

Where I've Never Gone:
diane in 10 frames



a Full-Length Play

by Ellis Stump

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theellistump@gmail.com
(717)-808-4067

Ensemble (4+)

*(These roles can be broken down in different ways, or further for a larger cast.
Diverse casting is strongly encouraged.)*

DIANE ARBUS: (f or nb) Experimentive photographer fluid in age and gender. Playful, curious, introspective. Equally existentially fascinated and frightened. Jewish, like all characters, only culturally. Small in stature.

ARTIST 1 (CHILDREN): (any) Brings to life Diane's brother HOWARD NEMEROV and daughters DOON and AMY, along with: GRENADE CHILD, SWINGER 1, and REPORTER 1.

ARTIST 2 (LOVERS): (any) Brings to life Diane's first partner ALLAN ARBUS and second MARVIN ISRAEL, along with: SPECTATOR 2, REPORTER 2, and DOCTOR.

ARTIST 3 (MODELS): (f or nb) Brings to life Diane's friend LISETTE MODEL, along with: SPECTATOR 1, MODEL, CONSTRUCTION WORKER, DRAG QUEEN, SWINGER 2, and MOTHER.

Synopsis & Relevance

Ageless androgynous artist Diane Arbus is on a quest to find and capture the universal human experience. Across a vignette series homaging her/their obsessive "box of 10 photographs" and blurred with childlike nostalgia, the voyeur known for exhibiting Coney Island "freaks" falls from Upper West Side privilege through 1930s-60s bohemia, before developing into a sensational spectacle her/themself. Identity, inclusion, and meaning are pursued until, when sensing light imbalance, the colorless fairy leaps. From there, can viewers participate beyond our frames? Prose arranged from real quotes, burlesque cabaret, audience interaction, and confining walls (the fourth, and set) expose Arbus's "terribly terrific" fantasies, seasons, and early end.

****July 26, 2021 marks 50 years**** since Diane passed by suicide. This piece focuses on playing with creativity and movement to process, not "fix," mental illness or trauma during eras of isolation, unemployment, and health concerns, providing a platform for timely conversation.

World / Set

A love/hate letter to mid-20th century (1936-1971) New York City. Descending from the Upper West Side through Central Park, the Villages, and Coney Island, in-and-out of the Arbus' photography studio, Marvin Israel's underground art gallery, a cellar swingers' party, and Westbeth Artists Community. Aesthetic/tone is whimsical, magical, cinematic. Falling snow, stars, confetti, Jello.

The Artists construct and deconstruct their own sets, with at minimum only these simple, repurposed pieces: 3 flats and a block or platform, clothing rack, standing mirror, cardboard box or crate, potted plant(s), cot, and bathtub.

A projection screen can display the artists' various masterpieces, as well as audience involvement and cinematic filmed visuals. An oven (or microwave circa Nifty 50s!) may be used for baking cake, if desired.

Soundtrack

(Features & Inspirations)

- “June in January” Bing Crosby (1934)
- “The Great Pretender” The Platters (1955)
- “Why Do Fools Fall In Love” Frankie Lymon & The Teenagers (1956)
- “Come Go With Me” Del-Vikings (1957)
- “The Wanderer” Dion (1961)
- “Mama Said” The Shirelles (1961)
- “Maybe I Know” Lesley Gore (1964)
- “Summer in the City” The Lovin’ Spoonful (1966)
- “Somewhere They Can’t Find Me” Simon & Garfunkel (1966)
- “No Particular Place to Go” Chuck Berry (1967)
- “There She Goes” The Velvet Underground (1967)
- “My Way” Frank Sinatra (1969)
- “Space Oddity” David Bowie (1969)

To Note

- / or -- indicates interruption
- ... suggests pause
- highlighted calls attention to interactive elements

Dialogue should be kept at a fast pace.

Resources

This project incorporates quotes and concepts from interviews, books, articles, and reviews. All photographs and texts by Diane Arbus, © The Estate of Diane Arbus

****A bibliography can be found at the end of this document****

ACT I

Still Lives in Private

Foreword

*(**An onscreen flash-forward to Photograph #9, which is then performed live onstage in the same fashion. **)*

SETTING: Spring 1970. Diane's final studio, cramped for space but internally bare: only a cot and platform, upon which sits a pan for processing photos.

You could film the literal theatrical set from Photograph #9 or a real apartment that mimics it.

AT RISE (onscreen): DIANE furiously scours about for inspiration or direction.

DIANE (onscreen)

Here is bad. This is bad. In this current moment of clarity, I am *recognizing* that this is bad. I need... Focus. Focus. Focus. I need, um...

(DIANE's eyes catch on a photo taped to the wall.)

DIANE, cont'd.

My strongest, most Fantastic images. Subjects. Moments. In order, interrelated yet spontaneous, and highly educational.

How many? Three? Not quite enough. I have...

(SHE finds a massive stack of negatives in the pan.)

DIANE, cont'd.

7,459. Slightly too much.

How about...

(Glancing down at fingers)

Ten? Ten. Ten! I'll select my ten most terribly terrific photographs that best capture Life, and arrange them inside a small box, and call it...

"A box of ten photographs!" Does that make sense?

Of course it does! A box of ten photographs. By Diane. It's perfect. Yes.

(SHE begins haphazardly "organizing" them, sorting into piles, tearing up.)

DIANE, cont'd.

This could be my Masterpiece! My Magnum Opus! For the MoMA, the Guggenheim, the world...

(To the Photographs)

In retrospect, you're far more...

Beautiful, than I recalled.

You shouldn't be. For that would be a lie and a bore.

Diane, you can do this. Just... Pick.

Ten. Quick. Before...

(With that, the small artist freezes, petrified by indecision. Fear of disappointment.)

(Screen grainifies, cuts black.)

Photograph #1

SETTING:

Winter 1936. NYC, Central Park West. The Nemerov penthouse windowsill, with the block/platform as the ledge.

AT RISE:

DIANE, age 13, teeters on the elevated surface, gazing below. Street traffic and falling snow (or ripped paper and photographs) filter the air. Gales whip her hair. She's barefoot in a summer jumper and masquerade mask, a whimsical, unsettling picture of childlike wonder.

Passing SPECTATORS observe.

SPECTATOR 1

Up there, on the ledge of that skysrise, do you see her?

SPECTATOR 2

Well, I'll be damned! It's a girl!

SPECTATOR 1

And a small one at that! Just a child!

DIANE

(To self, defensively)

I'm thirteen.

SPECTATOR 2

She looks like a fairy.

SPECTATOR 1

Or a ghost.

SPECTATOR 2
Probably a WASP.

DIANE
More like a bird.

SPECTATOR 1
Oy vey. What's she even doing up there?

DIANE
I... I just wanted to-

HOWARD (o.s.)
(Calling from inside)
Diane! D!

DIANE
I'm in, or... Out here, Howard. At the window.

(HOWARD, age 16, appears behind her.)

HOWARD
Ah gee, D, not again. You on that ledge puts me on edge.
Would you come inside and help me fix breakfast? Mother's locked herself in her room again. Wearing one of her slimy face masks that make her look like, you know...?

DIANE
A creature from the wax museum in Times Square?

HOWARD
Those are Hollywood stars and politicians.

DIANE
Even freakier.

HOWARD
I wasn't spying or nothing. Just caught a glimpse when she slipped out to draw a bath. She's deep under one of her sad waves, I figure. Think we should e try telling her to just *be happy* for crying out loud?

DIANE
I think that would only cause her to cry louder.

HOWARD

What're you even doing this time?

DIANE

I just wanted to see something.

HOWARD

In this weather?

DIANE

Not *literally*, Howard. You're the fine poet; you should understand. I just wanted to see if... I could.

HOWARD

Do what? If you could freeze? Fall? Or worse, skip school?

DIANE

Is skipping so terrible?

(SHE skips back-and-forth upon the ledge.)

HOWARD

Come on, D, I thought you fancied class these days! Painting. Mixing colors, and all. Claim it's all that makes sense to you.

DIANE

To *only* me.

HOWARD

Ha. Coming from little miss teacher's pet. Who brings home the best report cards but never shares a damn thing. What'd they call you last? "Terrific? Gifted? A natural creative soul?" Everyone loves ya, D. They find you fascinating.

DIANE

Is that love?

HOWARD

Sure! I figure, uh...

DIANE

What's the fun, Howard, in having nothing left to learn? When your mentors give up teaching, for what then can you *yearn*? I know absolutely nothing yet. And I wish to preserve that as long as possible.

HOWARD

You want to stay dumb?

DIANE

And young. Because, it's quite... *magical*, is it not? The pursuit of knowledge? Like invitation into the enchanted woods, beyond these palace walls. Where there are gremlins and trolls and-- *real people*, demanding you riddle. I want that... Grit. Straight flat paths are simple.

HOWARD

Ever thought maybe that's better? You can't just keep wandering around, aimlessly, forever. Wanna hear what I'm gonna do after graduation?

DIANE

That's so far away.

HOWARD

It's next year.

(HE passes her one of two Dixie cups attached by yarn. Telephone. A pastime, private method of communication.)

HOWARD, cont'd.

First, I'll attend Harvard to study Literature. Second, I'll settle into the industry, get comfortable. Coffee, cardigans, cigars by a fireplace.

DIANE

Naturally.

HOWARD

Third, I'll publish a book or two. And finally, I'll teach. If I happened to be interrupted by some unexpected global catastrophe in the mid-40s...

(Airplanes shriek overhead, foreshadowing WWII.)

HOWARD, cont'd.

I'd just alter my trajectory with practicality. Target destination always in sight.

DIANE

I believe that sounds lovely.

HOWARD

You do?

DIANE

Of course! Cornering yourself behind a podium, in half-empty halls of sleepy pupils, whose parents you applaud for producing prodiges. "Terribly genius," you'll say. "Terrific, terrific." And you'll perform like:

(Speaking over the terrace like a professor)

Symbolize, alliterate, rhyme, repeat.

Couplets and tercets and meters and beats,

Arranging words to assemble art, and soar like birds--

HOWARD

Breeze off already. *Professor*. What exactly are *you* going to do?

DIANE

Oh, make my way over to Russeks, I suppose. Dive into the new shipment of feather boas when Father's not looking.

HOWARD

He's never looking.

DIANE

Exactly. Then I'll stalk through the park until I come across a new bridge or pond. That's my favorite thing, Howard:

(Direct quotes may be cast onscreen for credit where due.)

DIANE, cont'd.

"To go where I've never gone."

Then maybe I'll find a bagel with lox to lick, or some shakshuka to slurp, or--/

HOWARD

I meant in the future, D. The start of your life.

DIANE

Oh. Well. Something unexpected.

A *series* of somethings unexpected.

HOWARD

So, I figure what I shouldn't expect, then, is for you to come help me fix breakfast?

DIANE

Howard, *that* we both know I'd only mess up worse.

HOWARD

Fine, D, I'll let you be. Out here alone. Spiral away. But before *one* of us heads off to fulfill our *responsibilities*, wanna hear the latest poem I've been working on?

Ahem.

(As HOWARD presents, DIANE leaps from the ledge and begins strolling the street, to a 1930s hit

like “June in January” by Bing Crosby, swinging her end of the Dixie cup along.)

(Meanwhile, ALLAN ENTERS with a standing mirror, clothing rack, and box or crate, transforming the space into Russeks.)

HOWARD, cont'd.

“I wonder if before the end, you ever thought about a children's game. Pretending to be on a mountain ledge, steep snowy darkness fell away. On either side, deeps invisible, you ran along that garden wall. And when you felt your balance being lost, you jumped because you feared to...”

(Peering up from his notes, HE sees Diane on-the-move, calls out.)

HOWARD, cont'd.

What do you think? D...?

DIANE

Seeks improvement, but will develop with time. No offense!

(With a final headshake, HOWARD exits, pulling Diane's side of the phonenumber with him.)

(DIANE arrives at Russeks, where employee ALLAN, age 18, stands in uniform, removing and shelving new items from the box. Furs, pearls, blouses with bows, tweed coats.)

