

The Creators

by Alexander Utz

Characters:

DEIRDRE	A go-getter type. (W, 20s-30s)
PIPER	A go-with-the-flow type. (W/NB, 20s)
WILL	A go-it-alone type. (M, 20s-30s)
JESS	New and idealistic. (W/NB, 20s)
THE INTERN	An intern. (W/NB, 20s)
ANOTHER INTERN	Another intern. (W/NB, 20s)

Time: The present.

Place: An office; four desks and four chairs.

Notes on the text:

- This play must be cast with diversity in mind.
- The Intern and Another Intern may (and maybe should) be played by the same actor.
- Transitions between scenes can represent minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, etc. All that matters is time has passed. Feel free to represent this through movement, stillness, or any other device that conveys time passing.
- This play may be performed with or without an intermission.

Alexander Utz
alexander.utz716@gmail.com
(716) 392-3418

One

An office space. There is one door leading to a private office, labeled "PRIVATE" and, under that, "Gene." The office kitchen is offstage. In the main space are four desks and four chairs; one desk is empty and piling with papers. At the other desks, in various stages of disarray, sit DEIRDRE, PIPER, and WILL. DEIRDRE is working, PIPER and WILL sleep. Heads on desks, laid back in their office chairs, that sort of thing. They've been here a while.

After a few moments, THE INTERN enters from the kitchen, carrying a buzzer. THE INTERN rings the buzzer, waking PIPER and WILL. DEIRDRE is unfazed by the noise. THE INTERN exits. PIPER and WILL yawn, stretch, rub eyes, etc, then get to work. PIPER turns on a handheld video camera, which she uses intermittently to record her surroundings or herself. They work in silence for a bit.

After another few moments, WILL stands and exits to the kitchen. He returns with a mug of coffee and a banana, then plops in his chair and puts his head back on his desk with a groan.

DEIRDRE

Maybe you should try waking up on your own. You wouldn't be so tired.

WILL *head down*

I hate that bell.

DEIRDRE

Maybe you should try waking up on your own.

WILL *head down*

Don't you hate that bell?

DEIRDRE

That's what I do. I wake up on my own.

WILL *head down*

I'm aware.

DEIRDRE

I've trained my internal clock to wake up when the sun rises.

WILL *head down*

You're an inspiration.

DEIRDRE

I could teach you.

PIPER

He's being sarcastic.

DEIRDRE

What?

WILL *head down*

I'm being sarcastic.

PIPER

I don't know how you do it.

WILL *sitting up*
Be sarcastic?

PIPER
I don't know how you get up so early.

DEIRDRE
I've trained my internal clock —

WILL
Yeah, we know.

PIPER
I just don't have the energy in the morning.

DEIRDRE
Once you get used to it, it's not too bad.

WILL *to PIPER*
Want some coffee?

PIPER
I think you already know the answer to that.

WILL
Fair enough.

WILL exits to kitchen.

PIPER
Getting a lot done?

DEIRDRE
The morning's usually a productive time for me.

PIPER
Do you get *any* sleep?

DEIRDRE
I get enough.

PIPER
I don't think I've ever seen you sleep.

DEIRDRE
You're exaggerating.

PIPER
Maybe you sleep with your eyes open. That's so cool.
Would you tell me if you did? If you slept with your eyes open?

DEIRDRE
I don't sleep with my eyes open.

WILL enters with a mug of coffee, hands it to PIPER.

WILL

How would you know? If you did or not?

DEIRDRE

I think I'd know.

WILL *to PIPER*

If she ever does, don't tell her.

PIPER

What, just leave her *in the dark*?

— Ha ha. See what I did there?

WILL

That's funny. Love it. I'm adding it to the act.

DEIRDRE

I don't sleep with my eyes open.

PIPER

We're just teasing, Deirdre. Geez.

DEIRDRE

Actually, call me Deedee. I want you guys to call me Deedee.

PIPER

— Why?

DEIRDRE

I want Gene to see me as more carefree, more fun. That way he might give me better assignments.

So, Deedee.

WILL

That doesn't sound like Gene.

DEIRDRE

It's worth a shot.

PIPER

Sure, if you think so.

DEIRDRE

I do. I think so.

Pause. They work.

— Can you guys say it? Just once? I want to see how it sounds.

WILL

What? Deedee?

DEIRDRE

Yeah, like in a conversational way. Like it's an everyday thing.

WILL

Okay, yeah, this is weird.

PIPER

What are you working on today, Deedee?
— How was that?

