

“YES, AND...”

a play in one Act

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Cast Of Characters

ELLIE: f, 30. Impulsive, lives in her imagination.

CRAIG: m, 30. Sensible, generally a little worried.

KAREN: f, 40s, company head fighting her own stodginess

ROSALIND: f, 40s, Karen's excitable wife. British.

Scene i: A nicely-appointed living room in a big-city apartment, morning.

Scene ii: Same apartment, evening, two weeks later.

Scene i

AT RISE:

(The living room in a city corner apartment, morning. Two windows open onto different views, one a fire escape exit. Decorations on one wall include some *papier-maché* animal masks)

(ELLIE chews a piece of toast, studying a handful of flash cards with prompts written on them, “practicing improv.” Ellie lives in her imagination, over which she sometimes hasn’t complete executive control. Her eyes are closed as she concentrates)

ELLIE

“Yes, *and*. Yes, *and*...”

(reads off card)

“You mean lightning struck your horse?”

(hides the cards)

Yes! You can imagine how terrified we all were!

(checks the card again)

Oh... your house. That’s less funny.

(tries different emphases)

You can’t imagine how *terrified*... You cannot imagine *how* terrified we all were. In fact, we all... What did we do?

(gives up on this; tries another card)

“Why did you miss my birthday this year?”

(hides the cards)

Your birthday. Yes, I’m so sorry! Why *did* I miss that? Oh! I know! Because my husband and I...

(CRAIG enters, furiously tying his tie, putting on socks and belt and wristwatch, all seemingly simultaneously.)

CRAIG

No no no, oh hell bells I can’t believe it!

ELLIE

What??

CRAIG

I slept through the time, the the the *the schedule*, the meeting!

ELLIE

Didn't you set your buzzy thing?

CRAIG

I set my – yes, I set my buzzy thing. It was on p.m. Listen...

ELLIE

I'm listening! Listening's very important in improv! In fact...

CRAIG

You have to make up a small thing, just a small story, a, a, a...

ELLIE

I can make up all sorts of things!

CRAIG

Phone Karen and give her, give her person, her, the current...

ELLIE

Sophie.

CRAIG

Sophia. Give Sophia a reason I'm late.

ELLIE

What reason?

(With tie, watch and belt all going at once, CRAIG can barely think)

CRAIG

Any reason. Except sleeping! *Or a disease!* I'm healthy, I'm going in. And nothing in the story that we can't, that doesn't fit with, you know...

ELLIE

Like what kind of...

CRAIG

I don't know, I can't think! I have to concentrate on the, the...

ELLIE

So make up something, but not something that "doesn't fit in with..."?

CRAIG

With our lives. We see Karen and Rosalind, so it can't be, you know, "we got a dog and it had puppies that chewed up all our model airplanes..." They'll come and see the apartment with no dog and no puppies.

ELLIE
And no model airplanes.

CRAIG
Right. So...

ELLIE
So something else.

CRAIG
I don't have hands-free phone in the car, and I've gotta go...

ELLIE
So, something clever, that explains you being late by...

CRAIG
Oh God, nearly an hour and a half.

ELLIE
How do we coordinate the lie that...?

CRAIG
It's not a lie, it's a plausible excuse.

ELLIE
How do we coordinate the plausible excuse that didn't actually happen?

CRAIG
That could have happened. That we agree happened. Text me. Text me what you tell her, what you tell Karen or or or...

ELLIE
Sophie.

CRAIG
... *Sophia*. Text me on my way in and I'll take it from there. Make it serious. Not too serious, but...

ELLIE
Sophia, Sophia! Got it. But not sickness.

CRAIG
No coughing. I have to go on the thing next week, the planning trip. So no disease. Just something...

Clever. ELLIE

CRAIG
And believable! And unavoidable! Where I'm responsible and attentive and efficient and...

ELLIE
Okay, I'm getting an idea. What if...

CRAIG
Text me. Love you. Bye! The number's in the...

ELLIE
I've got the number!

CRAIG
Love you! *Mwa!*

(And CRAIG is gone out the door, still carrying his shoes.)

