

“PROJECTION”
Final Draft / 3-20-18

Characters
Clarice, Britney, Eleanor

Lights up on a coffee shop. (Can be reminiscent of Small World Coffee if the director so wishes, but a generic shop setting is fine.) CLARICE sits at a small table with three other chairs. She's lounging in her chair, tapping her foot and scrolling through her phone as she waits for the others to arrive. Her shirt is white. After a few brief moments, BRITNEY enters, waving her arms around like a car dealership balloon man. Her shirt is sequined/bedazzled/shiny in some way.

BRITNEY [with enthusiasm]
CLARICE!!! IS THAT YOU?

CLARICE [looking up from her phone]
Britney?

CLARICE stands up just in time for BRITNEY to catch her in a tight embrace. It lasts for an uncomfortably long time. Then she lets go, looking around.

BRITNEY
Whoa, I've always wanted to try this place--I heard they serve beetroot espressos!

CLARICE almost sits back down, but BRITNEY catches her in another, even tighter bear hug, which makes CLARICE scream a little in surprise.

BRITNEY
But, ohmigosh, it's been waaay too long! I'm so glad you invited us here!

CLARICE [laughing, but subtly trying to push away from BRITNEY]
Me, too...!

BRITNEY
We have so much to talk about--we'll be here for hours! I have a million stories to tell you about UDell! You are literally going to DIE when you hear about--

BRITNEY cuts herself off. Beat. She lets go of CLARICE.

BRITNEY
Or, I mean... um. We'll talk about other things, too.

CLARICE
I'll just be happy if everyone can make it.

ELEANOR enters, hands in her pockets. She is wearing a black hoodie zipped all the way up.

ELEANOR

Obviously not everyone. But a 75% attendance rate isn't bad.

CLARICE

Jesus, Eleanor.

ELEANOR

What? It's not like she can hear us.

BRITNEY [cheerfully]

Eleanor!

BRITNEY gives ELEANOR a hug as bear-like as the one she just gave CLARICE. ELEANOR does not reciprocate at all; she doesn't even take her hands out of her pockets. CLARICE clears her throat, and BRITNEY pulls back.

BRITNEY

I mean... [more sternly] *Eleanor!* Have some respect! Shelbie's only been gone a month.

ELEANOR

Exactly. It's been a *month*. That's long enough. We all went to the funeral, didn't we?

CLARICE

That doesn't mean we stop thinking about her, El. She was a friend.

ELEANOR

That's a funny way to pronounce "snake".

CLARICE

You--[takes a deep breath; then, calmly]--Let's not argue about this right now. Why don't we just sit down?

The three of them sit down, leaving one empty chair next to CLARICE. She glances down at it solemnly.

ELEANOR

Really? You got a table with four chairs? You're such an English major.

CLARICE

I just think it's too soon to get rid of her seat.

ELEANOR scoffs but doesn't say anything else.

CLARICE [slightly annoyed]

Anyway! We have a lot to talk about, but I feel like it'd be nice right now if we, y'know... reminisced, or something. About the old days. What with the past catching up to us.

BRITNEY

Ooh, I love it! I can just picture us as little babies, meeting in sixth-grade math and becoming best friends...

The lighting slowly starts to turn a deep blue as they talk. (Note: Whenever BRITNEY speaks, CLARICE either cuts off her last word or speaks immediately after her.)

CLARICE [nodding fondly]

Yeah. Remember that first group project we had together? We had to calculate what life would be like on different planets. Gravity levels, sleep schedules...

BRITNEY

And when we had to do that big presentation at the end of it? God, it was nerve-wracking!

CLARICE

Even though everyone basically had to say the same thing, we were all so scared... but Shelbie really saved us back there. She's so good on her feet.

BRITNEY [misty-eyed]

Not to mention that PowerPoint she put together! I have no idea how she did it. It was so sleek and stylish, but all the information was spaced out just right--

ELEANOR

I made the PowerPoint.

The lights snap back to white. CLARICE and BRITNEY look at ELEANOR in surprise.

ELEANOR

Yeah. I wasn't there to present because I was home sick, remember? I sent it to her the night before so she could double-check it before sending it to you guys. She never told you?

CLARICE

No... well, I mean...

BRITNEY

Her name was first on the title slide, so we just assumed...