DEIRDRE

Seemed a little forced. Catch me off guard with it.

PIPER

But you asked me to — you'll be expecting it now.

DEIRDRE

Well, you'll have to surprise me.

WILL

Yeah, Piper, come on. Surprise her.

PIPER

How about I do it later, so you'll forget and won't be expecting it.

DEIRDRE

Okay. That works.
— Do you like it, though? Deedee? Does it sound like me?

PIPER

Sure. Yeah, it suits you, I guess.

DEIRDRE

You guess?

PIPER

It's different. I'll need to get used to it.

DEIRDRE.

I like it.
Will?

WILL

I'm holding judgement until I hear it in context.

DEIRDRE

We should get back to work anyway.

They do. After a few moments, THE INTERN enters again and approaches the empty desk. THE INTERN looks through the papers on the desk. PIPER and WILL watch, curious.

WILL

What's going on?

THE INTERN

Nothing.

WILL

Doesn't look like nothing.

THE INTERN

Just gathering some papers.

WILL

He might be coming back.

THE INTERN

Gene told me to gather these up, so I'm gathering.

PIPER

Does that mean he's not coming back?

THE INTERN

I don't know.

WILL

He might be coming back.

PIPER

Yeah, it's only been — how long has it been?

WILL

It doesn't feel like it's been too long.

THE INTERN

It's been months.

WILL

Already? Wow. Okay, so it's been a while.

PIPER

We get unlimited vacation days, though. I bet he's just taking a — a really long vacation.

THE INTERN

Craig did not get his time approved.

WILL

Yeah, but our time off requests never gets approved.

THE INTERN

I'm just doing what Gene told me to.

WILL

Gathering.

THE INTERN

Gathering.

WILL

And if he comes back? What then?

THE INTERN

That's up to Gene.

PIPER

I hope Craig takes photos to show us, when he's back.

They look at her.

What? I want to see where he went on vacation.

THE INTERN exits into Gene's office with the papers.

WILL

One of these days, I'm going to leave too.

PIPER

On vacation?

WILL

No, for good.

DEIRDRE

Do you think his projects will be reassigned to us?

PIPER

Whose, Craig's? Or Will's, when he leaves?

WILL

Anyway, I'm sure he'll come back soon. It's just a vacation.

PIPER

Yeah, he was happy here, with us. Right?

WILL

Ha. None of us are happy here.

Deirdre, you happy?

DEIRDRE

Deedee.

PIPER

I wonder where he's traveling. Somewhere beautiful, I hope. Warm.

My family used to spend winters on the Mediterranean, we couldn't stand the cold. Those were simpler times, before I had to do all this — work.

WILL

Do you think he left any snacks in his desk?

DEIRDRE

There are snacks in the kitchen.

WILL

Yeah, but they stopped getting those fruit bars I like.

PIPER

You could ask the intern to get more.

WILL *looking through the empty desk*
When have they ever listened to our requests?
WILL finds a fruit bar.
Aha!

DEIRDRE
What if he was saving that?

WILL
For months? He probably forgot it was here.

PIPER
I bet it's stale.

WILL
No way.
WILL takes a bite, then spits it out.
Damn it.

PIPER
Was I right? Tell me I'm right.

WILL
I'm not giving you the satisfaction.

PIPER
I was right.

WILL
Want a bite? You can see for yourself.

PIPER
Ew, no.

WILL
Come on, just taste it. I think you'll like it.

DEIRDRE
We should be working.

WILL
What's the point, if Gene's just going to reassign Craig's projects to us?

PIPER
Yeah, it's okay to have a little fun, Deedee.

DEIRDRE
I hope I get the fox book. I'd love to write that.

WILL
— Why?

PIPER
How did that sound, though? Natural?

DEIRDRE

What?

PIPER

You didn't even notice!

WILL *taking another bite of the fruit bar*

She called you Deedee.

DEIRDRE

Oh! Did you really?

PIPER

Ha. Yeah.

DEIRDRE

It felt very natural! Thank you!

PIPER

Any time, Deedee.

WILL

Okay, don't overdo it.

PIPER

Deedee, Deedee, Deedee, Deedee, Deedee.

WILL

Great. Just great.

DEIRDRE

Have I told you about the Dmitri Belyayev experiment, the one where they domesticated foxes by breeding only the nicest ones?

PIPER

Probably. Sounds familiar.

DEIRDRE

Oh.

Well, did you also know that Arctic foxes don't start shivering until the temperature reaches below 70 degrees Celsius?

