CAST

DANI - (female/50ish) Confident and capable, with an aura of assuredness about her. She possesses a depth of soul that makes her feel powerful. Also a great vulnerability that doesn't. Forever searching for a big life, like in novels. She is plus sized and not usually referred to as beautiful, but that doesn't mean she isn't. There is something unusually captivating about her.

JOE - (male/one year older than Dani) The brother of Dani's childhood best friend and was close to her parents as well. Reserved and aloof, extremely intelligent and very successful. An intellectual liberal, but conservative in manner. His life is lined up and in order, all things in place. He carries himself with authority, and those around him give it to him. He is as far removed from his primal self as is possible...except when he's around Dani.
ACT ONE

A New York City apartment, empty except for a Queen-sized bed in the middle of the room, and a man (JOE) leaning against the wall. Waiting.

From down a hallway comes the sound of keys, a door opening, closing, and footsteps approaching.

A woman (DANI) enters the room. She is dressed in a chic, avant garde manner. Except for her shoes which are worn boots, cool and comfortable.

She sees Joe. He sees her. Then they quickly look away.

DANI
Where's the guy?

JOE
Running late.

She looks around, anywhere but at him. He looks at a fixed point, anywhere but at her. They are paying complete attention to each other without paying any attention to each other.

The bed is (and will remain) between them.

DANI
How late?

JOE
Half hour.

DANI
(she sighs a heavy sigh)

JOE
Do you have obligations?

DANI
Yes. I do.

JOE
Is one of them a costume party?
He looks at her outfit pointedly.

DANI
Speaking of obligations: how’s your wife?

JOE
Pregnant. Again.

DANI
Your third?

JOE
Fourth.

DANI
Jenny said you had two kids.

JOE
Three.

DANI
So Jenny was misinformed.

JOE
Most people are.

DANI
You got right to it then.

JOE
Yes.

Silence. The pressure builds in the room with all the things not said. Let that silence happen until the pressure is too much. (*this is a note for all the sections of silence in the piece, let them be organically broken.)

Finally:

JOE
Jenny said you’re a librarian now.

DANI
...

Finally:
DANI
Will you please text the guy and find out how much longer?

* Joe sends a text.

DANI  JOE
Thank you. I- Excuse me, I-

JOE
...need to make a call.

He exits. The door to the hallway opens and closes.

Dani’s cool facade breaks...Her breathing speeds up. Across her face are signs of anger, loss, fear, pain, love, desire, self-hatred...all the emotions that might be engaged when reunited with an ex from a complicated relationship.

Door down the hallway opens and closes.

JOE (O.S.)
Thank you, I appreciate your understanding. I’ll see you tomorrow.

Dani pulls herself back together - almost.

Joe enters. Hangs up his phone. Checks messages.

JOE
The guy says “within 30 minutes”.

Dani takes out her phone and sends a text. Receives one. Then sends another. Then puts her phone away. She is silent, then:

DANI
This is so stupid.

JOE
Excuse me?

DANI
This is stupid.
JOE
What is?

DANI
This. Us. Having to be here.

JOE
That was your stipulation if I remember correctly.

DANI
I never thought you’d actually implement it.

JOE
Then it was illogical for you to pursue it.

DANI
(pointedly)
It was illogical for me to pursue a lot of things
back then.

(beat?)

JOE
You have some fucking nerve playing the victim here.

DANI
Language, Professor Joe.

JOE
It’s Joseph.

DANI
“Joseph”.
(scoffs)
You’re lucky I don’t still call you Joey.

JOE
Just because you haven’t matured past your childhood
nickname doesn’t mean the rest of us haven’t.

DANI
Ah, Joey...I remember him well. It was Joey who first
felt me up...Joey who first fingered me...Joey who I
gave my first blow job to...

JOE
Your crassness is one of the least attractive things
about you.

DANI
Of course I didn’t have much choice regarding the
blow job...waking up with someone’s dick in your
mouth kind of alleviates the burden of choice.
JOE
That’s beneath even you.

DANI
I’m sorry if the truth is inconvenient for you-

JOE
Would that be the whole truth, or just Dani’s version of it?

DANI
The truth is the truth.

JOE
So where does the truth that you were coming on to me rate on your truth scale?

DANI
I did /not-

JOE
/You laid down next to me on the sofa- wearing * underwear and tank top-with no bra-and then stretched * out your leg and started massaging my dick with your foot - like in Footloose.

DANI
Flashdance.

JOE
Whatever.

DANI
And I was asleep.

JOE
Uh huh.