ELEANOR [scoffs]

Figures.

Beat.

CLARICE

Um... what about sophomore year, when we all joined the school musical together? That was really fun.

The lights start to turn blue once more. BRITNEY sniffles, wiping away a tear.

BRITNEY [wistfully]

Bring It On... I can't believe we actually got in! Especially you, Eleanor!

ELEANOR

Gee, thanks, Brit.

BRITNEY

Not like that, El! I just meant, you always seemed to veer away from the theater crowd.

ELEANOR

Well, you can thank Clarice for dragging me to auditions.

CLARICE

You're very welcome. It wouldn't have been the same if it wasn't all four of us, right?

ELEANOR [shrugs]

Guess not.

CLARICE

And, oh my god, Shelbie was *phenomenal* as Campbell. I can still hear her belting out that crazy high note at the end of "What I Was Born to Do".

BRITNEY

It was insane! And she played Campbell so well in general--she had so much charisma. I wish I was half as talented as her. Maybe then I could have been cast as an understudy or something...

CLARICE pats her shoulder comfortingly.

CLARICE

Hey, you were an awesome Eva.

BRITNEY

Thanks, Clarice... I guess it's just the way it ended up that we couldn't choose who to audition for.

ELEANOR

Yes, we could.

Lights go back to white.

BRITNEY

Huh?

ELEANOR

They told us at the info session to say which character we would be auditioning for at the beginning of our time slot. If you didn't say who, then they'd assign you a part based on what they think would fit you.

BRITNEY

Yeah, I remember that, but... didn't they change it a couple days before the audition date because too many people were going for the main roles?

ELEANOR [shaking her head]

Did Shelbie tell you that?

Beat. BRITNEY looks between ELEANOR and CLARICE, shocked and hurt.

CLARICE

I'm sure she misheard it, Brit. There's no way she... that she meant / for you to--

BRITNEY [unconvinced]

But how do you know, Clarice?

Tense silence. CLARICE seems to be struggling to come up with a different topic to switch to.

CLARICE

Um--hey! What about senior prom? Do you guys remember senior prom?

ELEANOR gives a short laugh.

ELEANOR

I remember wearing the sleeveless dress you picked out for me. I had to buy a whole new bra for it.

CLARICE

It looked good on you!

ELEANOR

It didn't *feel* good on me, that's for sure.

The lights start to turn blue for a third time.

CLARICE

I'm so glad we went together as a group. It was so much more fun than it would have been if we went with dates.

BRITNEY

Yeah! I would've never done the Cotton-Eyed Joe without you guys, much less if I was with a date.

CLARICE

We ate so much food that day. I swear, the servers were giving us funny looks when we came back the fourth time.

BRITNEY

I was worried we'd be so full, we wouldn't be able to dance later... but thankfully the DJ put on some slow songs right after we finished.

CLARICE

Mhm. Shelbie was the one who pulled us onto the floor, remember that?

BRITNEY [starting to tear up]

She loved dancing so much...

CLARICE

And when we all took turns slow dancing together?

BRITNEY [weeping]

They picked such good songs...

CLARICE

They played Mitski when I danced with Shelbie.

BRITNEY [wailing]

Two slow dancers, last ones out... I wish prom never ended!

ELEANOR

Oh, bullshit.

This time, the lights switch abruptly to an intense, dark red.

CLARICE

Excuse me?

ELEANOR

You don't remember? You were supposed to go to prom with Michael.

CLARICE

Yeah, and we broke up right before it. So what?

ELEANOR

No. Shelbie *poached* him, and she ditched him because he picked her up in an SUV.

CLARICE stares at ELEANOR for a moment, dumbfounded, before finding the words for her response.

CLARICE

You know what, El? You're done talking. All you've done today is bad-mouth Shelbie, and I can't stand it.

ELEANOR

It's not bad-mouthing if I'm telling the truth.

CLARICE

It doesn't matter that it's the truth. Shelbie is our friend. She's our friend and she's *gone*. Have you no decency?

ELEANOR

Am I supposed to just pretend she didn't do all that shit? She's not suddenly a saint just because she passed at the tender age of twenty. We had the funeral to mourn. Now let's talk about her like she was a regular person.

CLARICE

Maybe she wasn't perfect, but it's not our place to--

ELEANOR

To what? Set the record straight? It's the only thing we *can* do now.

