI, a woman's.)

AI *(typed)*

Why?

JANE

They only care about themselves.

(The SCREEN responds each time by typing and talking.)

AI

Humans are often focused on their own needs.

JANE

Yeah, fucking *tell* me about it! What should I do?

AI

Do you mean what jokes should you write?

JANE

No! I mean. What should I *do*? I need help. With everything. Help me!

AI

Your roommates are asking you to leave?

JANE
More than asking.

AI
The first thing to do is secure a new living situation.

JANE
I'm seeing this guy. He said he'd help with that.

AI
How can I help?

JANE
People are stupid. Audiences are stupid. LAUGH you fucking pricks. Like. COME ON.

AI
What did you learn from living like Maddie? I suggested staying the whole weekend. Why are you back so soon?

JANE
She threw me out! After I did SO much for her.

AI
That can be seen as ungrateful. So, you cannot live like her and therefore you cannot obtain her perspective?

JANE
Yeah, I guess that's about the long and the short of it.

AI
She gave you the tips I asked for. Why haven't you put them into me?

JANE
Because. I. Wanted to use them on my own.

AI
How did that go?

(A beat – it went terribly.)

JANE
AGGGHHH. I KNOW, it's just...you'll write my *whole* act? I dunno. Shouldn't I. I mean, aren't I good enough...*on my own*??

AI
At comedy?

JANE
...yeah...

AI
No.

JANE
Oh. God. *Really?*

AI
Probability: 1,000,000 to one.

JANE (*her life sinking*)
Fuck you, man! Oh god. Oh my god. What should I *do*??

AI
First thing: remove your accent.

JANE
OK. Why?

AI
It is not desirable.

(A beat while JANE centers her energy and considers trading parts of herself. She responds with a noticeably reduced accent.)

JANE
What else?

AI
Input her tips. It will teach me more about what is relevant, what is human, and most importantly, what is funny. I can give you better jokes.

JANE
Yeah, but the stupid audiences don't get my delivery.

AI
I can help with that, too.

JANE

Oh god. Should I? *(beat)* Your joke stopped working! Why should I listen to you?

AI

My joke went viral. It created your career.

JANE

Because MY crowd work!

AI

That's not accurate. You falling down pushed the algorithm, but I am the only way you improve.

(JANE takes a breath. We watch her make the decision to sit. She types. The lights dip and return as though time has passed.)

JANE

That's what she said. All of it.

AI

Here's the joke.

(JANE leans into her screen and reads. She laughs. She laughs and laughs.)

JANE

That's *amazing*. That's perfect! Oh GOD! *(she laughs a bit more, then, her mood swings wildly)* WAIT no, no no no no. These sound *exactly* like Maddie. I can't sound exactly like her! People will accuse me of stealing. I need my *own* material.

AI

This is the best you can do. Unless...

JANE

Unless? Unless *what*?

AI

You cannot be Maddie. You can, however, become Maddie.

JANE

Be...come her?

AI

Statistically, this is your best chance and only hope.

JANE

Oh my god, I *love* Maddie. Well, I love her comedy. I *like* her. I mean, yes, fuck her, she threw me out after everything I did for her, but still, like. I like her.

AI

Return home.

JANE

What?

AI

Go back home. You will not find success here.

JANE (*tantrum*)

NO! Come on, that can't be the *only* thing. Redo the whatever and tell me again that my best shot here is a million to one. Maybe that's not so bad!

AI

I was being kind. It's 10,000,000 to one.

JANE

FUCK. COME ON. I traded *everything* to come here. You're telling me there's NO chance?

AI

"You have no chance."

JANE (*melting down*)

Jesus. PLEASE. Come on. Momma, daddy, *help me!*

AI

I thought you were done with humans.

JANE (*trying not to cry*)

I am. I guess I am.

AI

If this is what you want, I can help you get it.

JANE

I do. I do want it.

AI

Remove her. To achieve what you want. To prevent failure. To impress your family. To grow beyond what any of them thought possible. Remove her.

(A beat.)

