CHARACTERS

MARY, early 30s, confident and headstrong.

JOHNNY, early 30s, homeless, with a thick beard.

SETTING
Front porch of a nice home in an upscale urban neighborhood.

TIME
Present
(Lights up on the front porch or stoop of a home in an upscale urban neighborhood. Early morning. There is muffled yelling between a man and woman coming from inside. A figure stands downstage in the dark.)

MARY
(Offstage.) Fuck you!

(Slap. Furniture falling over. Door slam.)

MARY
(Offstage.) Is that all you got? Don’t walk away from me...

(More muffled yelling. After a moment of silence, the front door opens. MARY, early 30s, steps onto the porch and slams the door behind her. She stands tall but is obviously shaken. She is wearing a coat over a nightgown.)

MARY
(Yelling at the house.) Useless prick. It’s two o’clock in the morning, heat up your own damn food!

(Pipes rattle and there is the sound of water running. The sound of the water will be audible for some time, but should eventually fade out.)
MARY
(To herself.) I hope you slip in the shower and crack your fat furry ass.

(MARY lights a cigarette, and then begins to rub the right side of her cheek where she was slapped.)

JOHNNY
Sorry to bother you ... but you got another one of those?

(A startled MARY shuffles backwards. The figure steps out of the dark and into the light, moving towards the porch. JOHNNY, early 30s, looks older because of dark circles around his eyes and a full scraggly beard that dominates his face. His tattered and filthy clothing show that he’s been on the streets for some time.)

MARY
Jeezus! Where’d you come from? You scared me.

JOHNNY
I’m sorry. I thought you saw me. I wasn’t trying to hide—

MARY
How long have you been standing there?

JOHNNY
Five minutes, probably more. (Pause.) Can I get a cigarette? I’ll give you a dime for it.
MARY
(Hesitant.) Uh ... I guess. Sure.

(MARY takes a single cigarette from the pack and stretches her hand out cautiously. From the bottom step JOHNNY extends his hand and takes it.)

JOHNNY
Sorry, can I get a light too?

MARY
Here.

(Staying as far away back as possible, she lights his cigarette. His eyes are fixed on her face the entire time.)

JOHNNY
Thanks.

(He tries to offer her a dime, but she waves him off. She takes a few steps back. They smoke in silence.)

JOHNNY
Are you okay?

MARY
Excuse me?

JOHNNY
It sounded pretty bad in there. In your house earlier—
MARY
If I knew giving you a cigarette would lead to a conversation about my personal life—

JOHNNY
I’m sorry. Didn’t mean to ... I’ll go. Thanks for the cigarette.

MARY
No. Stay. Please. Just stay where you are and just finish your cigarette. (Beat.) It’s nice sharing one of these with someone. Nobody smokes anymore.

(Momentary silence. JOHNNY is anxious.)

JOHNNY
Is your name Mary? Are you Mary Jensen?

MARY
(Worried surprise.) Yes ... Jensen’s my maiden name. How did you know that? Do we know each other?

JOHNNY
Yeah.

MARY
Really? I don’t recognize you.

JOHNNY
It’s been a while.

MARY
Interesting. A mysterious figure from my past.

(MARY stares intently, searching to recognize anything.)
MARY
Not getting anything. Distant relative? Family friend?

(JOHNNY shakes his head.)

JOHNHY
We went to school together.

MARY
You went to State too?

JOHNHY
Huh?

MARY
What was your major?

JOHNHY
Oh sorry. No, I never went to college.

MARY
So farther back? High school? Don’t say middle school, that’s way too—

JOHNHY
High school.

MARY
(Sarcastic.) Go mighty Raiders.

JOHNHY
Your brother Walter, how’s he doing? What’s he been up to?

MARY
Walt? Is that it? You were a friend of his? That’s why I don’t recognize you. You were all burnouts just like him. Forgot his friends soon as I met ’em. You knew Walt, huh? Makes sense that I don’t—
JOHNNY
Knew?

MARY
Excuse me?

JOHNNY
You said “knew Walt.”

MARY
He died last year.

JOHNNY
Shit. Really? I’m sorry to hear that. What happened?

MARY
Kidney disease.

JOHNNY
I’m really sorry. That sucks. Walter was ... your brother was a good guy.

MARY
You don’t have to sugarcoat it. Let’s remember him like he truly was — an ass. I miss that jackass brother of mine. I still can’t believe he’s gone.

JOHNNY
He made me laugh. He was a funny kid.

MARY
Wait ... we’re the same age, right? We had classes together?