(Thinking he's alone, he holds some pieces up to the mirror, imagining and admiring himself as different personas. DIANE observes from a distance, intrigued, before clearing her throat.)

DIANE

Sir? May I try those on?

ALLAN

You don't have to ask my permission.

DIANE

I mean your pants. Your corduroys.

(At the odd request, ALLAN pauses, amused. He glances around to confirm the coast is clear, then...)

ALLAN

Yeah, Girl, you bet. I've just gotta shimmy a bissell, shake and jive...

(ALLAN, who loves to dance, strips down with all that jazz. DIANE is delighted. She mirrors his movement while removing her own jumper. Finally, SHE slips on his pants and awaits his once-over.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

Well, now. That's the neatest arrangement I've ever seen.

DIANE

Are you poking fun at me?

ALLAN

What? No, no, Girl, I wouldn't dream--

DIANE

Go ahead and call it absurd, considering the weather.

ALLAN

Now that'd be a boring topic, for our first conversation, or ever. And as a matter of fact, here's what I always say: "When the ponds freeze over, pull down your pants and slide on the ice." Right crazy, yeah?

DIANE

Crazy right.

May I ask, what you wish to take, from this one infinite life?

ALLAN

In the future? Photographs of the stars!

(A sparkling galaxy may settle around them. Moons, stars, suns...)

ALLAN, cont'd.

Like, models. Today, I just wanna take some neat gal out for a bite.

DIANE

Her father might disapprove of a penniless floorman. No offense.

ALLAN

Hey now, I've got pennies! And that's not all in these pockets, if that makes--

BOTH

Cents.

DIANE
You're perfect.

ALLAN
You're too kind. Diane Nemerov, yeah?

DIANE
Uh...

(ALLAN shakes his head with a laugh.)

ALLAN
Bingo. First day on the job, and I'm already strolling onto the Boss's bad side.

DIANE
Don't take it personally. That's truly his only angle.

ALLAN
Awful surprisin', considering his daughter's such an... Angel.
Did that one land?

DIANE
Needs improvement.

(From his pocket, ALLAN produces a penny.)

ALLAN
'Appreciate the *heads-up*.

DIANE
You wanna play a game?

ALLAN
Always.

DIANE
Let's close our eyes. And each pick a piece from this box.

ALLAN
On my countdown? 3... 2.... 1!

(THEY do. He pulls out a nice wealthy man's business coat to put over his workwear; she, a gauzy wedding veil. Hm...)

(ALLAN models, flashing the penny. Big money.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

(Modeling)

What do ya say, Girl? Is my ensemble complete?

DIANE

Looks like we're ready to embark on some wild

(Re: the penny)

tails. It may be early, perhaps.../

ALLAN

Yeah, I'm not off-the-clock yet...

DIANE

But this feels like our time to set...

(Instead of finishing the sentence, SHE points to a sign: SALE.)

(ALLAN grins, impressed.)

ALLAN

Jeez, that's nifty, how you let your thoughts hang.

DIANE

I don't with just anyone. Only those who understand the importance of a hanging thought. Who know where to put or return them, and how...

Truly only my brother Howard, so far. And now you.

ALLAN

Well, I'll have you know I'm studying Yoga and Hinduism as my night classes at City College. It's how to sit with yourself, and always move towards the light. So it's pretty much mind-reading.

DIANE

May I call Guru, then?

ALLAN

Hoo boy, Girl, don't give me a big head.

I'm still just a Swami.

DIANE

So I'll call you Swami, and you keep calling me Girl.

ALLAN

Yeah, you bet. But I guess I will introduce myself, too.
Girl, meet Allan Arbus. How do you do?

(As they shake hands, ALLAN transfers the penny, palm to palm. Like magic. She gasps.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

Even though I can read your mind, so you don't really need it-- have a penny for your thoughts, anyhow. You can take it as... *Interest.*

DIANE

Oh-- thank you. What a delight, compared to all those light loose paper bills.

(Inspecting it)

"In God We Trust." Four words I do not understand and fantastically fear. Allan, where is "In" as opposed to "Out?" And who decided that? "God?" Who *is* God, and who are "We?" And what about, instead of "We," if there is only one? Just... me? Could it be "In Me I Trust?"

ALLAN

(With a chuckle)

Jeez, Girl, it doesn't have to. Don't you wanna see where this interest can take me and you?

DIANE

Yes, Allan Arbus. I do. I do.

(THEY take each other's hands. To a love bop such as "Why Do Fools Fall In Love" by Frankie Lymon & The Teenagers, the Arbs open their studio, constructing the set together.)

(MODEL ENTERS to prep.)

(HOWARD helps, too. When the job's complete, he goes to pull an item for himself, from the box. He gets... a leather aviator's helmet! With a sense of duty, he puts it on, as more airplanes and sirens sound, then takes up the box and EXITS.)

Photograph #2

SETTING:

20 years later. Spring 1956. UWS. Inside Diane and Allan's studio, set like an outdoor cookout during the Plastic Tupperware Age. Same platform is now

the model's pedestal. Clothing rack and standing mirror remain.

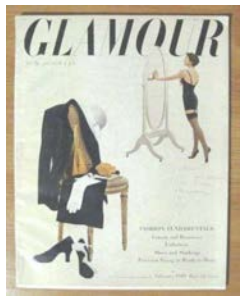
OUTSIDE, trees and flowers bloom.

ONSCREEN:

Ads by the Arbuses, such as: *Glamour* cover (1949), *Glamour* editorial (1959), *Vogue* (1950).

AT RISE:

DIANE crouches behind a teenage fashion MODEL flaunting a slightly oversized picnic dress, apron, and Jello cake.



*(Diane holds the excess fabric in place, flatly.
ALLAN shoots and directs the MODEL, energied.)*

ALLAN

Over there, look over there! Bingo! This campaign is called “New Beauty for New Beauties,” so show me the New! Show me the Beauty! 3... 2...
As FDR puts it: “say cheese!”

MODEL

Zero-fat cottage cheese!

ALLAN

Delicious! You, Angel, you are naturally perfect.

DIANE

Allan, I can't do this anymore. Not for another minute.

ALLAN

How 'bout thirty seconds?

DIANE

Swami...

ALLAN

Sure, it's a bissell boring, holding the fabrics back under our models. But it's an important part of the whole production! And there are no small roles, so they say. Just small... Wives. With sharp pins.

DIANE

I'm not unhappy here, beneath this girl's fine behind. *That* element of the arrangement I find quite thrilling.

ALLAN

Wait, what?

MODEL

I get that a lot.

DIANE

This-- this just looks like the end of my education. How can I expand inside this studio? Like Jello trapped in Tupperware meant to move?

ALLAN

Why don't ya step outside for a breather? Walk around the block?

DIANE

That's not long or far enough.

ALLAN

Alrighty. How 'bout taking an intro-to-photography course, then, with the camera I just got you for our anniversary? Summer semester starts soon, and there's this brand new instructor at the New School--

DIANE

Of course. New School. New Beauty for New Beauties, New School for New Students--/

ALLAN

Professor Model's their name.

People call 'em strict and unorthodox, but award-winning.

DIANE

Since that means so much.

ALLAN

Oh, or there's Marvin Israel. That's another master of the field. People say he's like a god. The man can speed up any young artist's future in a flash.

MODEL

(*To DIANE*)

Sounds like your type.

ALLAN

As for right now, anywho, why don't we all try hoppin' across the street, to grab a quick refresher?

MODEL

Ooh, I don't eat, but I *do* drink!

ALLAN

How old are you?

MODEL

I'm thirteen.

ALLAN

/Alright... /

DIANE

/Fair./

ALLAN

Uh, swell, then. I guess. Diane and me stay sober, actually, but we sure dig the cafe scene. What say you, Girl?

DIANE

Me? I say...

ALLAN

Hoo boy...

DIANE

I say....

ALLAN

I shouldn't have asked.

DIANE

What is the point, Allan? What are we attempting to *do*? Replicating fresh outdoors and cosmic space inside this windowless room? Use electric bulbs and blowdryers to fake natural sun and breeze? With stiff-cut cloth our models don't even touch pre-shoot, fabricate *identity*?

It's bupkis, embarrassingly believable. Molding these young girls without care, who in the mirror see old sellouts--

(MODEL is indeed critiquing her reflection.)

DIANE, cont'd.
 into mannequin monsters. Plastic, dead, destined for hot slimy gazes in Times Square.
 No offense/

MODEL
 Thank you! The magic trick is sucking in all your...

(SHE inhales air.)

DIANE
 And we, Allan, are expending all our time, energy, and vision to satisfy some wealthy old
 Art Director's wet dream! When this is not fantasy. It's not ours/

ALLAN
 Well, maybe it's not *yours*/

DIANE
 /Nor is it reality. It's neither. Nothing. A void. Of fake, fake, fake. Fake fashion...

(SHE angrily rips fabric in two.)

ALLAN
 Girl, that's expensive--

DIANE
 Fake scenery!

(Now SHE shoves over a potted plant.)

ALLAN
 That's-- Angel, *that* plant was actually real--

DIANE
 And worse of all, fake humans!

MODEL
 Who, me? Oh my gosh, thank you!

DIANE
 No, no, dear; you're Real!

MODEL
 Reeceeeaal grateful, you bet! Posing for the world-famous *Arbs* is a totally crazy treat.
 You're the best in the bizz, known for your
(Over-pronounced)
 "shtick" of being soooo kind and sweet!

DIANE

Oh, goodness gracious, dear. Go... Eat. Truly. Take a break. Enjoy your youth. Before you're nostalgic for something you never even tasted.

MODEL

Oh. Um. Okay! I will bop that suggestion by my agent, who is also my mom, thanks! Gosh. I just pray someday I'll have a relationship as intimate and adorable as yours with my own brother.

(MODEL EXITS, shoving her cake prop and apron upon DIANE. Unsure where to hang the apron, DIANE ties it on herself, as the Arbs begin tidying the mess.)

ALLAN

Cracks me up, how everyone thinks we're siblings nowadays. Hey, Angel? So that spiel you just spilled? On dreams?

DIANE

Mmm?

ALLAN

It's, uh, prompting me to bring up this new one of mine. I mean-- my *life* dream came true, so this is just.... Stay with me.

DIANE

Of course.

ALLAN

I... I think I wanna try acting. Improv.

DIANE

(Excited for him)

Improv!?

ALLAN

Yes.

DIANE

Yes, and...?

ALLAN

(Warmly, not getting it)

You and your unfinished sentences.

It's crazy, right?

DIANE

Crazy right. And far crazier and less right would be shutting it up in your heart until you burst. “The world can only be grasped by action, not contemplation.”

ALLAN

Sure.

DIANE

Perhaps I’ll follow your suggestion and all this inspiration, too, and sign up for a class, after all. Take the camera out for a little walk. Ponder my self-competence, my aloneness.... Could you help me?

ALLAN

Discover your independence...? Uh, sure. Always.
How?

DIANE

Would you develop the film for me, if I return?

ALLAN

You bet. Hey, wait-- if?/

DIANE

Then I’ll label every single negative, in permanent marker. To keep track.

ALLAN

Of the photos? Hoo boy, Angel. I love you and that scattered brain of yours, but it’s like Ringling’s Circus in there. You could brand your fingers and toes and still lose a digit. Think it’ll work with film?

DIANE

I don’t know. But it’s not for ordering the photos, necessarily. It’s for ordering me. A *pact*.

To be developing more forever. From Diane, to Diane. Now, I’ll be... [back.]

(ALLAN EXITS as DIANE, camera round neck and knapsack on back, embarks from their studio into the streets.)

(She marches, charged by “The Wanderer” by Dion or a similarly rambling traveling song, into...)

Interlude

{Call to Adventure!}

ONSCREEN: Billboard advertisements foreshadow Diane's upcoming life events, like:

- Lisette Model's New School photography course
- Marvin Israel's Bazaar Magazine
- The Coney Island Freak Show

AT RISE: DIANE explores the theatre stage and aisles, **photographing the audience.**

ONSCREEN: These pictures -- or ones taken with consent pre-show -- are flipped through onscreen.

DIANE

Hello, **down there**, don't mind me. Carry on, drifting along....