WILL

I guess we do now.

PIPER

Why do you know that?

DEIRDRE

I like foxes.

THE INTERN enters from Gene's office. No papers.

Well? Are Craig's projects being reassigned?

THE INTERN

No. Gene decided we're hiring a new employee. They will take over Craig's remaining projects.

DEIRDRE

Oh. A new employee. Okay.
— Wait, even the fox book?

PIPER

And what if Craig comes back?

THE INTERN

Gene's not worried about that becoming an issue.

WILL

Why not?

THE INTERN *exiting to the kitchen*

Because that's what he said.

WILL

But why not?
— Oh, and can we get those fruit bars again?
THE INTERN is gone.
Damn.

PIPER

I wonder who the new employee will be.

*One by one, DEIRDRE, PIPER, and WILL get back to working at their desks. Silence.
Transition.*

Two

The office. Same as before. Some time has passed. Days, or weeks, probably. DEIRDRE, PIPER, and WILL should be working, but instead stare at the new employee, JESS. JESS writes. Silence.

WILL

Look at them go.

PIPER

So focused.

WILL

They're making me feel bad about myself.

PIPER

They're making me feel bad about you too.

WILL

Great. Thanks.

DEIRDRE

How's the book coming, Jess?

JESS

Hm?

DEIRDRE

The book. The fox book.

JESS

Oh — fine, thanks.

DEIRDRE

I bet.

JESS

Hm?

DEIRDRE

I said I — never mind.

Did you know that foxes hunt on their own, rather than in packs?

JESS

— Yes. I'm writing the book on them, remember?

DEIRDRE

Right, of course. I'm sure you're doing great with that.

JESS

Thanks.

DEIRDRE

But let me know if you want any help. Or guidance. I love foxes. So, use me as a resource if you need. Okay?

PIPER
She *loves* foxes. She won't talk about anything else.

DEIRDRE
I talk about other things.

WILL
Like what?

DEIRDRE
Like — well, lots of things.

WILL
Give us one example.

DEIRDRE
Um — I talk about coffee. Sometimes. Does anyone want some?

PIPER
Ooo, yes please.

DEIRDRE
Coming right up. When I get back, we can talk about it, because I talk about plenty of other things besides foxes.

WILL
Very convincing.

DEIRDRE
I know.

DEIRDRE exits to the kitchen. JESS notices that PIPER has been filming them.

JESS
— Are you filming me again?

PIPER
No.

JESS
You are.

PIPER
Just pretend it isn't here.

JESS
But it is here.
I don't know how I'm supposed to act.

PIPER
Act like yourself.

JESS
But if I'm aware of it, how can I act naturally?

PIPER

You pretend it isn't here.

JESS

Are you even going to use this footage?

PIPER

Maybe. It's experimental.

WILL

Some self-referential stuff in there would be interesting. Meta.

PIPER

It's a deconstruction of the environments in which we create art! We talk about the making of the film in the film itself!

To the camera:

Hello, look at me, I am making a film.

WILL

Meta.

JESS

This is ridiculous.

PIPER

It's art.

People are going to think this is brilliant.

WILL

People are going to think *Gene* is brilliant for making it.

PIPER

Ugh, true.

DEIRDRE enters with two coffees, gives one to PIPER.

DEIRDRE

He was the one who assigned it to you.

PIPER

I guess.

JESS

But she's making it. You'll get credited at least, right?

PIPER

Ha. No.

JESS

I thought we get credited for our work.

WILL

Jess missed the fine print.

DEIRDRE

Gene takes all credit for everything we make here.

JESS

What? That's terrible! How did I miss that?

WILL

It's very fine print.

JESS

Why do you stay here? Why put up with that?

DEIRDRE

It's good experience. Exposure.

WILL

It pays.

PIPER

It's something to do.

For the camera's benefit:

Mmm, coffee.

DEIRDRE

Plus, it's experience in all sorts of disciplines. Like, Piper, if it weren't for Gene, would you be making a film like this?

PIPER

I don't know. Probably not.

JESS

It's still not right. To not give people credit.
I'm going to talk to him.

JESS starts toward Gene's door.

DEIRDRE

Oh, he's not *here*. Did you think he was actually here in the office?

PIPER

He does a lot of traveling. Ooo, I hope he takes pictures! I want to see where he goes!

JESS

You don't have a problem with this?

PIPER

Should I?

JESS

It seems pretty wrong to me. If I had known, I don't think I would've taken the job.