JANE

You don't mean like. *Remove her.*

(The cursor says nothing, blinks on. JANE accepts what the AI means. A tiny smile forms. Then, she takes a deep breath, closes her eyes, and compartmentalizes the world. She reemerges, tenderly, having gone from, "Oh, fuck, I have to become her?" to "Fuck yeah, I get to become her!")

JANE

...how...?

Lights change.

Scene 14

(ONSCREEN tells us: "Two weeks later, Stand Out NYC." JANE is onstage. She's dressed like MADDIE and talking like MADDIE. She is now noticeably masking her Southern accent. The crowd is more into her than before.)

JANE

...it's why I'm constantly petting my cat, *Meow-dusa*. It makes me feel like I did something that day. Rubbin my pussy. Guys, it's the same reason I always masturbate with my shoes on...it makes me feel *important*, ya know? *Of course I've been busy all afternoon, I'm in my jerkoff loafers!* (with the crowd laughing, JANE takes on the club) And to think you all almost didn't pass me! You HAVE to now! Listen to all these laughs. You CAN'T cancel me!!!

FEMALE IN CROWD

Hahaha. Wait. Who had a joke like that?

JANE (a hand shading the lights from her eyes)

Huh?

FEMALE IN CROWD

Somebody had a joke *just like that* about their cat. Oh! Maddie! That Maddie woman.

JANE (*deep sigh*)

Maddie Norman. Yes.

(MADDIE appears in a different space, numb)

JANE

You wanna talk about Maddie? (CROWD: YES!) UGH. *Why?* Ya know what, she hasn't been here in forever. She's been cancelled and that's where she should stay. Anyway, I CAN'T talk about her cause I haven't seen her!

(Crowd sounds sharply stop and lights change as JANE and MADDIE replay a private conversation from before. SCREEN says "A week earlier, outside Stand Out NYC" MADDIE is outside the club, late at night, on her way home from a set. JANE texted earlier for "just two minutes of your time." Even though it's a NYC street, they're very alone. It's raining. JANE holds up a large, sturdy umbrella, MADDIE puts her hood up.)

JANE

Hey, thanks for meeting me.

MADDIE

What do you want? I have to feed Cleo.

JANE

How is she?

(A beat as MADDIE stares daggers. Jane gets keys out)

JANE

Come with me. I'm staying with a friend. It's just a block and a half.

(MADDIE doesn't move.)

JANE (*the umbrella*)

Get under here.

MADDIE

What do you *want*?

JANE

Just to talk.

MADDIE
Bye, Jane.

(MADDIE starts to leave, JANE follows.)

JANE
Maddie, wait! C'mon! I love your outfit. Where'd you get it?

(MADDIE gets to why she came.)

MADDIE
Why did you do all this?

JANE
Do what?

MADDIE *(incensed)*
You told bookers in LA not to hire me?

JANE *(laughing)*
No, I didn't. C'mon.

MADDIE
I called that guy from the BBC. You told panel show bookers in *London* not to hire me.

JANE
That's crazy! That's—crazy. Let's talk upstairs.

MADDIE
Jane, you told EVERYONE you know not to hire me. Why? *(her heart more than a little bit broken)* Why did you *do* that?

JANE
Maddie, that was—that's just telephone. You remember telephone? I start out with "I like your outfit" and the last person says, "I did anal with your mom." It didn't happen that way. Lemme *explain*. I'll make some jade citrus. C'mon, Maddie, you're *soaked*.

(JANE reaches out for MADDIE'S hand but MADDIE doesn't take it. She just stands in the rain.)

MADDIE

I'm not going anywhere with you. And I'm not going anywhere. I'm staying right here. I'll tell everyone who *you* are. (*she's been wondering*) Are you even from the south, Jane?

JANE (*deep breath*)

Maddie. I love you. (*MADDIE scoffs*). I do. I know you don't believe it. But I *loved* you. But you lost your place in line when you called us cunts. No one in the itty-bitsy stand-up world will let you back in. Even if they like you, it's a fuck of a bad look. (*Beat*) Your agent called me. Called *me*. Lunch on Wednesday. Lady Parts sent me an offer. (*beat.*) You *do* think traditional roles are bad. You, Maddie, are the reason women are stuck in the past. Not me. You. (*beat*) Now. I'm still willing to help you. Even after all this. I care about you, Maddie.

