



# **JUST US GIRLZ**

by Sam Stone

JUST US GIRLZ

a play in two acts by Sam Stone



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LOCATION: A small town within day-trip distance of a large metropolitan area.

SETTING: "HAIRLOOMS," an up-scale hair salon.

The salon has two sections

- On one side, near the "front" entrance, is a styling chair.
  - Between the chair and the entrance is a work-height counter or display case with hair care samples, business cards a notepad and pen, etc.
    - A tall stool stands onstage from the display case.
  - A rifle is mounted nearby on a wall.
  - A rolled or folded exercise mat is somewhere nearby.
- Opposite is a stylish low table with seating for five.
  - Upstage of the table and seating is a work-height table, shelf or cabinet with; radio, coffee pot, telephone and phone book.
    - There are papers and a menu pinned on the wall above the phone.
  - The "back room" and laundry are offstage from this area.
    - The "rear" exit is through the back room.

TIME: The present.

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance):

JOE – (male/gay/fem) 40's. Hairdresser. JOE owns the hair salon.

MAYE SMELLING – Town busy-body.

MICHELLE MONTANA – 30-ish. Lives in the metropolitan area.

PETE SMELLING – MAYE's husband (PETE should be dressed for the wedding on his second entrance) .

REV. ANDROMEDA "Andie" SMYTH – Methodist minister. She wears "the collar."

HENRY MICHAELS – (male/gay/butch) JOE's lover. Successful mystery novelist.

TERESA MONTANA – (MICHELLE's mother) 20+ years older than MICHELLE (TERESA and MICHELLE should be the same ethnicity).

VICTOR "Big Vic Oregano" ORIGONI – 60's. Mobster from metropolitan area.

GUIDO – 40's. VICTOR's adopted son and bodyguard. Large, muscular.

MARCUS "Mark" GARCIA – 50's/60 's. Physically imposing, dominating personality. Retired Police Detective. Presently employed as Chief Special Investigator for the State Attorney General. Dating TERESA.

ETHNIC LANGUAGE: If any of the cast are of Latin descent, they may wish to speak occasionally to each other Spanish.

## SCENES:

## ACT I

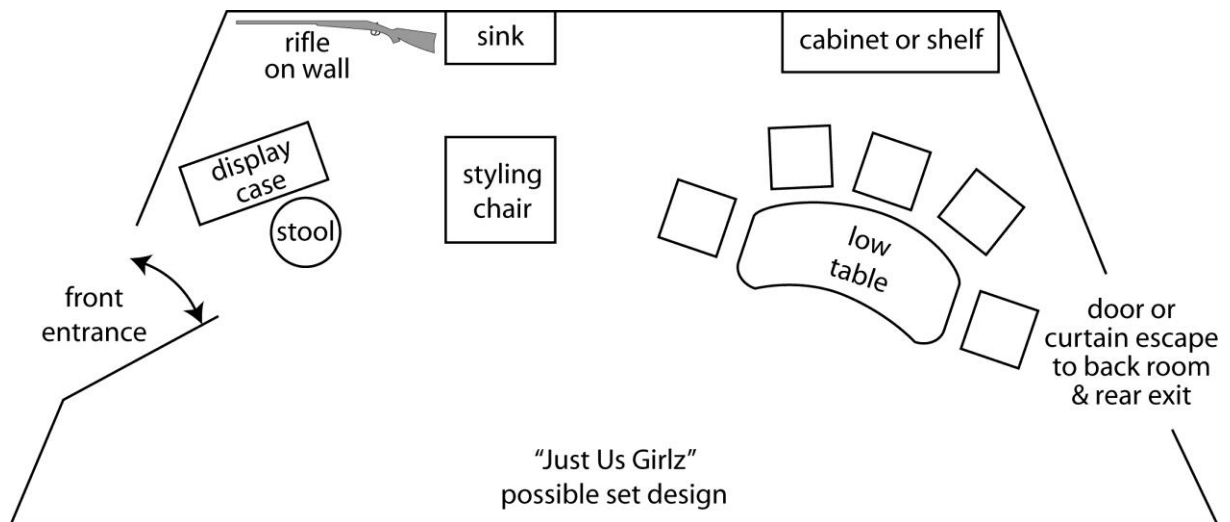
Scene 1 – Late Monday morning.

Scene 2 – After lunch. (25)

## ACT II

Scene 1 – A moment later. (33)

Scene 2 – A moment later. (53)



PRELUDE:

On rise, JOE is cleaning the salon. Music may be playing on the radio.

There is a commotion offstage. Several men's voices are heard. JOE goes downstage and watches action far left or right. Surprised and amazed at what he sees, his gaze flows slowly to downstage center.

VOICE #1 (offstage)

Hey... look at that!

VOICE #2 (offstage)

How many points... eight...???

VOICE #1 (offstage)

No! Ten!

VOICE #2 (offstage)

Somebody get a gun!

(Suddenly inspired, with a devilish air, JOE takes the rifle from the wall and exits as lights fade to black.)

(A loud gunshot.)

ACT ONE

Scene 1

late Monday morning

On rise, JOE is sweeping. Music is playing loudly on the radio. JOE is dancing with the broom. His back is toward the entrance.

MAYE

(Enters. Speaks over radio.)

Good morning, Joe.

JOE

(Startled. Looks around to see MAYE.)

Good morning Maye... Just a minute.

(Crosses to the radio. Turns it off. Returns.)

That's better. What brings you by?

MAYE

The volunteers are holding a meeting about hiring another professional Fire Fighter to keep the station occupied twenty-four hours a day.

(Looks at her watch.)

I'm running a little early and saw your lights on.

JOE

Honey, I'm glad they finally got around to hiring another Fire Fighter.

MAYE

Maybe, but that also means higher taxes.