(ELLIE focuses, working out something in her head, walking around the room, looking at the furniture for inspiration. She finds her phone. Dials, getting her plan straight)

ELLIE
Hi. Sophia?
(fist pump for getting the name right)
It's Ellie Jackson. Hey. Listen, Craig's so sorry, he's just out the door now, he asked me to call and explain to you, explain for Karen, what happened and why he's late. We were just tied up and brutally robbed. Yes. Brutally. It was awful! You can imagine how terrified we all were! And I'm so sorry we missed your birthday. No, we're both fine. I'm sure Craig will tell you all about it. Bye!

(ELLIE hangs up. She swipes on her phone and begins to text, still improvising.)

ELLIE
"You can imagine how terrified we all were. *Both were....*"

BLACKOUT

Scene ii

(EVENING, their living room, a few weeks later, set for a small dinner party. Snacks and an open champagne bottle and martini shaker on the coffee table. Visitors' coats on a rack at the door.)

(The foursome enters from the dining room: ELLIE, ROSALIND and KAREN with champagne flutes, CRAIG with a martini. KAREN is a company head, a bit stuffy but fighting it. Karen's wife ROSALIND is British, excitable, fun.)

KAREN:

... of course, that'll all have to wait until the New Products group's up and running. Blah blah, somebody please stop me from talking shop.

ROSALIND

Oh Karen!

KAREN

Roz is always saying I need to loosen up.

(ROSALIND rubs Karen's shoulders.)

ROSALIND

You do! You're tighter than a two dollar shoe. Get all of that stuff out of your head! Ellie... the robbery – do you mind talking about it?

CRAIG

We'd rather not.

ELLIE

No problem at all. Anything you want to throw at me.

ROSALIND

You said it happened in here?

ELLIE

Yes. We were tied up in here and in the bedroom. And not just during the robbery, ha!

ROSALIND

Oh!

CRAIG

She's kidding.

ROSALIND

Nothing wrong with a little boudoir tying-up between friends, eh?

(KAREN shoots Rosalind a warning glance)

KAREN

So awful for you two, I can't even imagine. What were you doing when they burst in?

ELLIE

Practicing for my improv class.

KAREN

How do you "practice" for...?

ROSALIND

Wait – sorry, Karen – Ellie, did you say they tied you up in separate rooms?

ELLIE

Yes. *And...*

(But nothing more comes to her)

ROSALIND

Why?

CRAIG

(lightly)

Maybe they thought we weren't married.

(nobody gets his joke)

You know... "separate rooms"...?

ELLIE

I think it was to keep us from getting our stories straight.

ROSALIND

Oh my! This must mean something!

KAREN

Oh dear, here she goes. Roz is a fiend for all those crime shows. Half the time she beats the TV police to the solution by spotting some clue they missed.

ELLIE

Oh no, like what?

ROSALIND

It's always something small but significant. Like, in your case: after they left, how did you get loose to call Sophia?

ELLIE

Didn't I tell her?

KAREN

If you did, she didn't mention it.

ELLIE

We gnawed.

CRAIG

We what?

ELLIE

We gnawed through the ropes.

KAREN

Both of you?

ELLIE

Yes. And...

ROSALIND

Why didn't the one who gnawed through their ropes first just untie the other one? To save him or her from having to gnaw?

ELLIE

Because... we didn't gnaw on our own ropes. We gnawed each other's.

KAREN

I'm sorry, I'm trying to picture that.

ELLIE

Imagine a "69," but with ropes.

KAREN

Craig, if I could just take you back a page. Perhaps I'm being impossibly dense but Ellie said they didn't want you "getting your stories straight." Isn't that sort of thing for when the police question suspects?

ROSALIND

Oh Karen, you know how literal you are!

CRAIG

Speaking of literacy, how's the new campaign coming?

KAREN

Let's not talk about work tonight. I'm up to my ears, scrambling to find a head of New Products. Mostly I'm concerned for you two.

(ELLIE returns with a short length of cord, "gnawed" at one end.)

ELLIE

Here it is.

(ELLIE hands the cord to Rosalind. She plucks and SPITS small bits of twine from her mouth as she finds her champagne flute under the table. ROSALIND examines the rope minutely.)

ROSALIND

Well! It looks perfectly ordinary. Rather like the rattan on your dining room chairs.

ELLIE

(a foul taste in her mouth)

Uh-huh.

ROSALIND

Oh!

ELLIE

What?

ROSALIND

Rope burns!

CRAIG

Pardon?

ROSALIND

It's very rough... but neither of you has rope burns.