DANI
And 15.

JOE
And I was 16. And I reacted like any 16 year old boy - just like you had hoped I would.

DANI
You don’t get it.

JOE
I get it.

She starts laughing.

DANI
Okay.
JOE
I don’t.

DANI
I know.

JOE
I mean it.

DANI
Of course you do.

JOE
Your sarcasm is another of your inferior traits.

DANI
I bet your wife isn’t sarcastic.

JOE
No. She isn’t.

DANI
Sardonic, maybe? When required?

JOE
...

DANI
When complimentary to whatever point you are trying to make, of course.

JOE
You’re not nearly as clever as you think you are.

DANI
Bet your wife is clever, tho.

JOE
She’s beautiful, she doesn’t need to be clever. (Or: She doesn’t need to be clever, she’s beautiful.)

DANI
Bet she’s the right mix of doting mother and adoring wife. Never too much. Never too little. Just attractive enough to make other men admire you, but not enough to where she doesn’t spend a great deal of her time exploring and planning ways to be sexually adventurous in a desperate attempt to keep you interested.

JOE
And I love her deeply for it.

DANI
So why are you here, then?
JOE
Oh, Dani...you really don’t think I...Come on now, you’re smarter than that.

DANI
(She smiles pityingly at him.)

JOE
I have no feelings for you Dani, good or ill.

DANI
You didn’t have to be here.

JOE
I did if I wanted my half of the money.

DANI
You already have money.

JOE
Not enough to where I can turn my back on the proceeds of half of an above-market New York City apartment I bought when the market was depressed I don’t.

DANI
You’re a best selling author.

JOE
Of books on Economics.

DANI
And a think-tank influencer.

JOE
I’m pretty sure that’s not a thing.

DANI
You could have bowed out. In fact it would have been the gentlemanly thing to do.

JOE
You’re the one who left, if anyone should be bowing out it’s you.

DANI
For someone with no feelings, you seem to have some feelings.

That lands on him. Silence

DANI
If you loathe me /as much as you—
JOE
/I don’t loathe you.

DANI
You can barely even look at me.

JOE
I could care less about you.

DANI
Is that right?

JOE
Other than an occasional cringe-worthy memory from a youthful indiscretion, I truly do not think about you at all.

DANI
Youthful like ma at 13 when this all began? Or youthful like me at 37 when it ended?

JOE
I swear on the lives of my children that I have no feelings of any kind for you – now or ever.

DANI
So you put my name on the deed because I was so irresistible, is that it?

JOE
You have your own perverse kind of charm.

DANI
Seriously.

JOE
(shrugs)
Everyone’s got a kink.

Silence.

Dani retreats. Takes out her phone, and scrolls through.

After some time:

JOE
I don’t appreciate the thing about the blow job.

Dani doesn’t look up from her phone.

JOE
I did not force myself upon you.
DANI

Ok.

JOE
You came to me. You came to me in the middle of the night when I was asleep. Every single time you came to me.

DANI
Except for the time you came to me when I was 17.

JOE
I came to visit your dad. Not you.

DANI
And you came to me in the middle of the night while I was asleep. Were you visiting my dad then, too?

JOE
What does it matter? You hid from me the rest of the weekend.

DANI
Your grand gesture denied by the fat girl you were trying to humor?

JOE
Rest assured it was only me I wanted to humor.

DANI
And then you came to me here, in New York. After my dad died.

JOE
I had to be here for work.

Silence. Then:

DANI
You can’t even give me one.

JOE
Give you one what?

DANI
One small bit of acknowledgement that I was worth the effort.

JOE
You mean something other than putting you on the deed to a New York City apartment?

DANI
Yes. I mean something other than that.
JOE
You knew the deal.

DANI
What deal.

JOE
From the very beginning.

DANI
The beginning - when I was 13, you mean?

JOE
Yes, the beginning when you were 13, and would wait until my then-girlfriend left and then sneak into my garage to make-out with me. And also the middle...when you were 16 and would wait until that girlfriend left and then sneak into my room and fuck me. And the /end when-

DANI
/The end when I would wait until you left your fiance to sneak into our apartment and fuck me? Except I didn’t know you had a fiance. Did I?

JOE
You knew there was someone else in my life.

DANI
You should have told me.

JOE
We were having an affair, Dani. The whole point is don’t ask don’t tell.

DANI
For you maybe.

JOE
Yes, exactly for me. An affair is also a very selfish endeavor.

DANI
What about me?

JOE
What about you?

DANI
What was I supposed to get out of it?