JOE

Wait a minute! That expense was approved by the town council last year. I already have my tax bill. Besides, state funding covers a large part of their wages.

MAYE

I'm still not sure I approve. Donna Garrett said the only reason they want to hire another professional is because Connor Milo went to the fire academy and got his certification. His mom's cousin is Anthony Dinkins who's Chairman of the town council. All the council members are volunteers and I think they're stacking the meeting in Connor's favor. That's also why the meeting was called on a Monday morning so most of the other volunteers would be working.

JOE

Aren't you a little overdressed for a meeting of the volunteers?

MAYE

Patty Jo and Jamie are getting married today. Pete and I are attending.

(Beat, speaks in confidence.)

She's pregnant, you know.

JOE

No, I didn't.

(MICHELLE enters. JOE dramatically checks his watch - HE's NOT wearing one.)

Well, it's about time.

(They embrace.)

Oh... uh... Maye Smelling, Michelle Montana.

(The women exchange greetings.)

So... big city girl having trouble finding her way to the sticks? What took you so long? You were supposed to be here more than an hour ago.

MICHELLE

Oh, Joe, I'm sorry. I forgot about the traffic. It took forever just to get as far as the bridge. From there on, it was better but not really good until after I was past mile marker ninety.

JOE

Why do you think I never took clients before ten o'clock when I lived there?

MICHELLE

Me neither but I've been doing it so long I forgot why.

JOE

Well, you did miss breakfast. But... I have a great lunch planned. Oh... I forgot! I should have done this earlier.

(Crosses to coffee pot.)

You're not going to believe this.

(Turns the coffee pot on.)

Wait 'till you taste this coffee. The market at the other end of Main Street opened a new gourmet coffee section. They have some of the most succulent flavors. It's almost like home. This one's Picayune Amaretto.

(Smells the top of the coffeemaker.)

It smells divine... and... you serve it with heavy whipping cream instead of milk or half and half. It's delightful.

(Returns.)

MICHELLE

Heavy whipping cream? How many calories is that?

JOE

Who cares? I'm on my feet all day. Believe me, I burn it off.

MAYE

Yeah, sure... Just the other day he was talking about needing to diet.

MICHELLE

(Quietly, to MAYE.)

I didn't want to say anything.

(Her attention returns to JOE.)

Wait a minute! How can you afford that on your budget?

JOE

Little do you know! Girl, I've been discovered.

MICHELLE

Really? Here at the 'end of the world' styling salon? You get what... two or three customers a week?

(MICHELLE sits on the tall stool.)

JOE

(Crosses to seating area. Brings a chair.)

That's what you think! Here Maye... sit down.

(MAYE sits.)

I'll have you know my calendar is very full these days.

MICHELLE

Full of what... or should I say, whom?

JOE

You're not going to believe this one. It's the wives of the local chapter of the N R A... including Maye here.

MICHELLE (slowly)

N... R... A...???... The National... Rifle... Association?

JOE

(Sits in the salon chair.)

Yes ma'am! Every able-bodied male in town is a member... uh... except me.

MICHELLE

And these machos let their wives come to you to get their hair done?

JOE (smugly)

Sure nuff!

MICHELLE

Why?

MAYE

Other than being the best hairdresser in town? It's because of the deer he shot.

MICHELLE

You shot a deer? What'd you shoot it with, a curling iron?

JOE

Go ahead and be smart. I'll have you know I shot it with a gun.

(Grabs blow dryer. Points it at her.)

MICHELLE

A gun! You have a gun? Naah!

JOE

Yes I do.

(Pointing.)

There!

MICHELLE (surprised)

How long has that been there?

JOE

It's been on the wall at least a year. Of course you wouldn't know that 'cause you never come to visit. Last time I saw you was... what... two years ago? Maybe longer.



MICHELLE

My life's been a little complicated lately. (Beat.) Let's get back to the subject at hand. You've never mentioned hunting.

(Looks around.)

So, where's the deer?

MAYE

My husband, Pete, smoked it. I brought Joe a couple pounds of sausage.

MICHELLE

That's not what I meant. Where's the head? The... uh... trophy.

JOE

Trophy? Can you see me with a trophy deer head on my wall?

MICHELLE

I can't even see you shooting the damn deer!

JOE

Me neither!

MICHELLE

So... why'd you do it?

JOE

It was Henry's fault.

MICHELLE

What does Henry have to do with it?

JOE

He's the one who talked me into hanging the gun... or rifle as he calls it... on the wall. He thought the town folk would be more accepting if I displayed one.

MICHELLE

So... did it work?

MAYE (laughing)

Not until he shot that deer.

JOE

Well, I didn't know the damn fool loaded it.

MICHELLE

Wait a minute! You let Henry hang a gun on the wall of YOUR salon, and then you went HUNTING?

JOE

NO!...

(JOE stands.)

Honey, you're not going to believe this. You see, it was the first day of hunting season when this deer comes...

(Imitates sashaying.)

...sashaying down the center of the road.

MICHELLE

This road?

(Points at the 4th Wall.)

JOE

Yes! Then it started grazing on the grass around the bottom of the war memorial.

MICHELLE

Where?

MAYE

(Points downstage.)

Over there! That big stone monolith in front of the courthouse.

MICHELLE

Huh... I never saw a war memorial like that. What war does it memorialize?

JOE

Who cares! It's just another event where young men throw away their lives because some Washington bigwig thought it would be a grand thing to do.

MICHELLE

You are becoming too cynical for words... (Beat.) ...so, the deer is munching on the grass at the bottom of that huge rock and you just went out and shot him.

JOE

Yeah... well... sort of... but it wasn't on purpose.

MICHELLE

Let me try to understand this. You take the gun off the wall, point it at the deer and shot the poor thing but it wasn't on purpose... really?