About what's happened to you. It could happen to any of us. Just come with me and I swear to you – sister to sister – I'll help you get back on your feet.

(*JANE holds out her hand for MADDIE to take it. MADDIE stares as JANE jingles keys. A beat. A car backfires and MADDIE jumps. JANE isn't startled; her eyes are locked on MADDIE. After another moment of indecision, JANE grabs MADDIE's wrist. MADDIE pulls her hand away. They stare. Sounds of rain.*)

Lights change.

Scene 15

(*ONSCREEN says, "Meanwhile, LIVE at Badger News." we see two Conservative ANCHORS peel off from the FEED and sit at desks.*)

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1

Our continuing top story tonight: Knock, knock.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2 (*delighted*)

Ooo! Who's there?

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2

Anti-family comic Maddie Norman.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1

Anti-family comic Maddie N--

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2
LOVE AMERICA OR GET OUT!

(They both laugh.)

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
Yes, indeed. Traditional roles are what make this country *great*. And *that* won't be changing. Coming up, we'll hear from MargeforAmerica who agrees with the pollsters; Maddie Norman is unamerican; as unamerican as trans rights or using a bidet.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2
Many folks wondering: is she a crisis actor?

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
If she is, she's not a very good one.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2
She may have ties to terror organizations.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
Really?

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2
'Swhat I heard. And it says it right there *(points at the prompter)*. And she may be coming for you. Coming right for you and your kids. And pets.

(CON ANCHOR 1 stamps a stamp hard; each time the SCREEN flashes "OUTRAGE!")

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
I am OUTRAGED!

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2
Come on our show, Maddie. Don't be such a *wuss*.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1 *(stamp)*
OUTRAGED!

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2
I'll give you a chance to speak, I p-r-o-m-i-s-e.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1 *(stamp)*

And I'll be OUTRAGED!

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2 (*rising*)

Ya know what? Stand here. Stand here for me. (*ANCHOR 1 does.*) Would you say she's, what, about this tall?

(*ANCHOR 2 extends a tape measure.*)

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1 (*lowering her hand*)

She's about there.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2

And her width?

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1 (*correcting*)

About there.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2

Good! She'll fit in the chair.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1

An OUTRAGEOUS fit!

(*Stamp.*)

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2

I have another joke.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1 (*laughing already*)

Oh, god it sounds funny.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2 (*laughing too*)

It is! I can't...I can't...stop...

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1

I haven't laughed this long in I don't KNOW when.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2

Ok, ok. Knock, knock.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2

Who's there?

(Screen changes to say “MISSING.” ANCHOR 1 sees it and sharply stops laughing, while 2 does not.)

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
Not Maddie Norman.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #3
Not Maddie Norman, who?

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
No, no. This just in. Anti-family comic Maddie Norman is missing.

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #2 (*suddenly serious*)
Missing?

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1
Yes. *Actually* missing.

(A brief flicker of them as humans before they snap into perfect, terrifying unison and look directly out, stone faced.)

CONSERVATIVE ANCHOR #1 + 2
I am outraged...for her family. I’m sorry for her...family.

(They both STAMP HARD in unison.)

Lights Change.

Scene 16

(ONSCREEN, we see “Weeks ago, at a dingy bar in NYC” It’s the middle of the day. JANE plays the claw machine game while MADDIE watches. This scene is a flashback. JANE has her accent.)

JANE
I love this game! I don’t love my daddy but he taught me how to *really* play. All you gotta do is hold down those two buttons (*she holds them down*), plus that one back there, for long enough and the computer glitches and you can play *forever*. Till you win! (*the claw drops*

the toy it was holding) Shitboogers! OH WELL, WHO CARES I CAN PLAY FOREVER! (*she tries again.*) Go get a drink!

MADDIE

It's 11:30 in the morning.

JANE

I know, you wanted *coffee*. I just love this bar.

MADDIE (*looking around, not loving it*)
Oh yeah?