"The camera acts as a kind of license," I believe, to wander among the shadows, approach whomever I please. It's got this power to "transfix" those who cross its path. Like Magic? See? Dizzying alchemy....

Or perhaps more like an Edge. A sword.

A blade.

How do *you* react when you find yourself face-to-face?

Do you crave the attention? Or flinch away?

I'll keep this between us, of course. I'm no.... Freak.

(Noticing the screen with sheepishness)

DIANE, cont'd.

Oh. Um... Pardon me.

This, uh, side pursuit of mine entirely differs from my Commissions: Portraits.

For the stiffest, coldest households, like the one in which I was raised.

I pose rich, sad families to support my poor, happy own.

It's strange.

I hate arranging people, when there's so much more happening outside the frame.

So, yes, if you could, just stay like this here... In your natural order...

And I'll just....

(Attempting to fit the entire audience in her shot)

DIANE, cont'd.

Oh. "There are an awful lot of people in the world," aren't there? How can I possibly...

Include [everyone]? I'm sorry, um...

(Suddenly, a BABY wails offstage. And atop the cry, an adolescent whines--)

DOON (o.s.)
Mommmmmm!

DIANE
I almost forgot. I have children.
Two daughters, Amy and Doon. I adore them fervorously, of course, but, um, keeping all these attractions up-and-running is, indeed, a circus. Hang on, gals! Diane's-a-coming!

(DIANE flees, exhausted, into the next scene, maybe to "Mama Said" by The Shirelles.)

Photograph #3

SETTING: Fall 1958. Subway then Central Park. The train set can include simply the platform, and park of the potted plants.

OUTSIDE: Tossed autumn leaves.

AT RISE: A fading, foggy, frenzied DIANE -- now accessorized with scarf, sunglasses, and journal -- rides beside her daughter DOON, age 13, spitting image in matching shades.

DOON stands, as DIANE sits and rambles.

DIANE
Down here underground, my belly always drops. Feels as if I'm swallowed whole while-- swallowing myself, too.
The ole railroad. How bout it? Fantastic invention. Mark Twain called stagecoaches "cradles on wheels," but is this really bed for a baby? Stuck, speeding ahead, no brakes? Of course, leaving home in anticipation is the scariest step. Descending down down down, then shut in by the sliding doors. But once you're here, settled one way or another, it can't get worse. Can it? We will reach our destination, or *some* destination--

DOON
Mom.

DIANE
Likely later than expected, but! We will--

DOON
Mom.

DIANE

Emerge again! Upon Earth, eventually! Dear?

DOON

Mom. This is our stop.

DIANE

What a pleasant surprise.

DOON

They tell you exactly where you are, if you just, like, listen and read the signs.

DIANE

Smart child, you.

DOON

I'm thirteen.

(THEY depart, crossing the threshold. DIANE stabs a finger at an unassuming audience member.)

DIANE

Ooh, Doon! I dare you to run up to that stranger and spark a reaction, quick as you can, by any means necessary!

DOON

What? Why?

DIANE

To see what they do! It's a game!

DOON

Didn't you say you have, like, a crazy busy schedule today?

DIANE

Not too crazy...

(DIANE unpacks her schedule, which is the epitome of crazy.)

DIANE, cont'd.

So first we have this shoot at the park-- your father will join to offer technical assistance after his class. Then I penciled in a SUDDEN COMPULSIVE STRIKE of Artistic Inspiration, to occur ideally on our way past the Zoo. Then, following that scheduled spontaneity-- is our afternoon family outing at the morgue! We can scout out a little birthday present for Amy. Not from the morgue, necessarily, though let's see what they have. She turns six tomorrow, of course, and is with Uncle Howard currently--

(DOON has, to Diane's surprise and confusion, been replaced by her other daughter, preschool-aged AMY.)

AMY
Five.

DIANE
Wha-- Amy?!!

AMY
Not six tomorrow. Today, I'm five.

DIANE
How did you get here?!

AMY
With you, mommy! In the dragon belly under the grass!!

(AMY acts like one, playing make-believe.)

DIANE
The subway? You were down there, too? Pardon, my head's in the clouds today. You and your sister, I should label you two.

AMY
Not two, Mummy. I'm turning *five!*
(Holding up five fingers)
A whole wing. See?
(Flapping one hand, clamping the other)
Here's my wing. And here's my beak.

DIANE
Um, fantastic! Very well. You two -- or
(Pointing to the girls)
you thirteen, and you five -- or, four? -- go frolic along to the swings. Fly, float, soar!
Mother must work to keep the lights on, briefly be a bore.

(DOON and AMY EXIT. DIANE drops her knapsack to the ground and begins setting up, while musing aloud... to herself, the birds, any breathing thing willing to listen.)

DIANE, cont'd.

I believe in a theory insisting you can pass through “boredom into fascination. I never select a subject for what it means to me. I just choose, and how I feel about it -- what it means -- begins to...”

(Unfolding a camera tripod)

Unfold. You get that, don't you, birds and bees? You fall in love and keep pollinating without even knowing why. So if you're bored, just kindly grant me another minute or three to set up. It'll be worth it. It'll all be...

(SPECTATORS' voices squawk offstage, from the side DOON and AMY exited.)

SPECTATOR 1 (o.s.)

Over there, the ledge of that bridge, above the pond!

DIANE

See? I expected the pace to start picking up.

SPECTATOR 2 (o.s.)

Well, I'll be damned!

SPECTATOR 1 (o.s.)

It's a girl!

SPECTATOR 2 (o.s.)

And a small one at that!

(Finally, DIANE's head jerks up, her gaze meeting the action offstage.)

DIANE

Oy vey...

SPECTATOR 1 (o.s.)

She looks like a pigeon.

SPECTATOR 2 (o.s.)

Or a dove.

SPECTATOR 1 (o.s.)

She's just a child!

DIANE

(Defensively)

/She's thirteen!/
/

AMY (o.s.)

Where're my gals?

DIANE

Um...

(DIANE falters, speechless. Following her gaze, ALLAN's jaw drops.)

(From offstage, a loud SPLASH.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

Amy! Oh my god!

(Sopping wet AMY re-enters. ALLAN crouches to catch her, and she sprints into his embrace.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

Amy, Angel, are you alright?

(AMY bravely nods her "beak" hand.)

DIANE

She means yes. She's nodding her beak. Here, dear...

(DIANE unwraps her scarf to dry AMY but continues standing, hovering, feeling comparatively useless in the suspended moment.)

ALLAN

/Jesus, Diane.../

DIANE

/Allan, I.../

AMY

I'm cold.

ALLAN

/Let's warm you up./

DIANE

/There, there.../

(Quiet. A long-held pane, cracked beyond repair.)

(ALLAN remains kneeling on the ground. One knee. A proposal.)

ALLAN
Diane, you know I love you?

DIANE
... I do.

ALLAN
And admire your individuality?

DIANE
I do...

ALLAN
And wish I had your confidence to quit daydreaming and just go pursue?

DIANE
I... I never quit. Besides school, and the studio, and--/

ALLAN
Diane.

DIANE
... I do.

ALLAN
And do you understand this is Reality, not Fantasy?

DIANE
I rank "nothing easier than self-deceit." Our fantasy is our reality.

ALLAN
Fine. Then, in this "Reality," do you trust I know what we have to do? I propose...

(HE stands.)

ALLAN, cont'd.
We pack up and schlep out West.

DIANE
West?!

ALLAN
Village. Downtown. Where realty is dirt cheap and I'll bet always will be.

(Ha. A joke.)

(CONSTRUCTION WORKER ENTERS to deconstruct this scene and set up the next.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

We'll rent, not buy, since even dirt-cheap would have us pushin' up daisies. We're more in the market for gravel than dirt, 'cause there's much more of that here than soil. But I bet we can find two decent apartments within walking distance.

DIANE

Two? One for each girl? How generous!

(ALLAN rolls his eyes, a rare gesture, then--)

ALLAN

One for you. One for me. They can stroll back-and-forth *with adult supervision*. How's that sound?

DIANE

Fairer than anticipated.

ALLAN

Alrighty. Swell. It's done and settled, then.

(ALLAN takes AMY's hand, pulls towards himself.)

AMY

Ouch! My beak!

DIANE

Though you're keeping something else from me. A secret in your eyes.

(DIANE takes AMY's other, pulls towards herself.)

AMY

Ouch! My wing!

ALLAN

Jeez. Yeah. Alright. You can always see through my disguise. I'm... Seeing someone.

(CONSTRUCTION WORKER pauses mid set change, maybe drops a piece with a crash or clang.)

(DIANE and ALLAN release AMY.)

DIANE
(Earnest, high-pitch)
 Lovely!

ALLAN
 Someone who *doesn't* identify as polyamorous, like you and me. Or-- only you now, I guess. If that's how that works. We -- Zohra and me -- are gonna practice... Monogamy.

DOON
 Groooooossssss.

DIANE and ALLAN
 Doon!?

DOON
 Monogamy is a social construct, benefitting only the capitalist bourgeoisie.

DIANE
 She's got a point.

ALLAN
 Doon, this is between your Mother and I--

DIANE
 Is it? Or is it between you and me and Zooya?

ALLAN
 Zohra.

DIANE
 A Jewess? Younger yente?
 Mazel! Where'd you meet?!

ALLAN
 Uh...

DIANE
 On your tour of fancy-schmancy Fifth Avenue department stores, owned by wealthy parents? Who, this time around, support their daughter's Art and accept her equally edgy, impractical lovers?

ALLAN
 No! Well. Yes, they do. But that's far from the story--

DIANE
 A story?! Oh, circle up everyone, there's a story/

ALLAN
We met in class.

DIANE
You're joking.

ALLAN
Usually. Not right now.

DIANE
How terribly classic. The mirror exercise?

(Indeed, the two have been mirroring each other.)

ALLAN
A scene. Checkov.

DIANE
Fake love; I see. "An idle life can never be a pure one," indeed. Well, you should know I too pursued a passionate love affair, I met through my creative course. It was HOT and DARK and we FLASHED in front of the whole class and I'm *obsessed*.

ALLAN
Jeez, uh, with--?

DIANE
Photography.

ALLAN
Diane, let's at least try acting mature--

DIANE
Of all roles to play, *that* one seems an awful bore.

(ALLAN sighs. Set construction proceeds.)

ALLAN
From here on, we'll share the girls. And brunch every Sunday. And even share our finances, if it helps. I can balance your books.

DIANE
You know that's not where I need balance in life.

(HE does know this, but not how to help.)

DIANE, cont'd.
 Could you help me with just one thing?

ALLAN
 Alright.

DIANE
 You will?

ALLAN
 Maybe.

DIANE
 Not "always?"

ALLAN
 What is it, /Diane/

DIANE
 Darling. Dear.

DOON
 Grosssssss!!!!

ALLAN
 Diane.

DIANE
 Keep developing my film?

ALLAN
 Sure, *Diane*. Alright. Come on, now, Amy. Doon. Diane, you'll have fun with this. Going someplace you've never been is your favorite thing, as you say. Don't you?

DIANE
 ...
 I do.

(But ALLAN and the GIRLS are already out of earshot, EXITING. CONSTRUCTION WORKER completes their job hastily and EXITS too.)

(DIANE turns inward, broken, slowly peeling off her apron and veil. Once again, she speaks to herself, or the birds if they haven't yet ditched the show. Or no one.)

DIANE, cont'd.
 I believe "we stand on a precipice... and...
 and as we wait it becomes higher, wider, deeper.
 So when we leap,"
 hopefully we... Hopefully I...
 "will have learned to
 [fly.]"

(DIANE sucks in a deep breath, then darts towards the pond, EXITING, the same way her daughters went. Song: perhaps "The Great Pretender" by The Platters.)

Photograph #4

SETTING: Winter 1960. West Village. Inside Diane's new studio apartment, sparsely furnished: only the cot, standing mirror, and platform, upon which sits a shallow pan.

AT RISE: DIANE, adorned as scarcely as the place, cocoons instead in a blanket, in bed with her journal.