JOE

Really! It was supposed to be a big joke. You see, some of the hunters were eating lunch over at Grandma's Kitchen and they all ran outside yelling for someone to get a gun. Funny thing is that even with all that commotion, the deer didn't run away. It just stared at the men for a moment and then went back to grazing. They kept yelling, 'Get a gun! Get a gun.' So I took the gun off the wall, went outside and shot it.

MICHELLE  
You WHAT?

JOE  
Like I told you, I didn't know it was loaded.

MICHELLE  
So...?

JOE  
Well... I thought the gun was just going to go 'click' and then I'd have a good laugh... so... I pulled the trigger and there was this tremendous BOOM! The next thing I knew I was on my ass on the sidewalk. Damn thing about ripped my shoulder off. Bruise lasted nearly a month. How was I to know it was loaded?

MAYE  
Pete said he fell like a tall pine. Flat on his back.

MICHELLE  
So, then what happened?

MAYE  
Pete said it took a couple a steps and fell over on its side, blam! Just like that guy on Laugh In.

MICHELLE  
What guy?

MAYE  
The guy on the tricycle that...  
(MICHELLE looks inquisitive.)  
...forget it.

(PETE Enters.)

PETE  
Maye, what are you still doing here? The meeting's about to start.

MAYE  
(Checks her watch.)  
Oops. We have to go if we want to be there for the meeting. Pete, why aren't you dressed for the wedding?

PETE  
I'll change at the fire station after the meeting.

MAYE

Let's hope there's enough time.

(To MICHELLE.)

Michelle, sorry I don't have time for proper introductions. This is my husband, Pete. Joe has mentioned you so many times I feel I already know you. It's a pleasure to meet you in the flesh. Joe I'll be here for my appointment Wednesday.

(MAYE and PETE exit. JOE returns MAYE's chair to the seating area.)

MICHELLE

Did you notice her hair? She should be in your chair today instead of going to a meeting.

JOE

Well, she does have an appointment.

MICHELLE

So there you were on your ass on the sidewalk.

JOE

Okay... well, the guys in front of the kitchen started cheering their fool heads off. They all ran over and helped me back on my feet, slapping me on the back and...

MICHELLE

So... big white hunter, huh? Guess next time you'll want me to be your gun bearer. I'll carry your spare ammo on my back and pack a lunch for you and the rest of the boys, huh?

JOE

Forget it. I'm never shooting anything again... never! I couldn't take it. All the guys from the café made such a big thing over me killing a deer and then it finally hit me. I had killed something that was beautiful... one of God's creatures... and it would never again jump gracefully over fences or look so perfect standing there in the meadow in the twilight. I had killed it! And... then...

MICHELLE

(A long pause. Michelle loses patience.)

And... then...?

JOE

And... then I lost my lunch all over Pete's hunting boots. After that, I put the gun back on the rack and never even let Henry clean it. The barrel's probably rusted real bad but I don't care. I'll never use it again, that's for sure.

MICHELLE

No more big time hunter?

JOE

No... just the pansy with the beauty shop on Main Street. (Beat.) Anyway, Pete asked what I was going to do with it. I told him he could do whatever he wanted. A few days later, Maye came in with a package of deer sausage. Nastiest stuff I ever put in my mouth. (Beat.) Well, maybe not.

(Knowing look.)

MICHELLE

So you killed Bambi!

JOE

Don't you start!

MICHELLE

Okay, it's just... you with a gun... it just isn't you.

JOE

No kidding! I feel the same way. The things I have to do for a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T! Next season I plan to help make breakfast at sunup down at the volunteer fire station on the first day of hunting season... me and the rest of the 'wives.'

MICHELLE

From what you've said in the past, I'm surprised the entire town isn't totally homophobic.

JOE

Oh, a few are still hung up in the biblical thing but most of them have accepted me... primarily because of Henry. He's so amazingly butch, and they like having a famous mystery novelist in their midst – makes them feel like they're in the mainstream. I even get some of the men in for haircuts too. Mostly it's the women. AND... this place has become the morning coffee klatch! I get to hear all the latest gossip.

MICHELLE

Oooh, gossip! Tell me more!

JOE

Yeah! There are about a dozen women, all customers. They typically come in to meet here one or two at a time and most often before eleven and leave in time for 'luncheon.' I don't even have to make coffee for them... they know where the supplies are and make it themselves, and, every week or so someone leaves a pound of coffee on the counter. Usually there's no more than three or four on any given day except once there were seven and I had to borrow a couple of chairs from next door. I eventually bought some folding chairs. They're in the back room in case I need them.

MICHELLE

How often does this happen?

JOE

What... the ladies coming in or having to bring in more chairs?

MICHELLE

How often do the ladies come in?

JOE

Once or twice a week.

MICHELLE

So now the good ol' boys here just love you and in the blink of an eye their little women just started showing up on your doorstep.

JOE

You said it honey! That's just how it happened... well, not all that fast. At first it was just one at a time and then all of a sudden the phone started ringing off the hook. I keep wondering if somebody went out of business but I'm afraid to ask.

MICHELLE

Sounds like you're right at home, here in this... one-gun salon. I'm going back to the city and tell everyone at The Hair Depot you've taken up hunting and talk with a hick accent.

JOE

Yeah. Tell them I knocked out a couple of teeth so I'd look more like a hayseed.

MICHELLE

So, you're staying busy, then?

JOE (exaggerated air of superiority)

Oh yeah! These days it's reservations only m'dear.

MICHELLE

Wonderful! How long has it taken? Three years?

(JOE holds up four fingers.)

REALLY? I'm surprised.

JOE

So... what's happening back your way? Last time we talked Mabel had had a heart attack.

MICHELLE

She had another, and then a series of strokes. She's in one of those facilities and isn't doing well. I try to get over there at least once a week for an hour or so.

JOE

Poor dear! How's her husband taking all this... uh, Jack?