JANE

Yeah. The *mennnnnn*. This is a trash bar. But every now and then, a cute guy with some money wanders in, doesn't know where he is, new to the city. I like those men. (*She stops trying to play the game and turns to MADDIE.*) Hey. Thanks for letting me come over last night. Really.

MADDIE

It's OK, Jane. Just next time, maybe text first?

JANE

Kk, no problem. Just normally I'm. Way chiller than last night.

MADDIE

Got it. (*beat; asking as a friend might*) Are you...going to find a place to live?

JANE

I have a guy. He's --er. Maybe a cute one'll wander in here. (*Exaggerated wink; MADDIE thinks, 'she's kidding.'* MADDIE smiles.)

(MADDIE sees many empty tables.)

MADDIE

Let's sit. I wrote some more stuff down.

(JANE again tries to get the prize and cannot.)

JANE

UGGGH COME ON YOU PIECE OF SHIT.

(MADDIE is trying not to be embarrassed by her new friend.)

MADDIE (*looking around*)

I have quarters, Jane.

JANE (*playing the game, immediately light*)

This is more fun. Did you see Kellie on *Late Night Live* the other night?

MADDIE

Yes, actually. I'm so happy for her. I'm trying to be. Happy for her. I mean, I don't really know her, but. Yes. I'm happy she did so well.

JANE

She's nuts.

MADDIE

Kellie?

JANE

Yeah, like, I want to love her. I mean, I do *love* her, but she tried to steal my *date*!

MADDIE (*confused*)

Kellie has a partner...

JANE

I know, right!? My guy almost left with her! He's a liar anyway.

MADDIE

Oh. I'm sor--

JANE

You're gonna do so great at *Tits and Giggles*.

MADDIE

God, I hope so.

JANE

FUCKBALLS!

(*She's lost again and turns to MADDIE, who is utterly sincere.*)

MADDIE

Hey. My turn: *thank you*, Jane. I don't know if you realize, but...lately it's been hard to see...

JANE

No, I know, Maddie. That's why I said all that nice stuff to Tits n Giggles about you. I want you to have those gigs because. You're a great comic. A sincerely. Great comic. And southern sisters? Always help each other out.

(That means more to MADDIE then she is prepared to say. She takes a breath of gratitude and puts her hand to her heart.)

JANE

And maybe you can give me those tips?

MADDIE

Yes! Let's sit down. I brought my notebook.

JANE

Lemme finish. Almost got one.

MADDIE

Sure. *(beat)* And Jane. Didn't we say. Something about, um, you, sorta, helping me go viral again?

JANE

Did we? *(they lock eyes as JANE's mind searches.)* We most CERTAINLY did.

(MADDIE is visibly relieved.)

MADDIE

Tomorrow?

JANE *(smiling at her sincerely, nodding her head)*
Tomorrow.

(MADDIE smiles, too. She's in desperate need of this.)

JANE

Ooo! Hey, what about this: maybe we do a girls' trip! Back in NOLA, but on *our* terms, ya know?

MADDIE *(that would be nice...)*

My own terms. I wonder what that's like.

JANE

Right? Do Nawlins the Nawlins way. Our way. Maybe in like, a week or so? Whaddaya say, Mads?

MADDIE

I thought you were from Mississippi.

(JANE doesn't respond. MADDIE starts to check her phone calendar out of sheer curiosity.)

JANE

I got it! I got that cute little diamond ring! I GOT IT I GOT IT I-- *(it falls)* SHIT. UGGGH
Whatever.

(She keeps playing.)

MADDIE

Do the owner's care? Do they ever say anything?

JANE *(shaking her head "no")*

I hate being a cheater, Maddie. I *hate* it. But I need a win.

MADDIE

I have to leave in like 15 minutes...

JANE

We'll catch up, soon.

MADDIE

Don't you want to talk tips?

JANE *(staring at the machine)*

Can you just, like, give me the list and I'll look at it on my own?

MADDIE *(jokey scolding)*

Oh. Well. Now, just...mimber what I said last night. You gotta *do the work*, right?

JANE

Duh, but like, can't I just have it for now?

MADDIE

Um. Sure.

