

REASONABLE DOUBT

By Natalie Dulka

Lights up on a messy room. JEANINE
ENTERS closely followed by CARMEN.
JEANINE starts digging through the things
in the room, looking for something.
CARMEN waits nervously by the entrance.

CARMEN

If she finds us up here, she'll evict us, Jeanine.

JEANINE

Let her. This place is a dump. She's gone for the night anyway! Are those fake birds?

CARMEN

Sure, it's no Four Seasons, but it is also the only place that didn't ask us for previous landlords. If she finds us, she'll evict us, and if we get evicted, that's it! We're done for! We won't be able to find another place to live and we'll have to go move back to that godforsaken town and live out our days in your parents' moldy ass basement and we both know how well that worked out last time!

JEANINE

Then you'd better quiet the hell down so she doesn't find us up here, hadn't you, Carmen?

CARMEN

I just really don't think this is the best idea, Jeanine.

JEANINE

Oh, come on! Don't you want to know what the old broad is hiding up here?

CARMEN

Not particularly, no. I'd rather go to dinner like we'd planned.

JEANINE

We can go to dinner any old time. It's not every day that the creepy old lady who lives upstairs leaves the house for the evening. This might be our only chance to find out what she's been doing up here.

CARMEN comes up behind JEANINE and wraps her arms around her waist.

CARMEN

It's also not every day that we can have inconsiderably loud sex in our room without annoying that same creepy old lady who lives upstairs

JEANINE

I see your loud as hell sex and I raise you loud as hell sex *after* I find a story.

CARMEN

You are hopeless.

JEANINE

Hopelessly in love with you, yes.

CARMEN

Gross.

JEANINE

Bah! My love for you! Gross? I have never been so thoroughly offended in all my days!

CARMEN

Oh whatever. Just finish snooping and take me to dinner like you promised!

JEANINE

Or to bed!

JEANINE goes over to the ash tray and
pokes around in the dust.

Holy shit, Carmen. I think this is cocaine!

CARMEN

Congrats, Jeanine! You did it! You figured out what she was hiding! You're so smart and pretty. Wow! I am just blown away! You're the best investigative journalist to ever live. Eat your heart out, Walter Cronkite!

Beat.

Can we go now?

JEANINE

Holding the portrait.

Do you think this is her long-lost lover? Estranged father? Both?!

CARMEN

Oh my god! That's it. I'm out. I quit. I'm leaving. Good luck with your witch hunt, Jeanine. I am going back to any one of the other rooms in this house that our landlord hasn't strictly forbidden us from going into

JEANINE

Okay, fine. But don't you want to know – even just a tiny bit – *why* she has strictly forbidden us from coming in here?

CARMEN

Probably because she, like every other human ever, likes to have at least a little privacy? She probably didn't want you sticking your grubby fingers in her cocaine and accusing her of incest!

JEANINE

There is no way that a woman who makes such a big deal out of us not coming in here isn't hiding something, Carmen!

CARMEN

She's probably just hiding the cocaine! And it honestly didn't seem like a big deal to me.

JEANINE

Okay what conversation were you a part of because the one I thought we had with her was pretty damn over the top. I mean, she made us take an oath, Carmen. An oath!

CARMEN

She's just eccentric, Jeanine! That doesn't mean that she's hiding something.

JEANINE

Eccentric? Your Aunt Maureen is eccentric. This lady is bat shit. She has fake birds in an off-limits attic, Carmen. That's not eccentric. That's fucking weird.

CARMEN

She's not hurting anyone, Jeanine. Why are you pushing this so hard?

JEANINE

Because I want to know what she's up to! There is a story here! I can feel it!

CARMEN

Look around, Jeanine! This is not a meth lab or the home base for some sinister plot to overthrow the government. It's just the attic of a sad old woman. God! You're ridiculous!