ELLIE

No. Because they used lotion.

KAREN

They used lotion before tying you up?

ELLIE

They were very considerate. I suspect they might have been Canadian.

KAREN

All the same, it sounds as though it was awful.

CRAIG

We don't need to rehash all this tonight...

ROSALIND

I don't mean to upset you...

ELLIE

That's okay, it helps my process.

ROSALIND

... but you told Sophia you were "brutally robbed."

ELLIE

Brutal psychologically. It's a good thing we don't have dogs. Or puppies. Because they'd chew up all the evidence.

ROSALIND

What evidence?

ELLIE

All our model... [*airplanes*]

CRAIG

There wasn't any. Pepper-wafer thing?

KAREN

And what did you say they took?

CRAIG

Just some unimportant things. Small, silly things. We don't know exactly. We were tied up face-down...

ROSALIND

In separate rooms...

CRAIG

... so we're hazy on the details.

ELLIE

You can imagine how terrified we all were.

ROSALIND

All?

CRAIG

Both.

(ROSALIND goes to her purse for her phone.)

ROSALIND

I just realized: the first time you invited us over I took pictures of your apartment. If we looked at them now, perhaps we could see what's missing!

KAREN

Rosalind, that is so clever.

CRAIG

It sure is!

(to Ellie)

Not like something thought up on the spur of the moment at all.

(ROSALIND scrolls through her phone photos, showing Ellie.)

ROSALIND

Here's your hallway. The living room...

ELLIE

Oh dear. That's a bad one of me...

(ELLIE stretches her jaw in imitation of the picture)

ELLIE

Ohh. Oh dear. Could you delete that one too? Ugh...

ROSALIND

Everything on your sideboard looks the same. Look, there's the picture, the silverware box, the decanter thing. From a superficial examination it doesn't look as if anything has been touched.

CRAIG

No. But what the pictures don't show is...

ELLIE

The letters.

KAREN

Letters?

ELLIE

They took – the secret *letters*.

CRAIG

No they didn't.

ELLIE

Yes they did.

CRAIG

I could have sworn we still had them.

ELLIE

I looked for them. They're gone. Like lightning, after it has struck a horse!

ROSALIND

This is so exciting!

ELLIE

Isn't it!

ROSALIND

What secret letters? Can you say?

CRAIG

No. That would be...

ELLIE

They were my father's. He worked in a very clandestine business – that means secret - and I had his letters, which I never thought anyone knew about, but the burglars must have! Because that's all they took!

ROSALIND

That sounds so mysterious! And so strange.

ELLIE

Doesn't it! Isn't it!

KAREN

But how did you only just now notice they were missing?

ELLIE

Because I kept them in the bottom of my sock drawer and I just realized that this morning when I went through the drawer it was all *socks socks socks* and no letters.

ROSALIND

What clandestine business was your father in? Are you free to say?

CRAIG

She can't tell you that. It's too...

ROSALIND

Mysterious?

CRAIG

Yes. Almost as mysterious as why Ellie kept top-secret letters in her sock drawer *under her socks*.

ROSALIND

But someone must have known about them or they wouldn't have broken in here to take them!

ELLIE

Craig! Rosalind's right! And... that means they were onto my father!

CRAIG

I keep thinking there must be *some other explanation*...

ROSALIND

Who did you tell about the letters?

ELLIE

Almost no one. Craig knew, of course. But we've ruled out an inside job because there's no way he could have tied us both up like that.

KAREN

(reappraising her employee)

Craig, you know about all of this?

ROSALIND

The mysterious part too?

(CRAIG isn't sure which way to go on this.)

ELLIE

Of course he knew. That's how I met him. Craig used to be in the same business as my father.

ROSALIND

(gasp!)

The spy business!?

(KAREN and ROSALIND both look at Craig reappraisingly)

CRAIG

It wasn't spying, so much as....

(starts to enjoy the idea. Slight swagger.)

Well, there's spying and then there's, you know, *spying*.

(CRAIG suavely sips his martini.)

ELLIE

He doesn't like to talk about it. In fact, he's legally not allowed to. Let me just say we never have to wait to go through airports!

ROSALIND

(Gasps!)

CRAIG

A small side-benefit. Karen, would you like more champagne? Ellie, would you like some less champagne?