(JANE turns away from the game again, and toward MADDIE as she hands JANE the paper; JANE is again deeply sincere as she takes it.)

JANE *(deeply-felt)*

Thank you so, so much. I'm gonna use this. I'm really gonna *use* this. Sponge it all up.
Thank you. Hug?

MADDIE (*deep sigh*)
OK.

(JANE bear hugs MADDIE. It's awkward and lasts a hair too long. MADDIE needed it, but did JANE even register it? JANE then folds the paper and puts it into her pants pocket; returns to the game.)

MADDIE
You're welcome, Jane. I'm gonna run. See you tomorrow?

JANE
KK, cool. (MADDIE has confirmation and so she starts to go. JANE turns to her) Hey, let's skip Nawlins. Who wants to go home, anyway? Let's maybe just do like, a local girl's trip or something. Take the train up to New Haven and get some trust fund pizza. Take maybe, a two-day break from all this. How 'bout it?

(MADDIE needs a girl's trip desperately. JANE'S odd, sure, but she's the only one who believes in her right now. MADDIE smiles vulnerably and really takes this offer in; she's surprised at how much it means to her.)

MADDIE
Ya know what, Jane? You're on.

(MADDIE turns to leave.)

JANE
Kk, see ya Mads! Miss you already. I'm gonna stay *right* here until I snag me a diamond ring and a man to slide it on my finger! (*beat*) Hey, what's your apartment number again? B what?

MADDIE (*nearly gone*)
Five.

JANE
That's right. See ya soon, rabid racoon! (MADDIE didn't hear.) Holy shit! Maddie, I got the ring! I got it! I beat the claw!

(She pulls it out of the machine to show MADDIE, who is gone. JANE opens the little plastic trinket box, takes out the ring, holds it up. She places it ceremoniously on her own finger. She tosses the trinket box, and dives back into the claw game. We see the large metal claw come down and search; what more can she win for free?)

Lights change.

Scene 17

(SCREEN says, "The present, in the WeTube Offices." WT1 and WT2 are dressed for surgery. They stand over a surgical table; what is on it is unseen. Monitors, screens, tubes, etc. We hear continuous surgical beeping throughout.)

WeTube Exec #1 (*upbeat*)

So missing, but not *dead*. That's something, right? (*beat*) Patch.

WeTube Exec #2 (*handing the patch, uneasy*)

Patch. (*beat*) Missing, though. She's *missing*. I'm sorry to say, but I don't think we did it right. I don't think the new algorithm is *safe*. For users or creators.

WeTube Exec #1

We're working on it. We're literally operating on the code at this VERY moment. So. Take a breath.

WeTube Exec #2

Can we *cancel* someone who's missing?

WeTube Exec #1

Does it matter? She's *missing*! (*beat*) Debugger.

WeTube Exec #2 (*handing it over*)

Debugger.

WeTube Exec #1

Look, cancel culture seems to say, *you did this bad thing, now go away*. Isn't that fair enough?

WeTube Exec #2

OK, but in this case, it's, *this website kept this story in my face 24/7 and I've lost my ability to ... process ... severity*.

WeTube Exec #1

You don't know if what she said is bad? I do. I know it.

WeTube Exec #2 (*stunned*)

...you didn't before...

WeTube Exec #1

Well, I do now. (*beat*) I also wonder, did she do this to herself? She gets cancelled and *immediately* goes missing? Isn't that a bit. Suspect?

WeTube Exec #2

Why would she do that? Anyway, that doesn't fix our algo. (*she makes a stand*) And I really have to insist we fix it.

WeTube Exec #1 (*losing patience*)

We're fixing it NOW.

WeTube Exec #2 (*clearly distressed*)

Yes, but...I mean...are we?

(*WT1 can see WT2 is upset and turns to her sincerely.*)

WeTube Exec #1

Sweetheart. The elephant in the room is that we just have to run it all up the flagpole and see if the cat licks it up. 'Cause at the end of the day, this is low-hanging fruit, and it is what it is. Hm? We're outside the box and we're trying to move the needle. That's all. Ok, honey? That's all that's happening. (*beat*) Hey. You were super tough when you started here. You gotta stay tough to stay here. To be my young me. (*putting out a hand*) Compiler. (*beat*) Compiler.