JEANINE

Oh, *I'm* ridiculous?! Me? Who's the one who couldn't possibly handle living in that Podunk town one more second after that hillbilly piece of shit called you a dyke at the convenience store? Who's the one who picked a fight over a goddamn hot dish with the woman – my mother, mind you – who so kindly took us in after we got kicked out of the townhouse? Who's the one who got us kicked out of the townhouse in the first place?! Because it sure as hell wasn't me, Carmen!

CARMEN

Why do you always do this? You can't just pin everything on me and call it a day, Jeanine.

JEANINE

I “always do this” because you always seem to forget that your temper has lost us multiple apartments, security deposits, and jobs, Carmen. You hulk out at the people who stand to take the most away from us and then pretend you did nothing wrong!

CARMEN

Do you ever stop to think that maybe I wouldn't have to “hulk out” if you didn't get yourself into situations where I have to defend you?

JEANINE

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

CARMEN

You do these stupid fucking things like going hunting for secrets in our landlord's attic and expect that there won't be any repercussions, Jeanine! When we were in St. Paul, you tried to write a story on the landlord's illegal immigrant family members and he evicted us. When we finally landed that townhouse in Rosedale, you got caught snooping in our neighbor's shed

because you could tell there was story there and we got kicked out! When we moved up to Red Wing to live with your parents, you stopped turning in stories and doing your damn job because you were too busy trying to figure out who was sleeping with who in the church book club and I stood up for you to your mom. The fight wasn't about Tater Tot hot dish. That shit's delicious. The fight was about you. It's always about you.

JEANINE

Don't turn this around on me! I am not to blame!

CARMEN

What!? I'm not even trying to blame you! I'm trying to show you that I do all these things for you! Jesus! I just can't win with you.

JEANINE

Your neurotic ass has ruined every good goddamn thing we've had in the last 3 years, Carmen. Not me. You. I might get into trouble sometimes but no one said you had to start wars for me. I never asked you to go to bat for me.

CARMEN

You're mixing your metaphors. And my "neurotic ass" is the only one that'll have you so I'd slow my roll if I were you.

JEANINE

Okay first of all, how dare you? And second of all, you are not the only one who'd have me. I am a catch.

CARMEN

Yeah, a fucking rude one. Who's not gonna throw back the fish that calls them names?

JEANINE

You didn't.

Beat.

JEANINE goes over to CARMEN and takes
her in her arms.

CARMEN

Yeah, well, I'm a glutton for punishment.

JEANINE

And a neurotic one at that.

CARMEN

You're such a bitch.

They kiss or hug or have a moment.

CARMEN

Can we go now, please?

JEANINE

Nope!

CARMEN

Why not?

JEANINE

Because I still haven't figured out her secret!

CARMEN

Jesus Christ.

During this bit, CARMEN takes a seat and impatiently waits for JEANINE to finish snooping.

JEANINE

Hear me out. She has an off-limits attic that she makes her tenants swear an oath they won't enter. She doesn't put it in the lease or just mention it casually like "hey, please don't go in my creepy witch attic" – she has us take a goddamn oath. And she was oddly specific about the wording of that oath.

CARMEN

That's usually how oaths work.

JEANINE

So, here's what I'm thinking.

CARMEN

Here we go.

JEANINE

I'm thinking that we might be a part of some weird reality T.V. series.

CARMEN

Like Big Brother?

JEANINE

Exactly. I think this is where all the recording and editing and commentary happens! This is a fantastic couch for a confession cam!

JEANINE gets on the couch.

CARMEN

Confession cam?

JEANINE

You know? Like on America's Next Top Model when the girls go in a separate room and sit there and talk directly to the camera and they're all like "Stephanie was being such a bitch today and I mean I want her to be successful in this competition but I just don't think she has what it takes."

CARMEN

So, you think that we were duped into being on a reality T.V. show about.... What exactly? It's not like the people living in this house lead extraordinary lives, Jeanine. I highly doubt any network would sign a show about a reclusive old woman who rents out rooms in her home to washed up journalists and their lesbian lovers.