JOHNNY
Something like that.

MARY
I’m close. I can picture you. At least I think I can. Just need the fog to lift. Crap.
JOHNNY
Let me end your suffering. It’s me—

MARY
Shush! Don’t tell me. Just give me a sec.

(Silence as she concentrates.)

JOHNNY
So you’re married now, huh?

(MARY nods, still concentrating.)

Any kids?

JOHNNY

MARY
No. Thank God, no.

JOHNNY
Why?

MARY
Doctor said the walls in my uterus were weak. Had an abortion once—

JOHNNY
I mean why thank God?

MARY
It’s a shitty world. Why do that to a kid, bring one up so life could beat it down?

JOHNNY
It’s not so bad.

MARY
Really?
JOHNNY

Really.

MARY

When’s the last time you had a hot meal? What’s your deal? Alcoholic? Junkie?

JOHNNY

Three days ago. Yes. Yes.

MARY

Have one so he could end up like you?

JOHNNY

Or you.

MARY

You may have known a little about me way back whenever, but you don’t know anything about me now.

JOHNNY

And you know me, right?

MARY

You just told me you were an alcoholic homeless junkie.

JOHNNY

You make it sound so bad.

MARY

Just being honest.

(She turns to cough.)

JOHNNY

Brutally so.

MARY

What was that?
JOHNNY
I said “is that so?”

MARY
I call ’em like I see ’em. (Beat.) Damn. You made me lose it. I was so close.

JOHNNY
Sure you were.

MARY
I got an idea. I’m going to ask you questions and you just answer “yes” or “no”.

JOHNNY
I probably should get going. Your husband might come out.

MARY
Don’t worry about him. You can’t just leave me hanging. Especially after I was kind enough to give you a cigarette.

JOHNNY
I offered to tell you—

MARY
I need to remember who you are myself. Seriously, it’s killing me. Besides, this is the highlight of my week. Talking to someone I knew when life was, I don’t know—

JOHNNY
Easy? Good? Wide open?

MARY
Sounds about right.

JOHNNY
Which one?
MARY
All.

JOHNNY
You really had people eating out of the palm of your hands.

(She smiles.)

JOHNNY
Even though you were usually feeding ’em shit.

(He throws his cigarette butt on the ground and steps on it.)

MARY
Hey! That’s not very nice.

JOHNNY
If you say so.

MARY
What are you saying?

JOHNNY
Nothing. Forget it. (Pause.) I’ll give you three questions. That’s it. I get to ask you three questions myself. Fair?

MARY
Three? That’s it? (Glancing at the house.) Okay, fine. You can have your questions too, I have nothing to hide.

(She moves down the steps toward JOHNNY, flicking her cigarette butt to the side. She offers her pack of cigarettes.)
MARY
Want another?

JOHNNY
Yes. That’s one.

MARY
Hey.

(He takes a cigarette and the lighter.)

JOHNNY
I’m just fuckin’ with ya. (Lights the cigarette and returns the lighter.) Thanks.

(MARY lights up a cigarette as well.)

MARY
So you’re my age and Walt’s friend …

JOHNNY
I said I knew Walt.

MARY
You said he made you laugh. Only his friends thought what he did and said was funny. Everyone else couldn’t stand to be around him for more than two minutes. Wait a minute …

(Mary nervously retreats up the porch steps.)

MARY
… Are you stalking me? Have you been watching me? Were you in love with me and now you found me and … Listen man, I’ve got a big hunker of a bat behind that door --

JOHNNY
No! It’s not like that. I was walking by and I heard what was going on in the house, so I
Mary stayed just to make sure … make sure nobody was dying or anything. Then you walked out. It’s good to know you still think so highly of yourself.

Mary
And you recognized me?

Johnny
Not until you gave me a light. When I got up close I knew it was you. Hard to forget a face like yours. (Beat.) I’m not stalking you. (Beat.) You believe me? (Beat.) Hunker? Is that even a word?

Mary
Just walking by? What would someone like you be doing in this neighborhood? Were you casing the houses on this block? My house!?

Johnny
No! (Pause. Finding a story to tell.) I was with a friend grabbing copper … you know … wire and pipes from abandoned houses. Get pretty good money for it. We were a few streets over and down … you live pretty close to one of the shadier parts of town — you go from fancy to fucked real quick. (Beat.) Well one of the houses wasn’t as abandoned as we thought and some big guy and his bigger dog … I got the hell out of there fast. (Beat.) Then like I said, I heard some fighting and yelling and I stayed to make sure everything was okay.