(CRAIG tries to get Ellie's champagne from her but ELLIE twirls away)

ELLIE

That was before he met me and we fell in love and he realized for the sake of our future children he'd better settle down to an ordinary job.

CRAIG

Not that working at Crane-Hemmings is ordinary!

KAREN

You didn't mention any of this at your interview.

ROSALIND

Karen! He couldn't! Don't you see?

(to Ellie)

Did you at least save a copy of your father's papers?

ELLIE

Yes. But it's in... the secure vault.

ROSALIND

Karen! *A secure vault!*

CRAIG

That reminds me, did we secure the Lafferty account?

(KAREN is about to answer. ROSALIND interrupts her)

ROSALIND

Wait – sorry, Karen. Ellie, now that these bad guys, albeit very considerate, Canadian bad guys – have the top-secret papers, isn't the world in some sort of danger?

ELLIE

Yes! And that's why we invited you two here tonight.

CRAIG

No it wasn't.

ELLIE

Yes it is. Because... we need your help.

ROSALIND

Karen! They need our help!

(to Ellie)

Will it be perilous?

(CRAIG shakes his head, but modifies his shaking to nodding as ELLIE changes her story:)

ELLIE

Not really. I mean, yes. I mean moderately. Okay, quite a lot.

ROSALIND

(squeals with delight)

CRAIG

Is there anything I've eaten no one else has eaten that might account for my feeling slightly lightheaded?

ROSALIND

We're always saying we want to do something perilous!

KAREN

I was thinking more like visiting Nashville.

(to Ellie)

Our E and O insurance doesn't cover the firm for anything done by employees off the clock or off company grounds.

ROSALIND

Oh you stick-in-the-mud.

KAREN

Roz, that's not fair!

(sotto)

You were the one who didn't want to *hrrrrmmph* with the *hrrmmphh*.

(CRAIG overhears and tries to parse this. ELLIE runs to the window and peers out through the curtain)

ELLIE

They're watching us! From under that streetlamp.

(ELLIE closes the curtain and turns off the lamp near the window.)

ELLIE

We mustn't do anything unusual!

CRAIG

Like turning off a lamp during a dinner party?

(CRAIG swigs his martini, finishing it. HE pours another from the martini shaker.)

ELLIE

If they read the letters they know Craig's identity. The relocation, the new I.D., everything. It sounds like we may have to open... the Code Letter.

ROSALIND

Code letter! Oh Karen, isn't this thrilling!

KAREN

I think I can actually feel my blood moving.

ROSALIND

What's in the code letter?

(CRAIG, despite himself, looks at Ellie to find this out too)

ELLIE
The Emergency Protocols.

ROSALIND
Protocols!

ELLIE
Including the signal to reunite Team... Alpha Bravo.

ROSALIND
(gasp!)
Craig, in the work you can't talk about, were you on Team Alpha Bravo?

CRAIG
I was more like... team lower-case alpha bravo.

(ELLIE peers out the widow again)

ELLIE
They'll move on us within ten minutes unless we act. Latvia Rules!

ROSALIND
Latvia! *We* could go to Latvia.

KAREN
Baby steps, Roz, let's start with Nashville.

ELLIE
I have to think clearly and unemotionally, and not let the robbery and the brutality and the ropes and the spies outside our window affect my judgment. Craig, we're going to have to open the Secure Vault.

KAREN
Where is it?

CRAIG
Downtown.

ELLIE
Behind that painting.

CRAIG
Oh, *that* secure vault.

ELLIE
My father told me to never open it except in an emergency.

ROSALIND

Ellie, there are spies outside and we had to turn off a lamp! If this isn't an emergency, what is?

ELLIE

Rosalind's right! Don't look.

(ELLIE goes to the painting on the wall. ROSALIND turns her back)

ROSALIND

Karen! *Secrets!*

(ROSALIND makes Karen turn around too. As CRAIG pantomimes *what the hell are you doing* ELLIE lifts the painting on its wire. There's nothing behind it.)

ELLIE

Seventy-four clockwise...

(ELLIE pushes a pencil into an electric pencil-sharpener on the side-table to make a "safe-dialing" sound)

ROSALIND

Don't tell us the combination! Karen, listen, she's opening the vault!

KAREN

I hope I took my pills today.

CRAIG

Ah it's stuck and it won't open. Oh well.