JOE
Decent sex and a place to stay?
DANI
Fuck you.

JOE
What did you want out of it?

DANI
A connection to another human being. What did you want?

JOE
A lot of sex. With a lot of women. A lot of different women.

DANI
...

JOE
You weren’t the only one. Ever. But you were one of the longest. If that makes you feel “special”.

DANI
Was I nothing to you?

JOE
You were available.

DANI
Nice.

JOE
And you would do whatever I wanted you to.

And that was enough?

JOE
Yes. Yeah. Hell yeah.

And now?

JOE
I don’t cheat anymore.

Since when?

JOE
Since I walked into this apartment and found it cleared out of your belongings.
He’s carried that hurt for ten years... so it lands, but she won’t give it to him and pushes on.

**DANI**
And was that before, or after, your honeymoon?

She’s carried that hurt for ten years... so it lands, but he won’t give it to her and pushes on.

**JOE**
After.

**DANI**
Because I broke your heart?

**JOE**
Because you helped me understand how lucky I was to have an exquisite woman without any penchant for the self-serving immaturity you displayed waiting for me at home.

**DANI**
At home on your tree-lined street, with your picket fence and two-car garage you mean?

**JOE**
Have you been stalking me?

**DANI**
You wish.

He doesn’t believe her.

The picture on your book jacket?

**JOE**
So you’ve read my books?

**DANI**
(shaking head)
I like interesting books - no, I had to re-shelve it a couple of times when I worked at the library.

**JOE**
Worked? So you’re not a librarian anymore?

**DANI**
No.

**JOE**
What are you then?
DANI
A muse.

JOE
A muse.

DANI
Yes.

JOE
I didn’t realize “muse” was an actual career choice.

DANI
And yet, here I am.

JOE
Not since the fall of the Roman Empire.

DANI
Greek...as you well know. I’d bet money you even know the word in the original language.

JOE
(almost sheepishly)
Moúsa.

DANI
Show off.

JOE
Says the muse...

They don’t laugh, or even smile, but there is a moment - a very brief moment of humor, briefly shared between them. It is gone immediately, but something has begun. (In my head the visual is a pinball being released and ready to be engaged. The visceral is expectant, primal and dangerous. Also maybe stepping into the roles that define them to each other? Though neither of them have any sense of any of that consciously. Yet.)

JOE
So, what are the duties of a modern day muse?

DANI
Same as they ever were.
JOE
You are inspiring a...? * 

She lets it hang a moment, then:

DANI
He’s a photographer.

That it’s a “he” doesn’t escape Joe.

JOE
And what do you do for this photographer? How do you inspire him.

DANI
He likes me to be around him.

JOE
(mocking)
Your proximity generates greatness? *

DANI
He says my proximity generates the most expansive and creative ideas he’s ever had.

JOE
And how do these ideas manifest?

DANI
He creates beautiful characters for me to embody and present, then places me in various environments and shoots it.

JOE
So he plays dress up with you. *

DANI
He likes looking at me.

JOE
Is that so.

DANI
And showing me off.

A challenge to him, who didn’t. *

JOE
Ágria tsírko.

DANI
...

...
JOE
That’s Greek for “circus freak”. Which is what you sound like you are actually embodying.

She studies him. Then:

DANI
You are so intelligent in so many areas, but when you come across something that doesn’t fit neatly into your formulas and equations, something that requires you to go beyond your intellect and into your soul to understand, you always demean it.

JOE
I understand perfectly – this artist dresses you up in crazy outfits, sticks you somewhere out in public looking uncomfortable, and takes pictures of it.

DANI
They are not crazy outfits. They are ensembles designed to be a commentary on society’s limited view of beauty!

JOE
They are outfits designed to make you feel as humiliated as possible in public view as he records your shame and discomfort for all to see in perpetuity. The only difference between that and a carnival freak show is that instead of a sideshow tent with swill on the ground, it takes place in a swank gallery with swill on the walls, and everyone pretends it’s the most interesting thing they’ve ever seen. At least at the freak show patrons have the decency to acknowledge it’s their base and prurient curiosities for why they’re there...the gallery crowd pretends they’re there for the art, and not the subjugation of those they wouldn’t look twice at normally.

DANI
I am not being subjugated.

JOE
That’s not how it looks in those photographs.

Dani regards him for a moment, then:

DANI
What photographs would those be, Joseph?

JOE
...

...
DANI
Now...how would someone who hasn’t thought about me in ten years know what I looked like in those photos?

JOE
...

DANI
Who’s the stalker now?

to be cont’d...