DIANE

Down here

I crash like a "spiritual automobile accident"
 in "an actual physical darkening,"
 alone with my "decent rudimentary self,"
 and it's frightening yet predictable "to see again."
 Too long in light or dark... and I miss the other.
 "'Wear rubbers in the rain, or you'll catch cold,' said my Mother.
 But in growing old, I have the right, don't I,
 to discover?"

(DIANE sneezes. Cold caught, indeed. She buries deeper into nest, then calls out--)

DIANE, cont'd.
 Lisette? Lisette? Instructor Lisette Model?

(Phone call, perhaps via the Dixie cups.)

(ENTER LISETTE MODEL, Diane's artistic mentor and a firm, factual Austrian woman. Their dialogue is always clipped, quick, to-the-point.)

LISETTE
Yes.

DIANE
It's your pupil, Diane Arbus-- Diane.

LISETTE
My husband and I just sat down for sausage.

DIANE
Lovely. Lisette, does feeling dark inside make a person evil? I ask on behalf of a being I once called a friend, now a total stranger, who I wish were my lover.
Me.

LISETTE
I see. You feel dark inside, Diane?

DIANE
If I did, what could I do with it?

LISETTE
Well. When one is given assorted meat, they make sausage.
If you feel dark inside, you can make light outside. By making...?

DIANE
A photograph?

LISETTE
Art.

DIANE
Or nothing.

LISETTE
On occasion.

DIANE
I'm just burnt out by beautiful bodies.

LISETTE
Beautiful bodies are boring.

DIANE

That's why I'm currently only capturing objects and places.

LISETTE

So I see, in your recent assignments.

DIANE

(Touched)

You notice?

LISETTE

They are difficult to ignore.

DIANE

Why, thank you--

LISETTE

The frailest, saddest subjects I've ever seen.

DIANE

Oh. Um...

(ONSCREEN: 42nd Street movie theater audience, N.Y.C 1958 by Diane)



LISETTE

Balloons without strings, twigs without leaves, crumpled newspapers on empty theater floors. A wax museum, at night. The morgue. A beached whale? How did you even find/

DIANE

Are they terrible?

LISETTE

They are different.

DIANE

Because they're not human.

(A realization)

They can be *different*, but not *terrible*. Only *people* can be different and terrible. *I* can be different and terrible.

I think I like different and terrible.

LISETTE

You want your Art to be different and terrible?

DIANE

I-- I want to live in the space between where I'm at now, and where you stand, with your confident models.

LISETTE

"They are comfortable in their skins and, when I photograph them, already strong."

(ONSCREEN: Photographs of Lisette Model's, such as Coney Island Bather, Cafe Metropole, Woman with Veil, Divorcee, etc.)



DIANE

Yes. I am more drawn to subjects in the *process* of... *becoming* strong.

LISETTE

Such as yourself.

DIANE

Dangerously weak? Fragile freaks?

LISETTE

Do not put words in my mouth.

DIANE

How come?

LISETTE

Someday, someone may celebrate you. A writer could put words in our mouths.

DIANE

Ha. Like who?

LISETTE

Unknown.

DIANE

What words, then? Words like...?

LISETTE

Sausage. Yes, I am Austrian, but do not put sausage in my mouth.

DIANE

Fine. I won't. Anyone can put their sausage in my mouth, though.

(Beat for sexual innuendo. Hehe.)

LISETTE

I see.

DIANE

Lisette. I feel incapable of approaching some subjects.

LISETTE

You should not.

DIANE

And unallowed to capture them.

LISETTE

You should not. You should not capture anyone or anything.

DIANE

That's... True.

Lisette. I want to learn darkroom processing.

LISETTE

That you should.

DIANE

With your help?

LISETTE
Until you no longer need it.

DIANE
Wonderful. Thank you.

LISETTE
Diane?

DIANE
Lisette?

LISETTE
The next time you feel dark inside, I suggest you dial a doctor, not an artist. Cameras are “tools,” not medicine. You have much to learn, Diane.

DIANE
Thank you, Lisette. Enjoy your platters of sau... Enjoy your night.

LISETTE
(Somewhat unsettled)
It is early morning, Diane, but... thank you. Enjoy your day.

(LISETTE EXITS.)

(DIANE rips out her journal page, carries it to the platform, and dips it in the pan.)

DIANE
“An actual physical darkness, and it’s thrilling to see again.”
“I must begin to work on MY story, that I keep assuming lies at the end.”
I suppose “*survival* is the secret, because you are all you’ve got.”
And if I don’t step up, whose survival may be lost?
If I don’t hang on, what universal emotion won’t be caught?
If I don’t do it, if I don’t do it...
(Trails off, then--)
Though I burst with ideas and energy, it’s the follow-through that petrifies me.
But with “confidence and control” I’ll compose “mental edge resulting in victory!”

*(With that, DIANE produces a photo! Success!
Maybe: 42nd Street movie theater audience, N.Y.C
1958 [revised])*

(Beaming, SHE hangs it on the wall.)



DIANE, cont'd.

“Despite how you feel inside, always *look* like a winner.”

Even though I often stand at the start, perpetually reborn, a constant beginner.

“I am full of promise” and,

(Into the mirror)

Girl, your reflection truly kills...

(From deep in her nest, or somewhere even less sensical, DIANE produces a Bowie knife. She holds the blade to her neck as music swells, spotlights circle.)

DIANE, cont'd.

If I don't do it,

if I don't do it...

Who the Hell will?

(ONSCREEN: Retro movie countdown: 3.... 2...)

(At 1, instead of slicing her skin, she hacks off a lock of hair. Just the beginning.)

(BLACKOUT.)

Introductory Photography with Lisette Model

{Pt. I}

(A lesson with laminated projection slides and classical Austrian music, Mozart or Schubert. Pre-recorded video or live presentation.)

LISETTE

Hello. Welcome to Introductory Photography.

If that is not why you are here, you are in the wrong place.

Please kindly... Remain seated for the duration of class, so as to not cause disturbance.

Now. Lesson 1. The Seven Fundamental Elements of Photography. You must learn them, in order to produce a balanced image. They are as follows:

1. *Points*. Direct our gazes to spots worth attention. The... point... of your image.
2. *Lines*. Bridge your image from space to space, or divide walls. They say “follow from here to there” or “stop, stay out!” Note: lines do not actually talk.
3. *Shapes*. Formed by points and lines, becoming symbols. These symbols may be obvious or abstract. I trust you have taken rudimentary geometry. If not... too late.
4. *Colors*. The light waves that reflect off a subject and evoke emotion in a viewer. Emotion is subjective. For example, we attach vibrancy and energy with warmer colors, and gloom and fear to cold. Why? Ask your mind.
5. *Texture*. The surfaces we can touch with our eyes. Texture adds excitement to boredom.

(To an AUDIENCE MEMBER)

You. Focus. I said “boredom;” must I spell that out for you?

6. *Space*. Within your frame, either full or empty, which we call positive or negative. Too positive can feel overwhelming. Too negative... Just wrong.

7. *Patterns*. Repetition, found occurring in nature, buildings, and machines.

Repetition is predictable. Comfortable. Makes sense in a confusing world.

Practice the Seven Elements. To prepare for the Three Relationships.

That is all. For now.

Unless you fail out before our next class, see you soon.

(BLACKOUT.)

(END ACT I.)

ACT II Portraits in Public

Photograph #5 {Temptation Initiation}

SETTING: Spring 1961. A West Village art gallery, with Marvin Israel's erotic drawings on display. In the background: The Velvet Underground.

ONSCREEN: Marvin Israel's art, i.e.: *Two women*, *Sans titre*, and *Lolita*, 1971.

AT RISE: DIANE ENTERS, sporting a new pixie/pageboy haircut (result of the knife) and her sunglasses. She's on the up-and-up, albeit timidly.

She approaches MARVIN ISRAEL, once described as "grouchy, agnostic, and brilliant."



DIANE
Hi there.
Hello? Um, you're Marvin Israel...?

MARVIN
Obviously.

DIANE
The acclaimed photographer, art director, artist?

MARVIN
That's just the tip of my pencil, kid. You've got to wear it down.

DIANE
Or break it?

MARVIN
You're Diane Arbus.

DIANE
I am.

MARVIN
The praised photographer--

DIANE
(Flattered)
/Oh, um--/

MARVIN
--*Allan Arbus's* wife and assistant.

DIANE
Oh. Uh, no, you see--

MARVIN
That's a blusher, indeed.
But don't beat yourself up over it.

DIANE
Which part?

MARVIN
The whole shebang!
(Counting on his fingers)
Wife. Assistant. Praised. Photographer. Thank God most of that you can change, if you only believe in yourself and nothing else. Marriage, for starters-- mishegas. A social construct. Frivolous. Sure, I participate, but I'm not, eh, *married* to the concept; don't tell my Missus. What's your Man's stance?

DIANE
Uh, we've... gone... separate ways, actually. He now pursues Acting. Film.
It's his "dream."

MARVIN
Wise.

DIANE
To go separate ways, or--?

MARVIN

Moving right along,
(*Continuing to count on fingers*)
you've just got to quit your little stint as an Assistant--

DIANE
I already have.

MARVIN
And reject any need to be Praised.

DIANE
I already have.

MARVIN
And lastly, as for being a *Photographer*, and craving the camera to escape all that uncontrollable conflict inside... Well. You're sorta stuck with that crazy. Or you'll wind up crazier.

DIANE
To that too, I already have.

MARVIN
Ha! You and me both, kid! Except: you and you alone. I'm happy and healthy as a clam, obviously.

DIANE
Not from what I've heard.

MARVIN
Hm?

DIANE
You were raised on a pedestal, same as me. Provided for, safely enclosed. But on display. And cold.

MARVIN
The "upper-class apathetic" aesthetic, indeed. We're two blue Jews.

DIANE
In a world on fire.

MARVIN
(*Turned on*)
Hot.

(*HE sweeps his arms wide, gesturing to the gallery.*)

MARVIN, cont'd.

Well, like a timid little bat mitzvah rising for aliyah, what're ya waiting for? Your cue? Move into the New, kid. Hit me with your cruelest review.

DIANE

Very well. Your imagery strikes me as quite... Sinister.

MARVIN

(Correcting)

Surreal.

DIANE

Perverse.

MARVIN

Abstract.

DIANE

Violent.

MARVIN

Modern.

DIANE

Is it?

MARVIN

(A business-style "pitch")

Listen here, kid. As the head of *Bazaar Magazine*, obviously, I'm in a position to share whatever with the world. I could appease the people's pleas for all posed, pretty like things. But I don't, would you believe? I *never* roll a whole portfolio of all flawless, touched-up women.

Some still slither through my cracks, so to speak, especially the smallest-- those little critters burrow deep into my folds like minx.

But. I take equal strides to include the... Strange. Strange people. For counterbalance.

In a sheynem epl gefint men a mol a vorem. Sometimes in an apple you find a worm. But to that I add. Sometimes a worm finds itself an apple.

(An apple is tossed onstage. HE catches and crunches into it.)

MARVIN, cont'd.

And that, kid, is Modernity.

DIANE

... Are you still working on them?

MARVIN
My Masterpieces?

DIANE
Yes.

MARVIN
No. Why?

DIANE
I think they beg for improvement, but might develop, with love and time.

(Tense exciting beat; MARVIN is aroused by the challenge.)

MARVIN
You've got chutzpah, kid.

DIANE
I do.

MARVIN
And I've got an "amazing mind."

DIANE
Says who?

MARVIN
Only *all* my students and lovers; indeed, they're one and the same. They swear I intuit artistic intention, before it can even form inside their brains.

(MARVIN removes and pockets Diane's sunglasses.)

(SHE flinches without backing down.)

MARVIN, cont'd.
Your eyes puddle with desire. A subject you yearn to frame. What is it, my child?

DIANE
It is... Um...
Freaks.

MARVIN
(Slightly newly turned-off)

Freaks?

DIANE

The Forgotten. The Outcasts.

Freaks.

I... See, while we traverse our lives dreading trauma, I think some are already born with it. All the life tests we artists, in positions of privilege, agonize over encountering, they've already passed. They're weathered, humbled aristocrats. I don't know..."