ELLIE

Yes, but with a little force... squeeek! It's open!

ROSALIND

(squeals with delight!)

ELLIE

The Code Letter. Screeee! Clunk!

(ELLIE whirrs the pencil sharpener again, then bangs the painting back into place. She picks up a paper napkin from next to the snacks.)

ELLIE

You can turn around now.

(KAREN and ROSALIND turn back around)

ROSALIND

My goodness. The Code Letter looks remarkably like...

ELLIE

Yes! All Code Letters are written on ordinary dinner napkins so they can be dropped unobtrusively beside an agent's plate in a restaurant like so:

(ELLIE demonstrates, then scoops it back up).

ELLIE

And if necessary, eaten.

(ELLIE "opens" the napkin like a pamphlet and pretends to read)

ELLIE

"Blah blah blah, National Security..."

(ROSALIND put her fingers in her ears and nudges Karen)

ROSALIND

National Security!

ELLIE

Here we are... "In case of a breach, such as if valuable papers are stolen from their secret location..."

CRAIG

... in a high-security sock drawer.

(CRAIG finishes his second martini and runs his hand over his face)

ELLIE

"... enemy agents will be watching you. In this case, proceed to Operation Level..."

(ELLIE looks at Craig's raised wristwatch)

ELLIE

"... Omega."

CRAIG

Dessert, anyone?

KAREN

Craig, I hardly think dessert's appropriate at a time like this.

ELLIE

Daddy talked about Omega so many times I have it memorized. But I never thought I'd have to use it.

(ELLIE tucks the napkin in her sleeve)

ROSALIND

Shouldn't you eat that?

ELLIE

I'm saving it for later. There's no time to lose.

(ELLIE goes to a side-table, opens a drawer and takes out a stamped letter. She hands it to Karen.)

ELLIE

This is the only-use-in-case-of-emergency Systems Go Letter.

KAREN

"West Side Dry Cleaning?"

ELLIE

It's a front. You have to mail it, without being seen, then all three go to the bar at the Hanhardt Hotel, sit side-by-side and each order a blueberry daiquiri. That's very important. And you must each carry a small spray of flowers and one section of yesterday's newspaper.

(ELLIE hands the newspaper to Rosalind.)

ELLIE

Rosalind, separate that into sections.

(ELLIE gives the table flowers to Karen.)

ELLIE

And Karen, make three sprays of flowers.

KAREN

How much is a "spray"?

ROSALIND

Oh, switch!

(KAREN and ROSALIND switch paper/flowers. They separate / assemble.)

ELLIE

The bartender will hear your order, confirm the flowers and yesterday's paper and take it from there.

ROSALIND

Hanhardt Hotel, blueberry daiquiri... oh dear, can I write this down?

ELLIE

No need. Craig knows the Omega procedure by heart.

(CRAIG is now drinking from the martini shaker)

CRAIG

If I recall, under Omega one person may have a gin martini.

ELLIE

But only one! The drink order's what we call a signal flare. The Agency will go on Red Alert for the Go Letter that calls in Team Alpha Bravo. Whatever you do, don't order a vodka plum smoothie, unless you want an airstrike.

KAREN

(getting a little tipsy)

What's in an airstrike?

ROSALIND

Bombs, silly. Hanhardt Hotel, no plum smoothie... how do we get past the people watching your apartment?

ELLIE

That part ... is going to be tricky.

(ROSALIND is tying three sprays of flowers with bits of string from the pastry box. CRAIG takes the champagne bottle to Karen's and Rosalind's glasses.)

KAREN

Thank you, we don't need any more.

CRAIG

Oh I think you're going to.

(HE pours anyway.)

KAREN

(reading the newspaper)

Marsha Cornwinkle is out at Baines Marketing!

(ROSALIND swats at the newspaper.)

ROSALIND

Karen! Focus! Fold!

ELLIE

They know there are four of us and they probably suspect you're involved. That means I'll have to lure them away from the building with a three-bag fakeout!

ROSALIND

Ooo! How does that work?

(ELLIE takes Karen's and Rosalind's jackets and purses from the coat hooks, and a jacket of Craig's.)

ELLIE

I'll go to the lobby, find three willing strangers, and make them put on your jackets.

(She plucks the three *papier-maché* Carnavale masks – Rhinoceros, Devil, Elephant – from their wall hooks.)