CLARICE

All you're doing is making Shelbie sound horrible.

ELEANOR

She was! Clarice, that's what I'm trying to say! We don't have to pretend anymore! We had some good times with her, but you have to admit, we all hated Shelbie a little bit for what she did / to us--

CLARICE suddenly pushes herself out of her chair, fuming. If it's possible, the red lighting seems to get even more intense.

CLARICE [enraged]

No, *you* hated Shelbie! Just you! She was more popular and confident and talented than you, and that drove you crazy! I bet you hated her guts! You're probably glad she died!

Lights shoot back to white as BRITNEY lets out a loud gasp. Long pause. CLARICE slowly covers her mouth, horrified. ELEANOR stares at her in shock.

ELEANOR

You're right. I did hate her. She was more popular and confident and talented than me. Than all of us. But, God, I didn't want Shelbie *dead*.

ELEANOR unzips her hoodie. Her undershirt is blue.

ELEANOR

Just because I'm not worshipping at her slowly decaying feet, doesn't mean I don't miss her. Because... in a messed up, backwards kind of way, I *do* miss her. She was a bitch, but she was *our* bitch. She made life more... exciting.

ELEANOR stands up, pushing in her chair.

ELEANOR

You just called us here to tell us to be sad, but I made up my mind about Shelbie a long time ago. No one can change that. Not some depressing indie lyrics, not that drunk driver on Fifth. And certainly not you.

ELEANOR starts to leave. CLARICE stares after her, wanting to reach out but too afraid to. Just before ELEANOR reaches the edge of the stage, though, BRITNEY bursts out of her chair.

BRITNEY

Eleanor, wait!

ELEANOR stops, looking back at her.

BRITNEY

You--you can't just leave! Not like that! Not after years of being best friends!

ELEANOR

Oh, yeah? Watch me.

BRITNEY runs over to ELEANOR and grabs her arm before she can exit the stage fully. ELEANOR tries to wrestle out of her grip, but BRITNEY holds fast. The two struggle until BRITNEY yanks off ELEANOR's hoodie, holding it away from her.

ELEANOR

What the hell is your problem??

BRITNEY

You don't get to walk away from this friendship. Not because one of us is gone.

BRITNEY ties the hoodie around her waist.

ELEANOR

Britney, give me back my sweater. I have to go.

BRITNEY

No, you don't! You're just running away from this, like you always do!

ELEANOR [scoffs]

I don't run away / from anything--

BRITNEY

We've been friends nine years. Nine whole years! And you don't think I know you by now?

CLARICE walks over to them, placing a hand on BRITNEY's shoulder.

CLARICE

Brit, calm down. If Eleanor wants this friendship to go down in flames, I say / let her--

BRITNEY jerks away from CLARICE.

BRITNEY

No! Let me talk for once! For the love of God, Clarice, let me finish one goddamn sentence!

CLARICE is stunned silent.

BRITNEY

Both of you have been talking nonstop. But I have opinions, too. I cared about Shelbie, too.

BRITNEY turns to look at CLARICE.

BRITNEY

As much as I loved all our good times together, I don't agree with you making her out to be an angel.

BRITNEY turns back to ELEANOR.

BRITNEY

Even though you were right about all the horrible things Shelbie's done, you can't just drop bombs like that and walk away. You think I've never been mad at her? Never wanted to rip her hair out for the way she's treated us? I see everything you're seeing, Eleanor.

ELEANOR

Then why didn't you speak up when Clarice was spouting all that crap?

BRITNEY

Because I'm not about to let our issues with Shelbie ruin the one time we've seen each other all year!

CLARICE

Oh, come on, Brit. We see each other plenty.

BRITNEY

Name one other time we've met up this year. Barring the funeral.

Silence. BRITNEY looks down, hugging her arms.

BRITNEY [laughing bitterly]

I mean, does it really take one of us dying for the gang to get together?

BRITNEY keeps laughing, until it starts to sound like a sob. ELEANOR and CLARICE glance at each other. They inch closer, enclosing BRITNEY in a group hug. Long beat.

CLARICE

...I heard they have good beetroot espresso here. Why don't we order some and catch up?

ELEANOR gags. BRITNEY laughs and hugs them back. Blackout.

END