JEANINE

Do you have a better explanation?

CARMEN

Yes! It's just an attic where she keeps her old things and doesn't want her tenants poking around!

JEANINE

That's totally unrealistic and completely ridiculous, Carmen. That makes no sense. I still think it's a reality T.V. show. I think the combination of the lease and the oath somewhere had a legally binding statement saying we were okay being on this thing. The whole premise of the show is probably that we're supposed to figure out that we're on a show in the first place!

CARMEN

Yes, because that's a reasonable explanation. You know that old adage about hoofbeats, Jeanine? That when you hear them, you shouldn't assume it's zebras?

JEANINE

What hoofbeats? Anyway. I think there's a hidden camera somewhere. Probably in the portrait or in Mary or something. Oh!

She goes over and fiddles aggressively with the headset.

I bet this is hooked up to all the microphones in the house and this is how she listens to us. If I could just get it to turn on, I could prove it to you!

CARMEN

Jeanine, you're freaking me out. This lady is not recording us! She probably just has some fond memories of these things and doesn't want us messing around with them.

JEANINE

Then why the elaborate oath? Hmm?

CARMEN

She's strange, I'll give you that. But I really think you're unravelling a bit here, Jeanine. Can we please just go to dinner?

JEANINE

Stop it! Stop trying to shut me up! Something is going on here! I can feel it!

JEANINE's search becomes more harried.
She picks up the statue of Mary and looks
all over it for clues, knocks over other props,
etc.

CARMEN

Okay! Fine! Let's pretend that there is something going on. That still doesn't make it your responsibility to unearth it! Can't we just live somewhere without you trying to expose the place for some conspiracy or other? Can't we go two months without a goddamn scandal?

JEANINE

This is who I am, Carmen! I am an investigator! It's what I do!

CARMEN

No; it's what you used to do. You got fired, remember? You're not a journalist anymore! Don't you know that?!

Beat.

JEANINE stops her frantic search and ends
holding the statue of Mary by the neck in
one hand.

JEANINE

Of course, I know that. I spend every minute of every day hating myself for losing my shit and losing my job. The last thing I need from you is a reminder that I'm worthless. That I'm not even allowed to do the one thing I'm good at anymore.

CARMEN

You're not worthless.

JEANINE

Without my work, all I am is some nosy bitch with a hot girlfriend. I don't have hobbies, Carmen. I don't have skills or really any friends. All I have is you and my journalism.

CARMEN

That's bullshit.

JEANINE

Yeah? Name three people who would choose to hang out with me if you weren't there, Carmen. Name one thing that I do well other than snooping and writing.

CARMEN

You're good in bed.

JEANINE

Other than that?

CARMEN

You're funny. You're smart. And you're persistent as hell.

JEANINE

But I'm worthless. I don't have anything to dedicate all my humor and good looks and persistence and superior love making skills toward. You can't be my purpose, Carmen. I need something bigger than that.

CARMEN

Find one. You've been dedicating your time and energy to finding a story. Stop searching for a story and just write, Jeanine. You don't need a scoop to be a good writer.

JEANINE

Pfft. That's easier said than done.

CARMEN

You haven't even tried! All you've been doing is spiraling and snooping and avoiding the problem.

JEANINE

I know.

She sets down the statue of Mary.

I'm sorry.

CARMEN

Are you apologizing to me or the statue?

JEANINE

You.

CARMEN

Well I forgive you. I love you.

JEANINE

I love you too.

CARMEN

Can we go to dinner, now?

JEANINE

We should probably clean this mess up, first.

CARMEN

That's on you. I didn't do any of this.

From offstage a crotchety old woman voice
is heard.

VOICE

Does an oath mean nothing to you fuckers?!

JEANINE and CARMEN share a look,
maybe they run off stage. Lights go down.

END OF PLAY