ELLIE

... and these masks. That way, the three of them -- plus me -- will pass for the four of us, out celebrating Carnavale!

CRAIG

In New York in September.

ELLIE

I'll take them out the front and lure the spies away from the building!

ROSALIND

Brilliant!

ELLIE

Thank you! I also do four and a half accents.

KAREN

But what makes you think these lobby strangers will willingly put on someone else's coats and *animal masks* and go off into the night with you?

CRAIG

People do anything for Ellie. I'm not sure why but they do.

ROSALIND

Here are the newspapers and the flower-things!

ELLIE

Good work! I'll lead the civilians away, give them a cover story, lose my tail with a cab switch, recover your jackets and the masks, double back and meet you at the bar. Which bar?

KAREN

Hanhardt Hotel.

ELLIE

Good, Karen!

(to Craig)

We could have used her in Istanbul.

ROSALIND

Won't they leave someone watching the front door in case you return?

(ELLIE goes to the other window – the fire escape. She puts their guests' purses down there.)

ELLIE

Yes! That's why you two and Craig have to go out this window, unfold the old fire escape, and leave through the alley.

(ELLIE hauls open the fire escape window)

KAREN

The "old fire escape"?

ELLIE

Don't worry, it's been oiled semi-regularly since 1903.

KAREN

I don't know...

ROSALIND

Karen, you wanted excitement! This is excitement, being handed to us on an old, rusty platter! Breathe work *out*, breathe excitement *in*!

(ROSALIND helps KAREN do this apparently routine breathing exercise. ELLIE looks out the side window.)

ELLIE

The alley spy has gone around to the front! No time to lose. Quick, out you go! Rosalind first! Letter, flowers, newspaper, blueberry daiquiri! Craig, you know the rest of the protocol?

(ROSALIND climbs out the window and reaches back for KAREN. CRAIG, slightly inebriated, is slowly adopting spy mannerisms.)

CRAIG

Absolutely. Standard Omega procedure, fallback operation afterward: pick up bread and milk. See you at oh-twenty-one hundred.

ROSALIND

Karen! *Oh-twenty-one hundred!*

ELLIE

If for any reason we get separated or if I don't turn up, we meet at the train station.

ROSALIND

Because they'll be watching the airports!

ELLIE

Alastair – I mean *Craig* – and I will have to lay low for four days; we can't tell you our destination.

KAREN

Alastair... or Craig... I must confess, this is the most excitement I have had at a dinner since my sister's ferret ate a canapé at our wedding! And it all escalated so quickly...

CRAIG

Interdum quae faciendum cito.

KAREN

You speak Latin!

CRAIG

Alpha Bravo's motto: "Sometimes things happen really quickly."

(CRAIG tries a suave eyebrow move and tosses the empty martini shaker out the window. ELLIE grabs some cheese slices from the snack tray.)

KAREN

I never had any idea! I'm starting to think you may be the person we need for Head Of New Products.

ROSALIND

Karen! Operation Omega! Blueberry daiquiri!

(ROSALIND tugs KAREN out onto the fire escape.)

ELLIE

(calls after them)

Good, Rosalind! Now pull that really old brown lever.

(O.S. hellacious SCREECH and CLUNK as the ancient fire escape lowers.)

ELLIE

Don't talk to anyone, don't look suspicious, and don't – oh dear, there goes Karen's shoe. Never mind, you can pick that up later!

(to Craig)

Out you go. Take these, we don't know how long it'll be before we'll have cheese again. Come on, one leg at a time, up up!

(looking out & down)

Karen's very agile for an executive. Oop, there goes the other shoe...

(CRAIG puts the cheese in his pocket. He has one leg out the window)

CRAIG

Ellie?

ELLIE

Yes, Alastair?

CRAIG

Are you really going to put masks on three strangers, cram them in a cab and drive them around in circles?

ELLIE

Possibly. I'll have to see what else I think of when I get downstairs. Oh hasn't tonight been amazing! Do you think after the bar we could catch a midnight train to Marrakesh?

CRAIG

Yes, I suspect we probably can. Ellie, being married to you is wonderful. But it is truly exhausting.

(THEY kiss.)

ROSALIND

Craig! Latvia Rules!

(ROSALIND yanks Craig out of the apartment through the window)

BLACKOUT.