MARVIN

The definition of "Aristocrat" or "Freak," obviously.

DIANE

Quite honestly, I know absolutely nothing, and I cannot possibly capture them all, anyway, all the humans on my list...

(Reading from her journal)

Streetwalkers. Protestors. Innocent prisoners. Men in heels. Worshippers of all faiths, swallows of swords, queers--

MARVIN

My pet. "You can photograph Everyone in the World."

But what do you predict your Audience will do, upon encountering your so-called Freaks?

DIANE

Oh... Uh, I imagine they'll run screaming for the hills. Or... go stalking silently through the streets. I mean, these individuals make *me* feel overlapping "shame and awe, curiosity and legend," so, to anyone else, they'll likely--

MARVIN

Is that bad?

DIANE

Not to me, but--

MARVIN

Are *you* bad?

DIANE

What?

MARVIN

Are you, Diane? A "naughty little girl?"

DIANE

So I've been told.

MARVIN
By *your* students and lovers?

DIANE
(A sad joke)
Just the intrusive demons in my head.

MARVIN
Feh. It's high time you dance with 'em, child! Take 'em to bed! Shriek to those hisses that they lurk in precisely the right place for Freakery. The Village is crawling with intriguing creatures these days. In swingers' cellars, sex clubs--

DIANE
Coney Island?

MARVIN
Even weirder.

DIANE
Ideally.

MARVIN
Well, Devil Diane, what're you waiting for?

(Accompanied by circus brass, circling spotlights, and klezmer polka music, MARVIN spreads his arms wide, becoming a ringmaster.)

MARVIN, cont'd.
Welcome to the Freak Show, baby.

(DIANE worships him. Wide-eyed, SHE basks in the changing surroundings while gliding into...)

Photograph #6

SETTING: Spring into Summer 1962. The Coney Island Freak Show, nearby the popular rollercoaster Neptune's Plunge. The platform slides center, and mirror might act as a "funhouse" element.

ONSCREEN: Old Coney Island video clips, perhaps.

AT RISE: DIANE is handed a new camera and blue ringmaster's jacket by MARVIN parading around in

similar attire.

MARVIN

Over here! Over here! Hurry, hurry, hurry! Ladies and gentlemen and...

(To Diane)

whatever the hell you are, step right up! One night only!

DIANE

I'd... rather not. Not yet.

MARVIN

Suit yourself.

(At the funhouse mirror; DIANE does indeed suit herself up.)

MARVIN

Gremlins and ghosts! Creepers and peepers!
 Angels and devils! Monsters and creatures!
 Behind these rusty gates and velvet drapes
 swirls realms of fantasy beyond your padlocked dreams;
 prepare your virgin eyes to take the terror,
 your insatiable appetites to feast as you scream...
 In today's show, we'll see
 Just how death-defying a drop can be
 From how high up in the sky
 To how deep in murky sea
 Will our river survive?!?!?!?

DIANE

Who? Me?

MARVIN

The riders. Of Neptune's Plunge.
 The most erratic erotic coaster on the East Coast?

(That's like, "No, you narcissistic idiot. This ride/show is not all about you??")

DIANE

Oh.

MARVIN

(To AUDIENCE)

Now, please kindly permit me to politely
 pass your precious time while you wait

by directing your sweet saltwater taffy attention
to our darling outcast cabaret!

*(Brighter lights, louder fanfare. Drum roll, then...
ENTER DRAG QUEEN and GRENADE CHILD.)*

MARVIN, cont'd.
The Coney Island Freak Show! Freaks, take it away!

“FREAKS”
Too small! Too big!
Too young! Too old!
Too feminine! Too masculine!
Too hot! Too cold!
Too this! Too that!
Like legends we’ve been told!
But in our skins and scales and wings and heels,
We’re confident and bold!
Sensation! Temptation! Invitation! Liberation!
What’s pretty in our city defies any expectations!

DIANE
Oh my goodness. How terrific you look. How terrific you all *are!*
I... I keep using that terrible adjective, don’t I? *Terrific, terrific, terrific*, what a
fantastically terrible--

DRAG QUEEN
Oh sit down. Relax! Terrific is a compliment.
Compared to what we hear most. “Terrifying.”

GRENADE CHILD
Or nothing.

DRAG QUEEN
Ding ding ding.

DIANE
Well, that I simply do not see.

GRENADE CHILD
(To DRAG QUEEN)
She’s lying.

DRAG QUEEN
Probably.

DIANE

Oh, no, no, no! You, you, have to believe me. I... How can I...
I just need to make a quick mental phone call, um, don't mind me.
(Calling out)

Lisette! Professor Lisette Model!

DRAG QUEEN (as LISETTE)

(Speaking with Lisette's tone and expressions)

Yes, Diane?

DIANE

Lisette. It's your pupil. Fiend? Diane.

DRAG QUEEN (as LISETTE)

Diane, my husband and I just sat down for--

DIANE

Lisette, it's happening. The overwhelming petrification-- guilt and shame for what I'm attracted to, and who I am. Or, *who* I'm attracted to, and *what* I am... Next to intrigue so intense I can hardly *stand--*

DRAG QUEEN (as LISETTE)

Diane. "Find a chair."

DIANE

I did not mean that literally, Lisette. *I can stand--*

DRAG QUEEN (as LISETTE)

And I did not mean for sitting.

DIANE

Oh. Well, this is no time for interior decorating, either! My new studio on Charles Street may be drastically sparse, but I just don't have the money -- or quite honestly, the care -- to furnish it. Not to mention, I prefer keeping the lights off, and blinds closed, so that daytime feels like eternal night. And less furniture, means fewer obstacles for me to trip over--/

DRAG QUEEN (as LISETTE)

Diane. "Find a chair." Observe anyone who may sit in the chair.
Start there.

DIANE

Lisette. That's brilliant.
A simple prompt to release me from my cage!

DRAG QUEEN (as LISETTE)

Okay.

DIANE

But, instead of a chair... How about a stage?!

(Beat of bursting enthusiasm from Diane.)

(Lisette “hangs up,” and morphs back into DRAG QUEEN to rejoin the performance.)

(DIANE and MARVIN play the audience.)

“FREAKS”

Too concealed! Too exposed!

Too light! Too dark!

Life is no Central Park stroll

But we will march along with heart!

Too high! Too low!

Two halves! Two parts!

Since we cannot control the chaos,

We will educate with art!

Flirtation! Narration! Motivation! Imagination!

One night inside our nation will ignite your inspiration!

DIANE

Marvin, does this sound curiously specific to you?

MARVIN

To me? Why, yes, it does.

DIANE

I meant to me. Like they’re speaking directly to me.

MARVIN

To me, indeed. Obviously.

DIANE

(To the performers)

Hi, hello, pardon me.

Artists? I’ve selected my Focus. It’s you.

DRAG QUEEN

Yes, honey. We’ve already established that.

DIANE

But not as Subjects. As Models. With stories. Narrators of those stories.

I wish to *speak* with you. Learn under which lights or shadows you feel yourself *becoming strong*. How do you *yearn* to be *seen*?

GRENADE CHILD

By who? This robot?

DIANE

Oh, no. This, dear, is a new Twin-Lens Reflex, which, yes, sounds like a robot. But it's a tool.

The pictures my old camera produced were quite grainy, which initially fascinated me. But then I wanted to... poke through that. Into Clarity. And now, I'm "terribly hyped on Clarity."

GRENADE CHILD

(Still referring to the camera)

So what does your friend see now?

DIANE

Wonderful question, Dear. Now, they -- I -- see Differences. Between flesh and fabric, subject and backdrop, human and world. Uniquenesses. So that after determining those uniquenesses, I -- we -- can seek out Others with *similar* differences.

"In every Difference is Likeness, too."

In fact, perhaps it's those Different Likenesses that mean the most.

Does that make sense, dear?

GRENADE CHILD

Not at all, Ma'am. Miss. Mrs? Erm...

(CHILD glances to DRAG QUEEN, who shrugs.)

DIANE

(To GRENADE CHILD)

What makes you feel alone in this universe?

GRENADE CHILD

(Plainly)

I have too much fur on my arms.

DIANE

Very well. Let's look at this image, shall we?

(DIANE gestures to QUEEN, who poses, arms up.)

DIANE, cont'd.

There! You see the strands on these suckers?! Each and every hair, alive!

And I've got a heck ton, too, you should know.

(DIANE pulls up her own top, revealing aggressively, endearingly unshaved armpits.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Ideally, if it keeps growing, I'll wind up with wings! What do you think?

GRENADE CHILD

That's nice, Mister Lady-Baby. But I still have the hair on my arms.
And I still have the Sad in my eyes.

DIANE

Oh. Yes. That comes out clearer in my newer pictures, too...
Along with Compassion. Wisdom. Love and Relation.

GRENADE CHILD

What does that mean?

DIANE

I'm not the one to ask. I've never known. I do have a brother I love. Now that I think of it, perhaps I should reach out to him--

MARVIN

And you have two stunning daughters, as well.

DIANE

I do.

DRAG QUEEN

(To DIANE)

Hey hon, I heard you're hyping up on Clarity?
Where would uh, one go about gettin' some of that?

MARVIN

I will provide.
Some dip you low. Some whip you high.

(MARVIN hands or feeds nondescript pills to QUEEN, then distributes to CHILD and DIANE.)

MARVIN, cont'd.

(To DIANE)

How're you feeling, Pet?

(DIANE snatches the pill from CHILD with

contempt. She does not take them.)

DIANE
Honestly? Somewhat... Perverse.

MARVIN
Do divulge.

DIANE
“Pictures of people are secrets,” aren’t they? Pacts between Subject and Artist, then the Artist and Viewer. Like... Do you recall that old childrens’ game? Whisper Down the Lane? Where whatever you said originally, ended up twisting into some humor or rumor. Riveting, but is it right?

(ALL zealously line up to play.)

GRENADA CHILD
(Whispers to DRAG QUEEN)
No.

DRAG QUEEN
(Says to MARVIN)
Occasionally.

MARVIN
(Proclaims to DIANE)
Always!

DIANE
Why then, I suppose...
(Stepping up onto the platform)
Ladies and Gentlemen! Everyone Outside and In-between!
Children who relate to the elderly, and adults who feel like teens!
Presenting... Tonight. And Forever...
Freaks!

(ONSCREEN: Diane’s Freak photography, her most well-known work, like: Child with a toy hand grenade in Central Park, N.Y.C (1962), Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey (1967), A young man in curlers at home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C. (1966), Stripper with bare breasts sitting in her dressing room, Atlantic City, N.J., (1961), among many others)



GRENADE CHILD

(Innocently)

Bombs away?

DIANE

Bombs away!

(CHILD drops the grenade, with a disorienting smoke cloud. During this chorus, the “FREAKS” become SWINGERS while playing dress-up with DIANE, costuming all in boas and masks.)

“FREAKS”/SWINGERS

Celebration! Transformation! Participation! Infatuation!

Your take over our circus will result in deflation!

Fixation! Frustration! Desperation! Desolation!

Your riding of our wonders ends in eternal Damnation!

(Their song ends, replaced by gritty party pop, like “Summer in the City” by The Lovin’ Spoonful.)

Photograph #7

SETTING:

Fall 1966. West Village swingers’ party. Streamers, balloons, Dixie cup drinks, with the “telephone” yarn attached for criss-crossing chaos.

Set-up doesn’t need to be complete by rise; characters can be decorating throughout.

AT RISE:

SWINGERS slapdash decor and splash treats upon a snack table. DIANE, watched by MARVIN, soaks everything in from her platform above.

DIANE

(To SWINGERS)

Um, from up here, I can't quite hear. Did someone say something regarding Eternal Damnation...?

SWINGER 1

No way, baby! You care for some popcorn, candy, cake with a flame?

DIANE

Oh! Whose birthday are we celebrating?

SWINGER 2

Everyone's! That's the name of the game!

SWINGER 1

Why, it's *your* baptism, Pisces princess!

SWINGER 2

Soft slippery snake of the swarming sea!

SWINGER 1

You fluid flickering electric eel,

SWINGER 2

Cold clammy chameleon queen!