MICHELLE

Jake! He's there all the time and feeds her every meal.

JOE

She had the most interesting customers. It was like they all escaped from the psycho ward.

MICHELLE

What did you expect?

JOE

Huh?

MICHELLE

She was a carnie... they worked in carnivals and circuses. She was a clown and Jake was a barker... you know, the guy that stood outside the tent touting the snake boy and the lady with three legs.

JOE

You're kidding?

MICHELLE

No! That's why she had all those whacko customers. They were all from her carnival days.

JOE

She never said anything about her past. How'd you learn all that?

MICHELLE

One day I was sitting with Jake and asked how they met. Since then we've had lots of discussions about it. I think its good therapy to get Mabel off his mind for a few minutes. When he talks about the carnival he really brightens up.

JOE

Good for you.

MICHELLE

Oh... Christie had the Hair Depot repainted. Every station has its own color.

JOE

Really?

MICHELLE

Yeah, let's see... there are eight stations, four on each wall, and one color for the rest of the place. He did the basic painting over a couple of weekends. You should have seen all the places where he filled holes in the wall! After he was done with the main colors, he painted columns between the stations with vines growing around them and an arch over the station that connects the columns.

JOE (unimpressed)

Sounds... uh... nice.

MICHELLE

It is! Sort of like being in your own office or something. After it was done, he painted a square on the wall in the waiting area with his ad in it.

JOE

I'm surprised Christie allowed that. Did she hang a picture over it?

MICHELLE

No. It's as beautiful as the rest of the art with vines and flowers making the border. That guy's more artist than painter and has become a regular customer... Christie's, of course. I think they might have made some sort of barter arrangement because I never see him forking over any cash. If that's true, it would have been a good trade for Christie... and... he's such a hunk! Straight too! Shame he's so young or I'd make a move on him.

JOE

Since when has age made a difference to you? I'm surprised you haven't already made that move.

MICHELLE

Okay, you got me there. I did try to pick him up but he wasn't interested. When I saw his girlfriend, I knew why.

JOE

What's she like?

MICHELLE

Your typical nightmare! Beautiful, cultured, drives a Mercedes convertible and wears expensive clothes. She comes in with him sometimes. She has perfect hair and make-up and her nails are long and natural... AND... the worst part is she's very nice. She comes in and talks to everyone while he gets a haircut. You can't help but love her.

JOE

Oh, well. You can't win 'em all.

MICHELLE

Yeah, but I seem to strike out a lot more often than I used to. Guess I'd better start looking at older men. Maybe even men with money.

JOE

Now THAT would be something new! Michelle without a stray man to take all her money. A novel idea! I still remember the time you helped that guy buy a new convertible so he could get a better sales job... and then he married his old girlfriend.

MICHELLE

Yeah. But what goes around... he's now divorced, the convertible is really beat up, the rag top leaks, and he can't afford something better because he has alimony and child support to pay for the rest of his life. She even had him locked up a couple of times for failure to make his payments.

JOE

How do you know all that?



MICHELLE

You're not going to believe this! She actually started coming to me for her hair. He's the topic of our discussions... and I'm cheering from the sidelines.

JOE

Speaking of the sidelines, do you still go to all the football games?

MICHELLE

Wouldn't miss a home game if they paid me! What if they actually won and I wasn't there? Okay, enough about me... how about Henry? Is he still serious about badminton?

JOE

Smartass... tennis! And he's just as crazy for it as ever. Come Wimbledon, I don't see him for what feels like months. He even got the special satellite hookup just so he could watch every match. Thank goodness his creative juices run while he's watching sports. All of his really good books were started during an exciting match. I still don't know how he can hear over the clack of the typewriter keys.

MICHELLE

Is he still using a typewriter? I thought you said he bought a computer.

JOE

He did, and he uses it for email and other stuff but not for writing.

MICHELLE

Why not?

JOE

He says the reason there's so much trash being sold today disguised as literature is because...  
(Mimicking HENRY.)  
..."the computer makes it easier to perpetrate it on an unsuspecting world by way of the Internet."

MICHELLE

You know, he may be right.

JOE

Yes, but I find it hard to agree when he starts typing at three A.M. and doesn't stop except to eat and sleep for a month or more. Once, I actually went out to the gazebo and tried to sleep on the swing, but the insects were terrible. After that episode, I made him spend some of his royalties and build a spare bedroom on the other side of the garage so I could get away from the noise.

MICHELLE

How long does it take him to write a book?

JOE

It depends on the subject. Initially, he spends several weeks typing, reading and more typing. After that, he does a huge amount of research and then re-writes the whole damn thing from the beginning. I asked him why he doesn't just begin with the research but he insists that he needs the first part of the process to get him rolling. How can watching tennis make you think of a murder mystery set in the Antarctic?

MICHELLE

Does he still travel for his research?

JOE

He travels some, just to get the feel for the places and people in the story but he does most of his real research on the Internet these days. What I find amazing are the video interviews he brings back when he does travel.

(JOE winces and rubs his neck.)

MICHELLE

(Moves behind JOE. Begins to massage his shoulders and neck.)  
Interviews?

JOE

He interviews local folks with a video camera... just him and them... pedestrians on the street, shop owners... things like that. They have some of the most interesting stories... AND... Henry seems capable of making the words on the page sound like the people in the interviews. He has a wonderful ear for that sort of thing.

MICHELLE

Maybe it's because he's such a good mimic. I remember when Josephine brought some guy from... where was it?... Texas or Oklahoma I think... to the Christmas party. I can still hear Henry talking to him the same way he spoke to Henry. They talked all night and said maybe twenty words total! That guy talked so slow you could take a nap between words.