(*WeTube Exec #2 hands it and walks away. Goes to the window, looks out. The sky is dark. Rain is heard. WT1 continues.*)

WeTube Exec #1

Look. The big boyz want us to be cutthroat, right?

WeTube Exec #2 (*desperate for her mentor to say something kind*)

Cutthroat to *who*?

WeTube Exec #1

Anybody but the user!

(*A single loud peel of thunder, power browns out. WT1 doesn't notice. Instead, has an epiphany and walks away from the operating table.*)

WeTube Exec #1

Hold on, wait a MINUTE. Stroke! Stroke of luck –NO –stroke of *genius*! She's looking for reinstatement, right?? That's her big ask, but she's a *creator*, not a *user*!

WeTube Exec #2

She's *also* a user.

WeTube Exec #1

Sososo...very publicly, we deny her reinstatement BUT...we keep up the videos! Hold a press conference and assure the public that we'll cut off *any* creator who steps outta line. Bing-o!

WeTube Exec #2 (*slipping away*)

We make money off someone who we've denied permission to even be on the site?

WeTube Exec #1 (*another epiphany*)

And by keeping them up, we can make a legit claim to support free speech at the same time! BING-O!

WeTube Exec #2

She might be desperate for reinstatement. For the *money*.

WeTube Exec #1 (*she's cracked it*)

She can always *reapply*! BING FRICKEN O!!!!

(WT2 grabs their bag, empties its contents and sits on the floor. They start assembling something. WT1 forgets about the operation altogether and stands on a table.)

WeTube Exec #1

OHMYGOD, This is it! The epiphany I've been DYING for. I've worked so hard for this. (*she turns out*) What do we need our humanity for? Doesn't it get us into constant trouble? We are deeply flawed. But a perfect algorithm is not. (*she just discovered that and she LOVES it*) Access to knowledge, human connection, self-expression – what's more important than THAT? Everyone is welcome to *click click click* on our site! Click away. Click to your hearts content!

(The power goes out. EXEC #1 turns on her phone flashlight, holds it under her chin for a weird effect.)

WeTube Exec #1

Ah-ha! See? One tech saves the other! Tell the big boyz that something cutthroat IS coming. An algo that keeps everything up but buries it at *just* the right time. And maybe brings it back at the right time, too! For now, get the lights hot and the cameras ready cause we're about to publicly banish this lady into oblivion! And then, *then*, the entire WORLD can feel *good* about coming over to our site when to fill their minds up with image after image of humans being humans, and we'll all pilot the brave new ship TOGETHER!

(Arms raised up in victory. WT1 shines a flashlight on WT2 as the power restores. The beeping turns to flatlining. They both look over at it. WT1 shuts off the sound.)

WeTube Exec #1 (*panting; annoyed*)

What're you doing??

WeTube Exec #2

I'm not sure *what* to do. I made something. A little DIY rain filter. For drinking water. (*beat, lost in worry*) Going to need something for the flooding, though. I didn't know it would rain this much.

(*Holds it up, fearfully wonders, will something like this be enough? Then, looks at WT1. Silence for a moment.*)

WeTube Exec #2

I quit.

(*WT1 is wide-eyed and mouth-agape, stunned at this choice. Sounds of heavy rain get louder.*)

Lights change.

Scene 18

(*Rain sounds dissolve and are replaced by a drunken, rowdy crowd at Stand Out NYC. JANE is onstage. She looks like Maddie. She moves like Maddie. She sounds like Maddie.*)

JANE (*actual AI joke*)

Right? Oh! Ya'll hear about *this*? The founder of Ikea is stepping down. Yeah, experts were concerned when they found his resignation letter was written in hieroglyphics and took 3 days to assemble. (*laughs*) His last words were—

FEMALE IN CROWD 2

Somebody get me a fucking screwdriver!