(The SWINGERS display the various options--)

SWINGER 1

Popcorn?! Candy?! Cake with a candle?!

SWINGER 2

Or dope, coke, Lucy with a handle?

(Holding up a handle of vodka)

Washes it down.

DIANE

Oh, uh, fantastic. Thank you. But I must admit, I avoid chemical stimulation...

(One shocked SWINGER faints into the other's arms, then both topple into MARVIN's.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Yes. Surprise. I just don't require it. I've never required it. Even alcohol. The chemistry in my system is overwhelmed and off-balance enough.

SWINGER 1

Ugh! Color me jealous as Jello!

DIANE
Jello? Oh, I *do* like cake....

SWINGER 2
Why! Then have it and eat it, sugar! Take, take, take!

(From offstage, MARVIN carries a multi-tiered Jello cake, explosive with firecrackers or sparklers. If able or desired, they share it among the audience/party-goers. Let them eat cake!!)

SWINGER 1
Come onnnnnnn! It *wants* to be eaten!

SWINGERS
JUST A TASTE!

(SWINGER 1 places a piece in SWINGER 2's teeth. DIANE briefly processes this situation, before diving in, kissing SWINGER 2 messily.)

(ALL dance, hypnotized and haywire. The SWINGERS peel off DIANE's jacket and boa, unbutton her top, and apply glitter, fingerpaint, and -- Diane's favorite -- star & moon stickers to her face. MARVIN watches.)

(ONSCREEN: a classic black-and-white montage of headlines displaying Diane's career success.)

MARVIN
1963. Emerging Praised Photographer awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in New York City....

DIANE
Already? But I have nothing to show! There's still so much remaining for me to collect, like-- like the protestors, the queers, not-guilty prisoners, the men in heels--

MARVIN
Annnnnnd just three years later for that ascending artist: the Guggenheim renews!

DIANE
Well, *now* I have too much! Too much noise. Too much chaos.
Too much for a museum. I-- I don't know what to--

MARVIN

1967 marks... Diane Arbus's first major exhibition. At The Museum of Modern Art!

DIANE

I... Stop. I feel so exposed--

MARVIN

Don't you love it? Don't you need it?
The Exposure! The Attention! The Money!

DIANE

No, I-- I still have some money. I still have...

(From a remaining hiding spot near her heart - her bra - SHE pulls out the penny from Allan. Beat.)

DIANE, cont'd.

"In God We Trust."

God... In *Who* to Trust? In... Me can I trust?

Funny. I still carry all the same questions.

(With that, SHE chucks it into space. The SWINGERS scramble for it. MARVIN parades on.)

MARVIN

She's different! Edgy! Bizarre!
A goddamned freak! Wizard of Odds!
Tell us: what will you do next?

DIANE

I... I...

"I am going to go cold.
I am going to be numbed."

(With white knuckles, DIANE grips her camera, flashing her surroundings with frenzy and fixation. Addicted not to stimulants, not to drugs or alcohol, but to Art. The others shy away, uncomfortable.)

(At last, DIANE tires herself out. Exhausted, she drops, upon a cot wheeled in by MARVIN.)

(Silence, and then...)

Introductory Photography with Lisette Model

{Pt. II}

LISETTE (onscreen)

Recall your Seven Elements of Photography? The Elements *can* stand alone, but together, they work better. Or worse. They make art. Or nothing.

We call these interactions the Three Relationships.

1. *Tone*. The mood, aroused with intention. You can establish your tone using Range, from the lightest part of your photograph to the darkest. Dial up brightness, and you may wash out details. Indulge your shadows, and you may become lost in them.

Tone also relates to Depth. Your audience is capable of handling depth. Assume your viewer is observant, and smarter than anticipated.

(Meta beat, staring at the AUDIENCE)

But not always.

2. *Distance*. Your proximity from your Subject, while delivering your message. A viewpoint, which alters how your message is received. Are you standing below or above your subject? How close, or how far? Too far may seem disconnected. Too close, intrusive. Or, do you stand at eye-level?

3. Finally: *Balance*. Harmony between Elements. For Example: Heavy tethers airy. Lucid; rough. Soft; sharp. Positive; negative. Empty; full. Light; dark.

Consider halves. Consider the Rule of Thirds. Balance.

(Nodding at a hand in the AUDIENCE)

What about Imbalance, you ask? I see.

By contrasting and clashing your Elements: Tension may occur. This works, if your Intention is not Flow and Cohesion, but rather:

(Matter-of-factly, as usual)

Total fucking chaos.

Master your Elements. Experiment with their Relationships.

Good night.

(BLACKOUT. END ACT II.)

ACT III
Landscape

Photograph #8

SETTING: Winter 1968. Doctors' office exam room: URGENT CARE. Stark, sterile, white like the gallery, but with a coastal theme to soothe the mood (which then seeps into a swampy lagoon). Cot. Platform topped with newspapers. Beeping heart monitor.

AT RISE: DIANE catches her breath and shakes off the glitter.

DIANE

Where am I...? How did I get here?

Lisette? Are you there? I swear I just heard your voice...

Oh. Well. Very well. I'll just... [write a letter.]

(Into journal)

"Dear... friend: I go up and down a lot. Maybe I've always been like that. What happens is I get filled with joy and breathless with excitement and plan everything I want to begin. But then, suddenly, through tiredness or disappointment or something more...

Mysterious... The energy vanishes. Leaving me swamped, distraught. Frightened by the very things I was so eager for! I'm sure this is um, awfully normal..."

Awfully normal...

(SHE wanders to the newspapers and rifles through.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Oh. They're about me.

(REPORTERS ENTER and flank DIANE, who reads along.)

DIANE, cont'd.

"She is..."

DIANE and REPORTER 2

"A naughty, devious bohemian."

DIANE and REPORTER 1

"A sexual free spirit."

DIANE and REPORTER 2
“A little girl.”

REPORTER 1
A curious creature-

REPORTER 2
A victim of society. Manipulative.

REPORTER 1
Perceptive!

REPORTER 2
Cynical.

REPORTER 1
... Smart.

REPORTER 2
Lonely.

REPORTER 1
Witty.

REPORTER 2
Needy.

REPORTER 1
Magnetic.

REPORTER 2
Dependent.

REPORTER 1
Observant.

REPORTER 2
Saaaaaaaad.

REPORTER 1
A chameleon who changes to fit her worlds!

REPORTER 2
A kid on a mood swing.

REPORTER 1

Who sees everything!

REPORTER 2
Who smells bad.

(DIANE sniffs her underarms, repeating the Photo #6 pit action.)

REPORTER 2
Her monsters are pathetic.

REPORTER 1
Tender!

REPORTER 2
Repulsive.

REPORTER 1
Lovely!

REPORTER 2
She exploits them.

REPORTER 1
She celebrates *eccentricity*!

REPORTER 2
Lacking compassion, /and self-definition/

REPORTER 1
/Striving for empathy-/

REPORTER 2
Aggrandizing pessimism narcissitically.
(Smug beat, before final remarks)
She is perverted.

REPORTER 1
Fascinated.

REPORTER 2
An enigma.

REPORTER 1
A myth.

REPORTER 2
Evil.

REPORTER 1
Troubled.

REPORTER 2
/Anti-humanist!/
/

REPORTER 1
/Authentic humanist!/
/

(THEY glare at each other.)

DIANE
Stop, stop, that's never what I intended to do! All I've been trying to say is--/

REPORTER 1
These quotes were brought to you by:
The Cut. The Washington Post. The New Yorker.

REPORTER 2
The Wall Street Journal.

REPORTER 1
The New York Times.

DIANE
What I was trying to show is--/

REPORTER 1
Please kindly--/

REPORTER 2
Civilly.

REPORTER 1
Permit us to politely--

REPORTER 2
Responsibly.

REPORTER 1
Direct your sweet--

REPORTER 2

Lucrative. Economical.

REPORTER 1

(With an eye roll)

Jesus--

REPORTER 2

(With prayer hands)

Amen--

REPORTER 1

ATTENTION to your playbills. For a resource bibliography!!

(REPORTER 1 breathes heavy, exhausted but triumphant.)

REPORTER 2

Calm down, lady. Don't try to force your philosophies.

REPORTER 1

UGHH!!

(REPORTER 1 tosses up or angrily rips the papers. THEY both EXIT. DIANE turns inward.)

DIANE

I never meant to turn Artists into Freaks. To call anyone anything! All I was trying to say is it's impossible to "slip out of your own skin, into somebody else's tragedy." Rather, we all experience pain and discomfort and...

Doesn't that make sense? Does it?

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm...

(An oblivious quack of a DOCTOR ENTERS, late 60s' groovy vibes that parallel "swami" Allan, who in the next scene plays a psychiatrist.)

DOCTOR

You're sorry for keeping me waiting? No worries. You're Mrs. Arbus?

DIANE

Diane. Yes.

DOCTOR

Is your surname not Arbus?

DIANE

No, that's correct. A shame, but correct. My husband and I separated nearly a decade ago but never finalized the legal divorce.

DOCTOR

Oh, groovy. So he'll be joining soon.

DIANE

What? No.

DOCTOR

After his 9-to-5, I mean. 9-to-5 *a.m.* if he's down in the Financial District?

DIANE

Allan Arbus? Ha, Allan Arbus is no Wall Street Warrior. He's just an artist, same as me, awaiting his big break.

DOCTOR

Of a bone? Like he's waiting to break a leg? You artists are such hypochondriacs. I'll never understand.

DIANE

I did not expect you to.

DOCTOR

Right on. So, tell me what's wrong with your body.

DIANE

Oh. Well, that knowledge I *was* perhaps expecting from you...
I'm... I'm not quite certain about my body *or* my brain these days.

DOCTOR

How have you been feeling, Ms. Arbus?

DIANE

It's *Diane*.

For months, I... "I've felt like a balloon. So light I almost floated away. Blue," specifically, so no one could tell apart me from the sky. "But then, all the air sputtered and fizzled and fluttered out of me, and now, I am weak." Empty than ever.

Am I going to die?

DOCTOR

Soon enough. Like everyone. But in the meantime, for my sake, you're gonna have to cough up a few more objective symptoms and a lot less beatnik poetry.

DIANE

Fine. I'm fatigued, feverish, nauseous. Hungry for nothing. Restless but exhausted. Hot then cold. I'm *ill*. Is that good?

DOCTOR

No, no, it's not. It's pretty bad. But it does make sense, considering you tested positive for Hepatitis.

DIANE

Hepatitis...?

(Actually empty, scared)

Oh.

DOCTOR

No. *B. O* is a blood type, Miss.

DIANE

Well. Never in my life have I aspired for high marks, so. I suppose a *B*, as opposed to an *A* is fantastic.

DOCTOR

It's really not. Your *HBV* presents a dangerously high likelihood of immediate career failure. In your case: loss of fellowship with the...

(Bizarre incorrect pronunciation)

Guggenheim..? -- is that a digestive disorder? -- as you become too weak to present quality work. Looks like you've already pretty much damaged your chances beyond repair, due to your cyclical history of hesitation and trepidation. This pattern of claiming you're "never ready?" Not too easy on the art.

DIANE

The heart?

DOCTOR

Yeah, both we'll have to restart. As for the condition affecting your Guggen..whatever, my results indicate the organ...ization is shutting down your upcoming gallery opportunity as we speak.

DIANE

Oh, my god. Should we be speaking faster, then?!

DOCTOR

Too late.

DIANE

God, this is... Terrible. What can I do?!

DOCTOR

Well, obsession isn't an antidote, but could relieve some internal pain.

DIANE

Obsession? Oh, I'm terrific at obsession! Order, organization, fixation, you name it. Fantastic. Anything else?

DOCTOR

Uh... Have a balloon?

(GRENADE CHILD skips in, with a balloon in one hand, grenade in the other.)

DOCTOR, cont'd.

Hand it over, kid.

(GRENADE CHILD offers the bomb.)

DOCTOR, cont'd.

No, the *balloon*, the-- ugh. Child!
(Taking and shoving it upon Diane)
Here.

DIANE

It says... "Be happy?"