JOE

Tennessee! The guy was from Tennessee. That's when Henry wrote the story about the blues singer who was kidnapped in Memphis and was rescued a year later in a brothel in Guadalajara. You remember! Everyone at the Depot read it when it first came out hoping they would find something familiar in it. That's the only one of his books I know of that wasn't inspired by a tennis match. After that, he moved here and bought the satellite hookup.

MICHELLE

Yeah, and nobody we knew was even in the story... not even the guy from Tennessee.

JOE

So what's going on in your life? Last time you visited you were going with a guy named Ralph.

MICHELLE

Ralph didn't last long. Then there was Ben and finally Evan. He was great until he started talking about marriage.

JOE

Not the marrying type, are you?

MICHELLE

Oh, yeah!... when I find the right person. But... I don't want to spend my life earning a living for some guy. Evan would work somewhere for a while and then find a way to get fired and collect unemployment until it ran out... then the process started all over again. Not my choice for a way of life.

JOE

How long did he last?

MICHELLE

(Becoming slightly aggressive with massage.)

About six months. It was fun while it lasted but I had to call it quits when he asked to move in. That's when he started talking about marriage.

JOE

When did this happen?

MICHELLE

(With increased aggression.)

Uh... about two months ago.

(JOE winces.)

You are really tight. When's the last time you had a good massage?

JOE

Actually, last night, at least Henry started to give me one. He was rubbing my lower back and one thing led to another.

MICHELLE

This is no good. Get where I can work better.

(JOE unrolls the mat and lays flat on his stomach. MICHELLE hikes up her skirt and straddles JOE's hips. MICHELLE's skirt covers JOE from lower back to knees, MICHELLE starts to massage JOE deeper and adds some pelvic action.)

JOE

Not too long. I have a customer coming in and she'd shit a brick if she saw us.

MICHELLE

On Monday?

JOE

Special perm. You'll like her. I've ordered lunch in so we can relax while she's drying.

(Moans.)

God that feels good. I've got enough room for another chair, why don't you move here and go to work with me again. You'd take a little hit in money at first, but you'd be more relaxed and I'll bet you'd bring in a lot of men just being here. Besides, you'd be able to give me a massage a week and I wouldn't get into trouble with Henry.

MICHELLE

What kind of trouble? Did you suddenly sprout ovaries?

(JOE looks at her. She pushes his head back down.)

I've got a little trouble of my own I want to talk to you about. You might not want me to stay after you hear about it.

(ANDIE enters.)

JOE (moaning)

Just a little deeper.

(MICHELLE's hips still in motion)

Oh... YES! Don't stop!

ANDIE (shocked)

Oh!

HENRY

(Enters speaking.)

Joe, I got this great idea... 'scuse me... what do you say we go to the city for a few...

(Moves around ANDIE, sees JOE and MICHELLE.)

...Woah!... just what's going on here! Get off him!

(JOE tries to disengage almost knocking MICHELLE over. They untangle.)

JOE

Good morning Reverend Smyth. Good morning, Henry. You remember Michelle, my old friend from the Hair Depot. She was just giving me a back rub.

ANDIE

Is this the wrong day for my perm?

HENRY

Old friend, you better hope so!

MICHELLE

Very old! Much older than you!

HENRY

Joseph did you hear the way she spoke to me?

JOE

Reverend Smyth, you're right on time. (Beat.) Alright Henry! What's going on?

HENRY

You ask me that when I come in here and see you moanin' and groanin' with... with... a...!

JOE (interrupting)

Henry, look! We're fully dressed! (Beat.) Maybe you don't remember her from the Hair Depot. Henry, meet Michelle. Michelle, meet Henry, my soon to be ex lover... if he doesn't start controlling his jealousy.

MICHELLE

Henry, Joe's back was really tight and I was working out some kinks.

HENRY

That's it?

(Looks at JOE. JOE nods.)

I'm sorry, but when I saw you like that... well... my heart almost stopped. I...

(Looks around.)

I thought you said you were doing a perm... this doesn't look much like a perm.

JOE

You're right, Henry. Here we were talking and Michelle decided to give me a massage while we waited for Reverend Smyth. I don't know exactly when she came in but you both must have arrived at about the same time and...

ANDIE (uncomfortable)

Perhaps I should come back later...

(TERESA enters in a huff.)

JOE

(To ANDIE.)

No, stay.

TERESA

Here you are! I've been looking in all your hideouts! Miranda finally told me where you were.

JOE

(Continues speaking to ANDIE.)

As soon as I figure out what this is all about I'll start your perm.

MICHELLE (sarcastic)

Hi mom, how are you? I'm fine! Remember Joe? Hi Joe! He's fine too!

(Beat. Change of attitude.)

What the hell is so all fired important you had to follow me out to the sticks?

TERESA

Don't get sassy with me young lady. I came here to save your life. Now grab your bag and let's get out of here! I have to hide you somewhere.

MICHELLE

Mom, you're talking crazy. It can't be all that bad.

TERESA

Little do you know.

(Nervously looks up/down the street downstage. Turns back to the others.)  
Hi, Joe. Sorry for the interruption.

JOE

Hello, Teresa. You're a little out of your territory aren't you?  
(Looks back and forth between TERESA and MICHELLE.)  
Okay, what's going on?

(A pause. Everyone looks at MICHELLE.)

TERESA

(Finally breaks the silence.)  
Victor's looking for Michelle.

JOE

Victor? As in Big Vic Oregano, the gangster?

TERESA

Yes Joe, Victor Origoni the gangster.

HENRY

I've heard Joe use the "Big Vic" expression before. How big is this guy?

MICHELLE

He's not all that big. I don't know where he gets the name.

TERESA

It has nothing to do with the size of his body... it's his...  
(TERESA hold her hands about a foot apart.)

MICHELLE

Really! And how do you know that?

JOE

HOLD IT! Enough about Victor's hardware. What's going on?