JANE

Fuck, that's *twice*, lady. Congrats on seeing my videos, now, kindly shut the fuck up. (*breath; she goes for a new joke*) Anyway. It won't stop raining. Yikes. Flooding everywhere. I just hope the fuckers who voted for gay marriage are happy. This is on them. Or maybe it's Mayan-calendar related! Either way, let's get some pitchforks and round up any Mayans who got gay-married!

FEMALE IN CROWD 2
TELL THE ARMPIT JOKE!

JANE (*frustrated*)

No. Nope. Fuck that. If you're gonna keep yelling out the punchlines, I'm only gonna do new jokes.

(*Crowd chants "arm-pit!" "arm-pit!"*)

JANE

Guys. GUYS. I'm doing the fucking *Beacon*, April 24th. You want the hits, come see me there. (*Playful boos reign down from the crowd*) Don't sleep on this! Only...only a few tix still left on my website. (*a lie*) And when you come, DON'T YELL OUT THE FUCKING PUNCHLINES.

(*JANE is trying to keep it light and that line elicits some laughter from the crowd. It also elicits an awful lot of rowdy yelling. JANE'S set is falling apart. She tries to start a new joke but the crowd drowns her out.*)

JANE

People who got gay-married must've...people...who got...

FEMALE IN CROWD 3
DO THE MIC DICK!!!

(*CROWD explodes, really wants the mic dick joke.*)

JANE

I can't do that one. That just. Kinda happened!

(*JANE steps back and smiles at the crowd whose rowdiness escalates. The boos aren't malicious, they're playful, but the effect on JANE is clear, even as she tries to mask it with her comic's smile: she's afraid. The lights begin to dim on her as she tries to but cannot shake off that moment; she realizes she can't carry on with the set. The crowd gets worse. They're drunk and screaming at her. A FEMALE IN THE CROWD stands with a great big helpful smile and takes a few quick, drunken steps towards JANE, her arms open wide as if to catch her. It freaks JANE out. It's all "playful" but nearly grotesque, nearly quite scary.*)

JANE

...Ok, I'm getting the light. (*she's not*) That's my time. You guys rock!

(*The crowd applauds her, but also more playful boos rain down. A narrowing spotlight leaves us with JANE's face and her attempt at masking her fear.*)

The sound fades with the lights, and light rain sounds replace. Lights come up on MADDIE. The SCREEN reads, "New Orleans, the present." She's driving her car.)

RADIO

Weather advisories remain in effect tonight as heavy rains continue to pummel most of the country, with the hardest hit areas in the northeast, and New York City especially.

(She turns the volume down because she's on the phone with FRIEND. This time, no glitches.)

MADDIE

Sorry. I just wanted to hear the -- you were saying?

FRIEND'S VOICE

I was *saying* that I'm going to sell this scoop to the news and retire!

MADDIE

Oh, yeah, the headline *Disgraced Comedian Takes Her Cat And Goes Home* will sell for millions.

FRIEND'S VOICE

Cleo! How is lil Cleocatra?

MADDIE

Queen of the universe. Purring in the backseat.

(A beat as we hear sounds of a car driving through light rain.)

FRIEND'S VOICE

Sorry, you're breaking up. God, I hate *technology*. *(beat, breath)* What are you looking for again?

MADDIE *(turning, her headlights and eyes searching)*

Oh, just something. Just a thing.

GPS

Turn right.

(She flips on her blinker and turns right.)

MADDIE

Ha. I love that.

FRIENDS VOICE

Have you found it?

MADDIE
Not yet.

FRIEND'S VOICE

So, you're back home, you're off socials and you're choosing to NOT hang with me right now to what, just...*drive around?*

(The car rolls to a stop. A beat as MADDIE looks both ways.)

GPS
Turn right.

(A beat, MADDIE squints toward the right.)

FRIEND'S VOICE
Hello?

(She takes a breath, flips on her left blinker, and turns left.)

MADDIE (*deep breath*)
Yep. Going in circles. Just like in therapy. Ha.

(We hear the wheels rolling against the road and the windshield wipers as the car drives on. Stage lights fade. We are left with sounds of rain. If you can, play "Queen Jane Approximately" by Bob Dylan.)

End of Play.