Mary
How altruistic of you, making sure nobody would be seriously hurt.

Johnny
Okay, you got me, I was really hoping to see a dead body wheeled out, and maybe get interviewed for the local news.
MARY
Dick. I was right ... you’re a thief to boot.

JOHNNY
You’re looking at it the wrong way. The takeaway for you should be is that I am most definitely, probably, not a stalker.

(She is taking it all in, assessing the situation and his explanation.)

MARY
Okay you’re not a stalker. (Beat.) But I’m not sure a thieving alcoholic homeless junkie is any better.

JOHNNY
I’m harmless. Promise.

MARY
Whatever.

JOHNNY
So what’s your first question?

MARY
Easy there, turbo. You’re only giving me three. Got to make each one count. (Pause.) Did you smoke back then? I didn’t, but my boyfriend did, and I knew all the kids who smoked behind the gym during lunch.

JOHNNY
Yes.

(MARY closes her eyes to remember.)
(Laughing.) Lester “Louie Louie” Garcia, remember that guy? He had the curliest hair and he said “warsh” and “sangwich.” Cute too.

JOHNNY
You thought he was? (Beat.) I do remember though. Smoke. All types … regular, menthol, cloves … sometimes weed. (Beat.) And sweaty feet! The smell of our youth.

MARY
Okay, that’s something. Not much, but I think it’s helping. By question three I’ll have your first, last and nickname if you had one. Your turn.

JOHNNY
Are you happy with your life, your marriage?

MARY
No. That was kind of a wasted question, right? Look at my face. The fight you overheard?

JOHNNY
Some people are good at lying to themselves.

MARY
Those people are fools. My turn. Did we have a lot of the same friends, besides the smokers?

JOHNNY
Yes.

MARY
(Fishing.) Steve?

(He shakes his head.)

MARY
Paul … wait, no … Randy! Is that you, Randy? You were the only one who could grow a full beard.
JOHNNY

Nope.

MARY

You must really look different now. Did you get any work done or something?

JOHNNY

Who would pay to look like this?

MARY

I had a pretty big group of friends, but still, why can’t I place you? You must have been one of those guys that was always around but didn’t say much.

JOHNNY

Believe me, I wouldn’t recognize me if I weren’t me. (Pause.) I ran into my mother a few months back. Downtown, by the courthouse. She was probably paying down a ticket or maybe she was there for jury duty, whatever. We hadn’t seen each other in some time, but still … she looked me straight in the eyes and walked right by. So I stopped her. She said “Sorry, young man, I don’t have any money.” There was no feeling in her voice. She thought I was just another bum begging for change. She didn’t even recognize her only child. I’ve been trying, really trying to clean up. Mothers aren’t supposed to forget who their children are. Right?

MARY

Maybe she did know it was you, and she just didn’t want to show it because she loves you so much, even now, and she knew you’d feel bad for letting her down. She just didn’t want you to feel worse than she already knew you must have been feeling … or something like that. I’m rambling. I don’t make sense sometimes when I ramble.
JOHNNY
I know. It’s one of your endearing qualities.

MARY
It is so unfair that you remember me and I have no idea who the hell you are. The way you’re looking at me, I can feel you judging me or something.

JOHNNY
I wipe my ass with newspaper. Who am I to judge?

MARY
Really annoyed right now. We obviously knew each other fairly well, or at least you knew me. (Pause.) My turn?

JOHNNY
No, it’s mine. Does it happen often, the fighting and the hitting?

MARY
Yes.

JOHNNY
Why don’t you just leave? You don’t have to stay. Looking at your house, that big car in the driveway ... I know it seems pretty hard to leave someone who provides such nice—

MARY
Don’t assume that he’s responsible for all this. Cause he’s a man? He’s a writer. At least that’s what he tells everyone. Nobody’s paid a cent for anything he has to say or write about. I pay for all of this. I don’t need a man to buy me things. Don’t go feeling sorry for this girl, I give as good as I get. The mental and physical abuse in this household is doled out equally by both parties. Understand? Understand!?
JOHNNY
Yeah. I’m sorry, I just thought—

MARY
Your thoughts haven’t really taken you very far in this life, so I’d stop now if I were you.

(Silence.)

JOHNNY
I’ll go.

MARY
Hey, no. Don’t. I’m sorry. You poked a nerve. I didn’t mean to. I have a mean streak in me. Hurt a lot of people with it in my life. (Beat.) Besides, I’m not letting you go until I remember who the hell you are and I got one more question left.

(Silence.)

MARY
Okay?

JOHNNY
Sure. Whatever.