(Everyone looks at MICHELLE. After a beat, MICHELLE speaks.)

MICHELLE

I wanted to tell you when I got here but one thing led to another and I really didn't want to burden you.

JOE

Come on Michelle, we're all family here. What's going on? How bad does he want you?

TERESA

Real bad! He's got the word out on the street. Five large for her where-a-bouts.

JOE

FIVE... THOUSAND... DOLLARS? That's a boatload of crack... I bet the entire south side of town wants to earn that.

TERESA

That's true, and nobody knows why. He even had a couple of goons watching the house.

(To MICHELLE.)

It took nearly an hour to lose them before I started searching for you. I looked everywhere and... well... what the hell did you do to piss him off?

(Again, everyone looks at MICHELLE.)

MICHELLE (hesitant at first)

I... uh... I went to Victor's place after work Saturday. It was a pretty quiet night. None of the gang was around and I was sitting there at the bar talking to Guido. He had this new tie and I liked it, so I had him pose and took a picture with my phone.

HENRY

Who's Guido?

TERESA

Victor's adopted son, bodyguard, bouncer, enforcer... AND he runs the club.

JOE

So you took Guido's picture and...?

MICHELLE

And... I didn't realize it but in the background of the photo were Victor and Jeremiah Wilson.

JOE

Are you talking about City Assemblyman Wilson? The bible thumper who hates gays, Jews, Italians, Latinos, women and almost everyone who isn't a religious hypocrite?

MICHELLE

Yes, Joe, and both those guys are crystal clear in the photo. So is the wad of cash Victor is handing over to Wilson.

TERESA

Let me see!

(MICHELLE produces her cell phone and opens the photo. Everyone looks.)

JOE

Wow! Can I have a copy? I know some folks I'd like to forward this to.

MICHELLE

I don't think that's a good idea. Victor's apparently already after my head over it.

TERESA

Jeremiah called me yesterday asking for you. He talked about a client from out of town that needed her hair done for a big meeting today... I knew he was full of crap. That bastard!

JOE

Caught with his hand in the cookie jar! Wait a minute! You're on a first-name basis with that asshole?

MICHELLE

Mom and Jeremiah used to date... that is, until he tried to corner me in the kitchen one day while Mom was visiting a client. I was only seventeen and... well... luckily, I had a saucepan in my hand and was able to fend him off with it. I think I broke one of his fingers with that saucepan. Mom wasn't very happy when I told her about it.

JOE

Really? So what happened?

MICHELLE

I don't know. He just stopped coming around. I was so relieved to get him out of my life I never asked... Mom...?

TERESA (hesitant)

Okay... well... I called Victor and asked for help. I never heard from Jeremiah again... that is, until yesterday.

JOE

Getting back to Big Vic, you took this photo of Guido... and then?

MICHELLE

Then Victor started hollering and coming my way. I didn't even know he was there and suddenly he was angry. I didn't know what was going on but got out of there pronto. It was later, when I looked at the picture I realized why.

HENRY

Wow! With all that going on you couldn't go home.



MICHELLE

That's for sure. I hung out with Miranda Saturday night and yesterday. That's why I called to see if I could come and visit.

TERESA

Now you see why I've been trying to find her.

MICHELLE

Wait a minute! I just remembered. Joe, you're not afraid of Guido... how come?

JOE

I'm not sure about not being afraid, but he and I go way back. There's been a lot of water under our bridge ... over it too.

HENRY

(Instantly jealous.)  
How MUCH water?

TERESA

What say, let's hold the water boyfriend. The rest of us are trying to figure out how to protect Michelle.

ANDIE

Yeah, hold the water. This isn't a baptism... yet...

JOE

Speaking of water, let's get you shampooed.

(Escorts ANDIE offstage, JOE glances at the coffee. Speaks while exiting.)  
Oh, the coffee's ready and I'm starved for some. Michelle... Teresa... Reverend? Henry, you won't like this... it's flavored.

(Author's Note: Hair wash station is just offstage. JOE regularly leans his head back through the door - or curtain - to pay attention and speak.)

TERESA

I'm in.  
(All but HENRY indicate "yes".)

JOE

Where are my manners! Henry, say hello to Teresa Montana, Michelle's mom.

(HENRY and TERESA exchange greetings as MICHELLE speaks.)

MICHELLE

I'll pour.

JOE

Thanks. The heavy cream is back there in the refrigerator.

HENRY

While you're in the refrigerator, would you please get me a bottle of pop?

(MICHELLE exits to 'back room' and returns with a container of heavy cream and a bottle for HENRY. Gives the bottle to HENRY and goes to the coffee pot.)

MICHELLE

How much cream?

JOE

(Poking head in from offstage.)  
About a third of a cup. Stir it in slowly.

TERESA

I'll help.

(Assists with coffee. HENRY watches - interested.)  
Michelle, I'm really worried about this situation you've gotten yourself into. I don't think you're safe here.

MICHELLE

Mom, you're overreacting. This place is plenty safe. Henry, would it be okay if I stay with you and Joe for a few days.

HENRY

Stay as long as you like. There's lots of room.

TERESA

I'm still not sure. I've got a funny feeling and I can't figure out what it is.

(MICHELLE and TERESA make coffee and distribute cups.)  
(JOE returns onstage with ANDIE, settling her in a chair and gathers perm rods.)

HENRY

What do you mean by that?

TERESA

I can't explain it but I really feel exposed here. So, Joe... tell us about you and Guido and your 'water under the bridge.'

JOE

Well... it wasn't long after I started at the Hair Depot... at least a couple of years before Michelle got there...

(Beat. Thinking.)

Yeah... quite a bit longer. Let's see... I was still living at the Golden Arms. I had just broken up with Armand and...

TERESA (interrupting)

Boy is it hard keeping you on track. And Guido fits in this thing how?