DOCTOR

The gift shop downstairs ran outta "Feel Better Soon." So, yeah. Hepatitis B happy.

DIANE

(Dryly)
You sound like my family. Like my...

(MOTHER ENTERS, same performer who played MODEL, wearing a robe and slimy face mask.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Mother?!

MOTHER

Don't mind me. Just shuffling through for some...

(SHE makes her way to a cabinet of pill bottles.)

DIANE

Mother, could you "tell me your story of depression?" It might be awfully helpful right now.

MOTHER

Oh, please. What a dim drawn-out tale. It lasted from the summer of '29, through the 30s, but, decently well-off, we were, of course, distanced--

DIANE

Not the Great Depression, Mother. I meant your... standard depression.

MOTHER

Oh, even worse. "I had everything a woman could dream of, yet I felt miserable."

DIANE

Is that not often *when* we feel most miserable?

MOTHER

"You were always so sensitive, to the world and my moods."

DIANE

Perhaps too much.

MOTHER

Mm.

DIANE

So, what happens to them in the end? Your moods?

MOTHER

Well, my psychiatrist suggested I return to happier days. Youth. Summers out on the oceanliner with my father. You know.

DIANE

I don't. Father -- my father -- was never around. Those types of memories don't exist.

MOTHER

Diane, your father worked at Russeks for 42 years -- almost as long as your whole life -- rising up the rungs, bottom to top floor, from window-washer to company president. To build a foundation. For us. For you. He says he couldn't bear to be a failure, "not only in [his] own eyes, but the eyes of the world."

DIANE

How admirable.

MOTHER

And now, he paints.

DIANE

Father?

MOTHER

If only for himself.

We followed my psychiatrist's orders -- all these Docs say the same thing, you see -- and we sailed the coast, down to Florida. It's colorful here, which puts us at peace.

What is life, we ask ourselves, without color?

DIANE

I suppose it's black-and-white. Like my photographs?

MOTHER

(With a scoff)

That sounds awful.

No offense.

DIANE

So, did it work? Did you get over your depression?

MOTHER

Goodness, no. I gaze out and sail upon it.

(GRENADE CHILD approaches DIANE and crawls, curls, up into her lap. ALL three turn to face the back wall, where blue hues dance, in a misty calm sea. Moment of silence. Reflection, into the looking glass.)

DIANE

I'm...

MOTHER

I'm...

DIANE

/I'm sorry./

MOTHER, cont'd.

"I'm so sad I couldn't love you."

/Diane./

DOCTOR

/Mrs. Arbus?/

(DIANE leaps to her feet. GRENADE CHILD falls.)

(MOTHER EXITS.)

DOCTOR, cont'd.

If you have NO other intriguing or relevant information to share--?

DIANE

Clearly, I do!

DOCTOR

And require NO additional aid--

DIANE

I do! I need physical, mental, and emotional /help/

DOCTOR

Then maybe we'll pay ya some attention in the future! And speaking of pay, this appointment will cost you only...

(Peers at clipboard)

All your savings. Your husband can provide?

DIANE

NO, Doctor, I -- DIANE -- CANNOT! My fellowship is the ash upon which I survive! And in my currently unstable condition--

DOCTOR

We'll just complete the transaction, then, and send you on your way.

DIANE

Doctor. Please. /Help--/

DOCTOR

Best of luck with your rapidly declining marriage and career, Mr. Arb. Always remember, you're not alone! Now go quarantine yourself inside a small empty space; Doctor's orders. And, as you said, you love order!

GRENADE CHILD

Goodbye, broken robot! Goodbye, sad eyes!

DOCTOR

Goodbye, whatever you call yourself!

GRENADE CHILD and DOCTOR

(Voices echoing)

Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!

(With broad smiles, THEY wave as DIANE stumbles, backwards, into her apartment.)

(“Maybe I Know” by Lesley Gore may intensify the transition.)

Photograph #9

SETTING:

Spring 1970. Diane’s final studio, Charles Street. Similar to her previous apartment, but the flats/walls are moved in tighter, and there’s less furniture: just her cot for sleeping, and platform & pan for processing photos. Outside: no leaves or flowers.

ONSCREEN:

A slideshow of D’s final works (below, *untitled*)

AT RISE:

DIANE scours the room for inspiration or direction.



DIANE (onscreen)

Here is bad. This is bad. In this current moment of clarity, I am *recognizing* that this is bad. I need... Focus.

Focus. Focus.

I need my strongest, most Fantastic images. In order. Interrelated yet spontaneous, and highly educational. How many? Three? Not quite enough. I have...

7,459. Slightly too much.

How about... Ten? Ten. Ten! I’ll select my ten most terribly terrific photographs that best capture Life, and arrange them inside a small box, and call it...

“A box of ten photographs.”

(To the Photographs)

In retrospect, you’re far more...

Beautiful than I recalled.

You shouldn’t be.

You shouldn’t be...

Are the walls closing in, or, um, is that just me?

No, not it's not. As the Doctor said, I'm not alone.

I have... Allan!

(Calling out, a "phone call")

Allan? Allan, dear?

(ALLAN ENTERS, picking up.)

ALLAN

Diane! What a coincidence. I was just about to call.

DIANE

Oh, how curious! How cosmic! Swami, I need your hel--

ALLAN

I hope you're sitting down in a chair for this one, because I've got good news.

The office finally processed our divorce paperwork! After all those years of dragging this out, we are officially separated in two!

(Despite how strongly she perseveres through the conversation, this rips DIANE in two. She manages onwards, but the air and light have left her.)

DIANE

Oh.

Permanently?

ALLAN

You better believe it, Diane *Nemerov*!

DIANE

Wow. That's...

ALLAN

Crazy, right?

DIANE

(Quieter, softly)

Right-crazy.

(Beat. ALLAN laughs at someone offstage.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Are you poking fun at me?

ALLAN

What? No! Zohra just said something funny.

She's playing dress-up with Amy, and--

(Listening again)

Alright, alright, Amy insists they're not "playing dress up," she's just trying on Zohra's costumes. Z's in rehearsal for this brand new thriller she's starring in, where--

(Again, then)

Right, right. Not "thriller." Psychological horror.

It's called *Let's Scare Diane to Death*.

DIANE

What?!

ALLAN

I said *Let's Scare Jessica to Death*. The reviews say it's gonna be huge. Really knock down the house. Blow off the roof. And send us wheelin' all the way out West.

DIANE

To the Village? You're coming back?!

ALLAN

West Coast. L.A.

DIANE

Oh. You're joking.

ALLAN

Nope. City of Angels.

DIANE

I've never been.

ALLAN

Yeah, we figure it'll be good for Amy. Swell art schools.

DIANE

Art schools?

ALLAN

That's what she says nowadays. It's her latest dream. She finds photography "intriguing" ... How 'bout them apples?

Amy, come tell your mother...



(AMY ENTERS, costumed in a slashed '70s dress, Jello blood dripping. Cinematic cult classic aesthetic.)

AMY

“I was holding myself back, afraid to compete with the legend, but the minute the viewfinder comes up to my eye, I think... ‘I’m home.’”

(AMY bows or curtsies and EXITS.)

DIANE

Amy, that’s beautiful.

ALLAN

She’s run off already. Sure sounds like you, though, huh?

DIANE

Like *you*. You’re her consistent influence. Her *legend*.

ALLAN

She wasn’t talking about me, Diane.
She was talking about you.

DIANE

Oh.

...

Have you, um, seen Doon as of late?

ALLAN

Nah. She’s always off doing something. 25 years old, you know how that goes. She and Amy, though, I’ll tell ya. The neatest characters for sure.

DIANE

(Dazed)

Characters. “In a fairytale for grown-ups.”

ALLAN

Sure.

DIANE

Like, “if the fall of man consists in the separation of god and devil, the serpent must have appeared in the middle of the apple when Eve bit down, splitting every pair into opposites.”

ALLAN

Uh, right...

DIANE

“So the world is Noah’s ark on an eternal sea, containing endless irreconcilable pairs. Heat will always long for cold. Back for front. No for yes. Smiles for tears...”

ALLAN

Sure, sure. Diane, I... The girls are calling me.

(They aren't. HE calls offstage dramatically, towards the back wall or opposite the direction he did earlier, an acting faux faux.)

ALLAN, cont'd.

Coming, angels!

(HE hangs up, releases a sigh, and EXITS.)

(Heavy with brief true sadness, DIANE leans against one flat, which collapses.)

DIANE

Oh... Um. Oh, my.

Do I truly *need* that wall?

No. I am supported. I am not alone.

I have... I need...

Lisette. Lisette! Lisette!!

(LISETTE ENTERS with trepidation.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Lisette. What is love?

LISETTE

Diane...

DIANE

"I believe it involves a peculiar, unfathomable combination of understanding and misunderstanding."

LISETTE

I see. Diane--

DIANE

And Lisette. "The farther afield we travel, is what we're really getting closer to... Home? Perhaps the gods drop us down in the wrong place. And where we go... what we seek... Is..." Leaving me with the question: do I honestly *yearn* to wind up where I've never gone? Or, truly, to end up... Home?

LISETTE

Diane. Listen to me.

You ride on constant waves of euphoria.
You say that yourself in your letters.

DIANE
No, I don't.

LISETTE
Yes you do. And then you burn out.

DIANE
No. I get better.

LISETTE
It is dangerous. You will pop like a balloon.

DIANE
Not this time. *Never.*

LISETTE
/Diane--/

DIANE
Lisette. It's not over YET. *Now help me.*

LISETTE
With what?!

DIANE
I... Forget.

LISETTE
Diane. My husband says, when we talk, you suck up my energy like a black hole.

DIANE
He does?

LISETTE
Yes.

DIANE
And you believe...?

LISETTE
I do.

DIANE

So, what do I do? Where do I go? /Lisette--/

LISETTE

Diane, I don't know!

(Beat. From LISETTE, exasperation. From DIANE, desperation, into sad resignation.)

DIANE

Very well. I shouldn't expect you to. But you can tell your captor -- I mean husband -- the next time he eats SAUSAGE I hope he CHOKES.

(SHE hangs up, knocking over the second wall.)

DIANE, cont'd.

Oh, fall, wall! See if I care! There are others, still. There is....

Marvin! Marvin! *MARVIN!!!*

(MARVIN ENTERS, half-naked or clothes askew, clearly interrupted.)

DIANE, cont'd.

You asked me what I desire, and I suppose it may be... Faith.

In anything grander than myself.

Maybe that doesn't say much, considering my size. But...

In You I Trust.

In You I Trust.

In You I...

(Trailing behind him, wrapped in their mother's robe: DOON.)

(ALL stare at each other. Mirrored reactions.)

(Long pause.)

DIANE

Doon...?

DOON

Mom...

(MARVIN steps forward, composed.)

MARVIN

My child.

Let Agony inspire your Art--/

DIANE
AGHHHHHH!!!!

(Guilty, MARVIN and DOON retreat, EXITING.)

(DIANE shoves over the final wall. Done.)

DIANE, cont'd.
Howard! Howard! *HOWARD!!!*

(HOWARD ENTERS with relaxed maturity.)

(HE smokes a cigar, flaunts the cardigan and coffee, the whole shebang.)

(The siblings speak via Dixie cups leftover from the party. Soggy, sippy, crumpled, used.)

DIANE, cont'd.
My brother! My friend. How are you? What's new on your end?

HOWARD
Well gee, D. It's been so long. "I have a plot, but not much happens."

DIANE
You served in the war!

HOWARD
Among many. Years ago.

DIANE
What it that like?

HOWARD
War? Where to start?
I wrote about it, but I doubt you came here for poetry.

DIANE
I'm beginning to believe I'm here for no specific purpose at all.
Please, share. You have the floor.

(SHE takes off her shoes and settles on the ground. Criss-cross applesauce. Story time.)

HOWARD

Uh, sure D. Alright. Ahem.

“For a saving grace, we didn't see our dead,
Who rarely bothered coming home to die
But simply stayed away out there
In the war in the air.”

*(Two previous lighting designs may overlap: the
planetarium atmosphere from Allan and Diane's
meet-cute and the dancing blue waves from
Photograph #8.)*

HOWARD, cont'd.