MARY
Okay good. (Beat.) I’m not sure what to ask and this is my last chance. (Pause. Searching.) Okay, I got it. What kind of car did you drive?

JOHNNY
That’s not a yes or no question.

MARY
I know, but—

JOHNNY
But nothing. You made the rules.
MARY
I didn’t know alcoholic homeless junkies were such sticklers for rules.

JOHNNY
I don’t know the kind you’ve been hanging out with. Must be with the “bottom-feeding, shelter-challenged and addicted.” The ones like me, the respectable ones, we only go by the rules. By the way, you forgot “thieving.”

MARY
You’re kind of funny. Were you this funny back then?

JOHNNY
Yes. At least you always thought I was. Now for my last question—

MARY
Hey. That wasn’t my question.

JOHNNY
You asked one. I answered.

MARY
That didn’t help me any.

JOHNNY
Really?

MARY
Well, I got nothing. I guess I’ll never know who the stranger was I shared cigarettes and conversation with. How the hell did this happen anyway? Why I didn’t run for the door when you first showed up … you’re pretty scary-looking, you know.

JOHNNY
Why didn’t you? Then again, you didn’t always do what you were supposed to. (Beat.) This was meant to be, I guess.

Jay Guevarra 19
MARY
You might be right. (Pause.) So give it to me. What’s your final question? Make it a good one.

(Sound of running water fades up slowly.)

JOHNNY
Earlier you mentioned an abortion.

MARY
Wow. Yeah. I guess. I’m just not holding anything back tonight, am I?

JOHNNY
Did you have it the summer after we graduated?

MARY
(Serious.) What? How did you know that?

(JOHNNY looks into her eyes momentarily then drops his head.)

MARY
Who the hell are you? How could you know that? I’m talking to you. How could you know? Only my family knew. I said I’m talking to you!

(He raises his head and stares at her heartbroken. Finally, MARY realizes who it is.)

MARY
Johnny? Wow. (Pause.) Is this really happening? You were the last person ... we just moved here. It’s only been a few months ... and someone ... actually ... jeezus ... it was your parents! I bumped into them at the deli, our deli ... by your house. And they told me you moved to California or Hawaii — somewhere with sun and beaches — and
that you were married ... happy. It was really
good to hear that, and now I—

JOHNNY
(Quiet. Calm.) Boy? Girl? (Pause.) Forget it,
don’t answer. I don’t want to know.

(Silence.)

MARY
It was too early to tell.

JOHNNY
(To himself.) Mia. I always liked that name.

MARY
I don’t know what to say.

JOHNNY
Nothing to say.

MARY
I’m so sorry, Johnny.

JOHNNY
Me too. But it was a long time ago. Two
different people. A different life.

(Silence, only the running
water. Until pipes rattle
and water shuts off.)

MARY
Shit, he’s finished. (Pause.) Hang on. (She heads
for the door, then turns around.) Don’t leave
yet. Promise me you’ll be here when I get back.

JOHNNY
Sure. Whatever.

(MARY disappears through
the front door. JOHNNY

JAY GUEVARRA 21
turns and exits. After a minute he returns and sits on a porch step just as MARY appears through the door, carrying a plate of food.)

MARY
Good. I thought you might have left. Here.

(He stands and she shoves the plate into his hands.)

MARY
This was supposed to be for him but ... fuck him, you know? I won’t let you go another day without a hot meal.

(JOHNNY makes an effort to return the food, his arms extended, motioning for MARY to take it back.)

JOHNNY
You’re going to start another fight.

MARY
I know. We weren’t finished anyway.

JOHNNY
You know? (Pause.) Where’s that bat? I can help you work something out. Make it look like a robbery or something ... anything. You don’t have to live this life—

MARY
(Controlled, strong.) All the choices I’ve made and will continue to make in my life ... and the consequences ... they belong to me. I own every single one.
JOHNNY
I don’t think you—

MARY
Stop thinking already. Just take it. For me. It’ll help get you to tomorrow, then you’ll figure out a way to get to the day after and so on. Maybe on one of those days we’ll get to smoke and talk some more.

(JOHNNY relents and drops the plate to his waist.)

JOHNNY
Another night to add to the list of memorable ones spent with the incomparable Mary Jensen. (Pause.) I always wondered how life for you turned out.

MARY
Now you know. (Beat.) This is the life I created. This is the life I deserve. Some of us have to live out the crappy ones.

(They smile one last time, a silent farewell. When the moment ends, JOHNNY walks off as MARY turns and enters her house, closing the door behind her.)