JOE

Oh... yeah, so... Guido came in for a haircut and I was between customers. He had just gotten out of jail... uh... he took a hit to keep Victor out of the slam. He was in for a couple of years and during that time he developed a taste for blond boys...

MICHELLE

Blond?

JOE

Well, I was blond at the time... and a lot younger, although far from being a boy... and... remember, this was a few years ago and Guido was a real hunk. You know, for his age he still is.

(HENRY begins to react.)

TERESA

(To HENRY.)

How 'bout we just hear the story and put a cap on the emotional ejaculations?

(To JOE.)

So here you were, dating Guido... ???

JOE

Okay, so a couple of nights a week, after they closed Victor's, he'd pick me up. I introduced him to some gay spots around town. We'd go to one, then go to my place and... well... I knew he was seeing a girl too.

(Beat. Serious.)

That GIRL... looked more like a boy than I did and it was obvious he loved her. Eventually, Guido and I drifted apart and he married her. Luckily there's no hard feelings either way and we still speak. (Beat.) Michelle... you should remember Donna! I did her hair for several years before they moved out to the suburbs. Natural blond, skinny, tall, cheerful, flat chested... kept her hair cut short kinda like a pageboy, to make Guido happy. Can you believe he sent her to me while he was dating both of us? She knew all about Guido and me and we'd swap stories. I actually taught her how to...

HENRY (interrupting)

OKAY... so how is all that knowledge going to help us get beyond this new predicament?

MICHELLE (inspired)

Hold it! I know the answer to this one. (Beat.) The videos, right?

HENRY

Videos? What videos?

TERESA

(To MICHELLE, pointing at JOE.)

WAIT... um... um... this is the guy you told me about? The guy that set up the video camera in case his date decided to get rough later on? JOE, I never knew it was you.

HENRY (raised voice)

What videos?

JOE

Henry, don't get your knickers in a knot. They're long gone. I threw them away before I moved here.

MICHELLE

You threw them away?

JOE

Hey, I was leaving town... AND... I was downsizing. You can't imagine how much crap I got rid of. It was a good time to leave that part of my life behind.

TERESA

Apparently you didn't leave it all that far behind.

JOE

Well, I thought I had until you two showed up.

MICHELLE

So... what do you think?

JOE

What do I think? I think we're all in deep shit... that is, except for the Reverend here... Oh, where are my manners. Teresa, Michelle, this is Reverend Smyth. She and her husband share the pastoral duties at the Methodist church at the top of the hill... Reverend Smyth, this is Michelle and Teresa, and you already know Henry... AND... you get to have your hair done by two of the best hair dressers this side of the ROCKIES. Michelle's every bit as good as me.

(Stage whisper.)

But don't tell her I said so.

MICHELLE

I heard that.

ANDIE

Please, it's Andromeda... call me Andie! ... and I haven't had this much excitement in a long time. It's a pleasure to meet you both.

JOE

So... uh... Andie... let's get you rolled up. Michelle, you're left-handed (right-handed), so you take that side. Henry, would you care to join us for lunch?

HENRY

Sure!

JOE

Would you please call over to the Sweet Onion and ask Martha to add another person to my lunch order...

(HENRY crosses to phone.)

...and include some jalapeños for Teresa...?

(Winks at TERESA.)

AND... order a ham sandwich or something... manly... for yourself. Unless anyone else has another preference, we are having Sweet Potato and Vidalia Onion Soup... her specialty... and Cobb Salad. Guess you can tell she's from Atlanta.

HENRY

(HENRY opens the phone book. Flips pages.)

Okay let's see. It's either listed under Sweet Onion or in the Yellow Pages under...

JOE

Henry, there's a menu there on the wall above the phone.

(Henry closes the phone book and consults the menu while picking up the phone.)

Teresa perhaps you would accompany Henry and go by the wine shop and pick out a bottle each of red and white to go with lunch. Get the good stuff... and make Henry pay for them.

TERESA

Is lunch being delivered?

JOE

Oops! On your way back remind him to pick it up or he'll forget. AND... make him pay for that too...

(A beat. Expression of exasperation.)

...he's such a cheapdick!

End of Scene 1

Scene 2  
after lunch

On rise, JOE, MICHELLE, ANDIE, HENRY and TERESA are seated around the table. The remains of lunch are piled on the table.

ANDIE's hair may be wrapped in a towel or otherwise look like preparations for a perm.

JOE

(Begins to pick up remains of lunch.)

Okay, Andie, soon as we clean up what say we get your solution on?

TERESA

Joe, you and Michelle take care of Andie's hair. Henry and I can clean up.

(TERESA looks at HENRY who agrees.)

(JOE and MICHELLE get ANDIE seated in the styling chair. JOE works on ANDIE while MICHELLE watches.)

(TERESA looks downstage right and left regularly.)

I'm surprised Victor and Guido haven't shown up.

HENRY

Why do you talk about those two as if they're joined at the hip?

TERESA

I'd say that's a pretty good explanation about their relationship.

HENRY

Really? So, what makes you so sure they'll find their way here?

TERESA

I just have a bad feeling about all this. Victor's not the kind of guy you want to upset.

HENRY

You want to fill me in? I don't know those guys.

TERESA

Well... Victor started off as a kid, running numbers for Anthony Faccione. Over time, he worked his way up the ladder until he had his own territory. That's when he opened Victor's Restaurant and Lounge on Twenty-Third Street to give himself some legitimacy. Since then, he's been a close part of the Faccione mob and he's got fingers in every pie all over his territory... including political stuff. If you want anything to happen in the southwest section across the river from downtown, you call Victor first.

HENRY

Okay... so, how does Guido fit in?

TERESA

Guido was a tough street kid. They called him Gordo, and...

HENRY (interrupting)

You know that means fat boy in Spanish, right?