“Seldom ghosts come back bearing tales
Of hitting the earth, the incompressible sea,
Per ardua, said the partisans of Mars,
Per aspera, to the stars.”

DIANE

What does that mean? Per aspera?

HOWARD

It's the Royal Air Force motto. “Through struggle to the stars.”

DIANE

...

I am going to go down in history as Howard Nemerov's sister.

HOWARD

(With a head shake, like “yeah right”)

That doesn't sound right.

DIANE

Would you tell me another story, Howard? The one of your life.

HOWARD

My life? Gee, uh...

DIANE

Only if you wish.

HOWARD

Uh, well sure. Alright.

After the war, and Harvard, I married my partner, who you know I love and support and does the same for me. We complement each other. Our three crazy kids clash on occasion, but what can you expect? Then I started teaching, published my collections--

DIANE
Which won Pulitzer Awards!

HOWARD
They did. Sure.

DIANE
They say you “handle the contemporary world in formal verse.”

HOWARD
I feel safe with patterns. Same as you.

DIANE
Yes.

HOWARD
Now I’m at Washington University. St. Louis. We enjoy the suburbs and the space. I figure I’ll retire in 20 years, give or take. But mostly, day to day, I just write, and smoke what I call “no-nonsense cigars.” Like my poems: “all quality, no style.”

DIANE
Always so practical. The most grounded pilot.

HOWARD
I figure life is either “Discovery or Invention of one’s character.”

DIANE
Two quite different outcomes, are they not?
Guess we’ll see.
We’re sort of two different outcomes, aren’t we?

HOWARD
You said you wanted a life series of unexpected.
My little sister, crazy D.

DIANE
That’s me.

(SHE gazes down at the Dixie cup in her hands.)

DIANE, cont’d.
I should have called more.

HOWARD
We can’t fly backwards. Only onwards, altering the course when necessary.

You know that.

(DIANE shrugs. HOWARD understands.)

HOWARD, cont'd.

Hey, I finally finished my poem for you, if you can stomach one more.

DIANE

Please. Please.

HOWARD

If you insist. It's titled: "To D."

"My dear, I wonder if before the end

You ever thought about a grown-ups game,

You go on running along the wall.

And when you felt your balance being lost

You jumped because you feared to--"

DIANE

(Suddenly somber)

"Nothing is as they said it was."

HOWARD

What? Who?

(DIANE lunges at HOWARD, seemingly in an attempt to kiss him. He stumbles backwards, reeling.)

DIANE

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

I'm sorry.

(SHE flies offstage, EXITING.)

(HOWARD shakes off his fluster, in order to regard the audience as his students.)

HOWARD

"That was a lifetime ago.

And now you've gone."

That's a... poem, class. What we call a poem.

About... Vertigo. As fellow pilots, veteran pilots, you are familiar with that dizzy feeling that can overtake you, while peering down from unfathomable heights. Or looking back across your own life...

(LISETTE steps forward, in line with HOWARD, also in teacher mode. She holds an envelope.)

LISETTE

Good evening, pupils. I have received a letter from an old friend, once enrolled in this very course: Introduction to Photography. Still today, she remains one of the “greatest students I ever had, maybe who ever lived.”

She often rambles in letters, but she may offer a lesson on... Feeling.

(With a Bowie knife, LISETTE opens the envelope. Out flutters confetti and glitter, then a card.)

LISETTE, cont'd.

A greeting card? That is... Different.

(LISETTE reads, displaying a rare moment of lost composure, as HOWARD raises his hand.)

HOWARD

Professor? What does it say?

LISETTE

It says... Um. “Be happy.”

HOWARD

(Lower octave, off-record)

Really? That actually happened?

LISETTE

Yes. Did...

*(Re: his last moment with Diane)
that?*

HOWARD

...

So they say.

*(ALLAN ENTERS in a war uniform, as Major Sidney Freedman from M*A*S*H. He takes a deep breath, psyching himself up, to play a psychiatrist.)*

(Pre-recorded voice of DIRECTOR booms from above.)

DIRECTOR (voice)

Okey doke, kid, here's the skinny. In this episode, Klinger wants discharge. As always, classic Klinger. Your character, Major Sidney Freedman, is a psychiatrist, evaluatin' whether or not the ole kook deserves medical leave. And you're willing to write him off as... Different, ya feel? Queer? Mentally ill? Copy?

ALLAN

You betcha, Boss.

DIRECTOR (voice)

Quiet onset! Lights, cameras, action!

*(ONSCREEN: Clip from M*A*S*H Season 2, Episode #3, Radar's Report. ALLAN might lip sync along.)*

ALLAN

"From now on, as a homosexual, you go through life on high heels."

KLINGER (voice)

"But I ain't none of those things! I'm just CRAZY!"



ALLAN

Well, you know what I've been trying to say?!

"When the ponds freeze over, pull down your pants and slide on the ice."

(ALL pause, breath held.)

DIRECTOR (voice)

God. It's like you're speaking right to us!

(LAUGH TRACK and AUDIENCE APPLAUSE,)

DIRECTOR (voice), cont'd.

Damn, kid, you really read the room!

That's a wrap on the climax, folks,

So just stand by, as we strike and reset booms.

Falling action. Resolution. Then, we're done!

So now: up lights. Roll cameras. 3... 2...

(ONSCREEN retro movie countdown: 3.... 2...)

(...1.)

(BLACKOUT.)

(Song suggestion: “Patterns” Simon & Garfunkel)

Photograph #10

SETTING:

Summer 1971 for Diane. Westbeth Artists Community residents’ bathroom. A bathtub with the platform nearby, as a stepping stool.

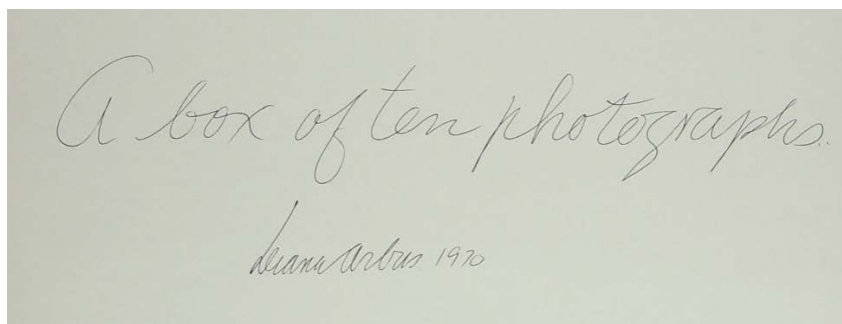
Also: the Smithsonian, a full decade later.

On display: *A Box of 10 Photographs* by Diane. Each photo singularly encapsulated in a plexiglass cube.

AT RISE:

Rain pelts outside. DIANE stands in the bathroom with her journal.

LISETTE, HOWARD, and ALLAN take in the Smithsonian exhibit.



HOWARD

There. See the title?

“A box of ten photographs. By Diane.”

She wrote it herself, according to her journal.

Practiced it a bunch of times first, like a schoolgirl.

ALLAN
Always such a perfectionist.

LISETTE
An artist.

ALLAN
It was Marvin's idea to put each picture in a box. Plexiglass. Neat-o.
And Doon did the labels!

HOWARD
Hm.

LISETTE
I see.

(From her place in space and time...)

DIANE
I wanted my pictures to stand for what I believe:
that Art is Realer than Reality.
Our *realities* are our personal fantasies-- what we fantasize as the most magical best, or
fear to be the darkest worst. Through our lenses and filters, framed by our nightmares and
dreams.
But art. A photograph. It can't lie like that. It freezes the true moment, as is.
Which is quite... Frightening, is it not? Far more compelling.
I wanted that Reality to poke through the haze. Stare straight through. Eye-to-eye. Direct
human gaze. But... I couldn't. I couldn't make it work.
I couldn't prove-- I couldn't discover-- that Art is real and Life is not.
Because I was wrong.
Life isn't a fantasy. And my models, who I meant to uphold as beautiful representations
of Reality, the world perceived as grotesque creatures, like you'd find in Times Square.
Everything went askew. Fluttered to the ground.
By Art and by Life, I've been let... down.

(HOWARD sees DIANE in the bathroom window.)

HOWARD
Up there, do you see her?

ALLAN
Well, I'll be damned. It's a girl.

LISETTE

Or something. She looks like...

ALLAN

A fairy in the light.

LISETTE

A ghost in the dark.

ALLAN, HOWARD, LISETTE

Oy vey....

HOWARD

What's she doing in there?

DIANE

(To self, into journal)

I'll title you... "The Last Supper."

And, I should include my last numbered negative, shouldn't I?

#7459.

Now, I just want... I need...

The top step.

(On the step leading up to the stage, if possible, DIANE places her journal with utmost care. Like she did in real life.)

DIANE, cont'd.

There. That feels... Right.

Finally.

(At ease, she begins undressing. Over the tub, she scrubs off the glitter and paint, while explaining to the audience or others--)

DIANE, cont'd.

"Identity is what's left,
when everything else is stripped away."

LISETTE

(To HOWARD and ALLAN)

"When I first met Diane, she seemed so fragile.

When I last saw Diane, she looked so strong.

I forgot that strong can be used to destroy."

(Finally, DIANE turns, noticing the OTHERS.)

DIANE
What are you looking at?

LISETTE
“One of the most Powerful

ALLAN
American artists

HOWARD
of the 21st century.”

ALLAN, HOWARD, LISETTE
No offense.

(DIANE gazes into their realm and the gallery.)

DIANE
You’re arranged into the rule of thirds.

LISETTE
Like a photograph.

HOWARD
Like a poem.

ALLAN
Like a joke.
I hope it lands.

HOWARD
Lands like a plane?

ALLAN
I’ll bet it does.

LISETTE
Diane, someone wrote your story.

DIANE
Who?

LISETTE
Unknown.

DIANE
Does it make sense?

LISETTE
Occasionally.

DIANE
Does it make anyone... Feel?

LISETTE
That we will see.

DIANE
Did they take creative liberty?

ALLAN, HOWARD, LISETTE
They always will.

DIANE
Lovely.

(ALLAN, HOWARD, and LISETTE return their attention to the gallery. Eventually, by the End, they ALL EXIT.)

(DIANE addresses the Audience and her Photographs.)

DIANE, cont'd.
Despite it all, I wish I could say I stayed.
That I discovered Darkness doesn't develop Art. Art *processes* Darkness.
And that I got to see my subjects speak, to the curious collection of individuals who identify as both Artist and Audience. Spectator and spectacle.
Yearner and self-critic. Imaginative idealist, and negative cynic.
Good and Evil. Ugly and Beautiful. Light and dark.
Always *becoming* Strong.
Perhaps it would have been Different,
if I'd grown up in a different world.
With circles of support, and diagnoses for mood swings.
Chemicals to balance imbalance.
From my story, there is far more to learn from the beginning than The End.
(To AUDIENCE)
Friends. Do you wish to, perhaps, preserve this Moment?
I mean it. Here, take out your... modern photography robot gizmos. I'll wait.

(AUDIENCE is invited to take pictures.)

(After a generous pause...)

DIANE, cont'd.

Thank you. My sole request is, if you choose to share one of those images, you include an artistic creation of your own, as well. A photograph, painting, poem. Don't think too hard. You are not limited to 10 or 3 or 1 of anything.

Now, before I go someplace I've Never Gone -- despite a little earlier than my planned departure -- You should know, that in my final years, I became a Professor.

Perhaps you anticipated that plot twist. If not: Surprise.

So, as *Professor* Diane, here is what I have to say.

"If you scrutinize reality closely enough, both the terrible and terrific become... Fantastic."

Thank you for... [watching/participating/Being.]

(Gripping her knife and drawing in one final breath, Diane perches to leap into the abyss.)

(Then, with a resounding SPLASH...)

(She's gone. Everyone is.)

(Only the Art remains.)

(The photographs. On their platforms. In their boxes. Bold. Becoming. Speaking for themselves.)

(Eventually, the lights go down. Or, the audience is ushered up to peruse the gallery. Either way...)

(End of play.)

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