TERESA

Yeah, only he wasn't really fat, just large and muscular. Nobody knew his real name... not even him... could be he never had one. He was an orphan. He was passed around from mom to mom to mom until he was old enough to care for himself. Finally, Victor took him in. When he and Isabella adopted him they named him Guido.

HENRY

How big is this guy?

TERESA

He's good size... kinda what you'd call a gentle giant. But don't piss him off, 'cause you can find out real quick why Victor keeps him around. And don't be mistaken. He ain't just big and dumb. He earned a G.E.D. while he was in the state prison.

HENRY

Okay, I think I understand now.

(Sudden inspiration.)

Teresa, would you mind finishing here. I'm sorry to dump this on you but I have a couple of things I'd like to do.

TERESA

Sure, go ahead... this isn't much.

HENRY

Thanks! I'm going out the back... uh... don't lock the back door.

(TERESA signals "Ok". HENRY exits via back room.)

(After cleaning up lunch, TERESA grabs a towel and starts wiping the table.)

JOE

(To TERESA.)

Oh, honey, you can start with a towel. There's a polishing rag and a bottle of wood finish on the shelf above the washer.

(TERESA cleans up the remainder of lunch. SHE exits to the back room and returns with the polishing supplies. All the while, TERESA pays close attention to what's going on in the chair and watches out the window constantly.)

MICHELLE

(While TERESA is offstage.)

How is it she knows so much about Victor and Guido? She seems to know everything but when I ask she doesn't really answer. She says something like, "It's out there. All you need to do is pay attention."

(A look of frustration.)

She's really good at avoiding a question when she wants to.

JOE

So... don't accept the runaround answer. Put her on the spot.

MICHELLE (sarcastic)

Yeah... good luck with that!

ANDIE

So, you two worked together?

MICHELLE

Yes, in the city at the Hair Depot on Forty-fifth Street. Joe was already there when I started and they put me in the station next to his. By the end of the first day we were fast friends. I brought in a few clients and they fed me some more. Before long my calendar was full.

JOE

It's a wonderful place. There's a real team atmosphere. The owner doesn't allow anyone's ego to get in the way of business. New clients were shared out to anyone who had room in their calendar and we all helped newbies get familiar with the program.

ANDIE

So, why did you leave?

JOE

Well... even though I was doing well and liked everyone... INCLUDING the owner, I always dreamed of having my own shop and not having to worry about all the superfluous stuff that goes with working in someone else's place. I had a nice apartment, lots of friends and a boyfriend who actually seemed to respect me but I wanted more. Then, one day driving to work, I watched two guys jump out of their cars and get into a fistfight. That's when I knew I needed to make a move before I actually got to the point that I hated myself.

MICHELLE

You never told me that.

JOE

What, the part about needing to leave town or the fistfight?

MICHELLE

Neither, I think. So...?



JOE

So, Argus... that season's boyfriend and I... took a few days off and did some traveling around just to forget about our lives and simply enjoy each other.

MICHELLE

I remember Argus. He had that beautiful curly red hair.

JOE

Right. Anyway, we had gotten off the interstate and were enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of the highway. There's a Bed and Breakfast at the other end of town... Joanna's. It's a very nice place. We decided to spend the night there instead of going back to the interstate and taking a room in one of those cookie-cutter hotels. It was early evening and we asked Joanna if she could recommend somewhere for supper. She suggested the Sweet Onion, which we loved, and then walked Main Street.

MICHELLE

Yeah, all two blocks of it.

JOE

Actually, three, and there are a couple of side streets but that's not important. So, here we were stretching our legs after dinner and I noticed this storefront. Right off the bat, a lot of things were obvious about this place. First, it used to be larger but the antique shop took half the space.

ANDIE

Really? I didn't know that.

JOE

That was before you and Reverend Aaron moved here. It was easy to tell the laundromat had been larger because the window only had half the name painted on it. The rest was removed when the antique shop took the other half.

ANDIE

Oh... okay.

JOE

I like the full glass front... AND the fact that it faces north so there's no glare from the sun. There was already plumbing and electric for washers and dryers, which meant I wouldn't have to pay contractors to dig up the floor and run new water and electric for a hair station. There are a couple of ladies who do hair work in their homes but this is the only salon anywhere near downtown, and... it's right across from City Hall with lots of free parking. The nice thing is, everyone coming down the front steps of City Hall looks directly at me.

MICHELLE

As I recall it took quite some time to make the move happen... how come?

JOE

Well, I had nearly a year left on my apartment lease. I was here weekends cleaning and painting and set up a cot in the back room so I wouldn't need to rent a room. What took the longest was deciding on a name for this place. Finally, one day, I was over at the courthouse, sitting on the front steps enjoying my lunch.

MICHELLE

Wait a minute! You said it was City Hall and then you call the same place the courthouse. What's the story there?

JOE

Sweetie, it's a multi-use building... some of the city and county offices are on either side of the first floor. The courts and more offices occupy the second and third floors. The entire county has a small population and this is the county seat.

MICHELLE

Ooh, I get it.

ANDIE

So, there you were eating lunch on the courthouse steps.

JOE

It was a cool day and the bright sun kept me warm. I was looking this way, admiring my work. I remember thinking the antique shop next door was filled with heirlooms from days gone by and suddenly the name just popped into my head. I immediately went inside and filed for a fictitious name... Hairlooms!

MICHELLE

What a great story!

JOE

Anyway, before moving here, I needed to downsize which seemed to take forever. Argus didn't last long after I decided to move. Henry appeared out of nowhere and we hit it off immediately.

MICHELLE

How did you meet? You never said.

JOE

At the Coffee Depot.

ANDIE

What's with the depot thing?

MICHELLE

The train depot takes up the entire block across the street and there are several shops along the street with Depot as part of the name. Christie said it took seconds to decide on that name.