WILL

You wouldn't? A place to live, a fully stocked kitchen, being paid to make art?
You have to admit it's a pretty nice setup.

JESS

Yeah, but to not get credit —
Deedee, back me up here.

DEIRDRE

I'm okay with it, for the time being. It's a really good opportunity, this could all lead to something.

JESS

What if it doesn't?

DEIRDRE

It will. It has to.

PIPER

You'll get used to it, Jess. And look at it this way: at least you're actually making something. That's more than a lot of people can say.

DEIRDRE

Plus, we're all in it together.

PIPER

Right! We support each other, like a pack of foxes out hunting.

DEIRDRE

Foxes are solitary hunters.

PIPER

Still.

JESS

Don't you want to make this all better, though? Instead of being complacent?

DEIRDRE

It'll get better. We just have to put in the time, pay our dues, and everything will work out.

WILL

That's what you always say.

DEIRDRE

I mean it.

WILL

But nothing ever changes.

DEIRDRE

It will. Trust me.

WILL

One of these days, I'm going to leave. Just like Craig. Once I have enough saved up, I'm getting out of here. I'll make art with my own name on it.

JESS

You can do that now. Why wait?

PIPER

You ask a lot of questions.

JESS

Is that a bad thing?

PIPER

Ha. You just proved my point.

JESS

Forget it. If you're all fine with this, then I guess I shouldn't say anything.
I'm getting back to work.

PIPER

Uh oh.

WILL

I think you upset them.

PIPER

Looks like it.
Sorry, Jess.

DEIRDRE, PIPER, and WILL watch JESS work. Then one by one, as they lose interest, they get back to work too. After a few moments, THE INTERN enters.

THE INTERN

How is everyone doing in here?

JESS

I actually have a question.

DEIRDRE

Don't ask the intern.

THE INTERN

Ask me what?

DEIRDRE

Nothing.

JESS

I had a question about my project.
Should I be using Craig's work to supplement my own, or —?

THE INTERN

Let me see.

JESS hands THE INTERN some papers from her desk.

Right.

THE INTERN tears the papers up.

You won't be needing this.

JESS

Won't it be helpful, though?

THE INTERN

The project should be your own.

JESS

But Gene takes credit for it.

DEIRDRE

Jess.

THE INTERN

Gene's the artist.

JESS

Right. Of course. Silly me.

THE INTERN starts to exit towards the kitchen.

Hey, by the way, I'm sorry but I never caught your name.

THE INTERN

Right.

JESS

— So, what is it?

THE INTERN *ignoring JESS*

I'm going out. Does anyone need anything?

WILL

Fruit bars?

THE INTERN

They're out. They don't have any more.

WILL

Maybe they've restocked?

THE INTERN

I doubt it.

PIPER

Can you at least check, so he shuts up about it?

JESS

If it's easier, I can go with you. An extra pair of hands.

THE INTERN

— No.

JESS

I'm sorry if I upset you.

THE INTERN

I have to go.

THE INTERN exits.

JESS

— Did I say something wrong?

PIPER *sarcastic*

Wrong? No. What makes you think that?

WILL

I bet there *are* fruit bars.

JESS

I don't think the intern likes me.

PIPER

The intern doesn't like anyone.

DEIRDRE

They like me.

WILL

I bet there are fruit bars and the intern purposefully doesn't buy them, to spite me.

DEIRDRE

They're actually really nice, if you're nice to them.

WILL

To fruit bars?

DEIRDRE

To the intern.
Everything's easier if you're nice to people.

JESS

Is that my lesson for the day?

DEIRDRE

What? I don't —

JESS

I should be nice to people, I shouldn't make waves. Keep my head down.

PIPER

Ooo, waves. Good idea.

PIPER gently shakes her coffee cup and films the inside of it.

DEIRDRE

This job can be a really good opportunity, if you're patient.

JESS

— Why do you like foxes so much, Deedee?

DEIRDRE

I just do. I guess. Always have.

JESS

Yeah.

DEIRDRE

Why?

JESS

I was curious. I wanted to ask.

WILL

You do ask a lot of questions.
Not in a bad way. Sorry. I'll shut up.

PIPER

Yeah, Will, shut up.

WILL

Done and done.

JESS

Ha. It's fine. I know I ask a lot of questions.

DEIRDRE

You like working here, though, right? With us?

JESS

Yes, I like you all. Of course I like you all.

DEIRDRE

Good, That's good.

*Pause. One by one, they all get back to work. Silence.
Transition.*

Three

Later. JESS is writing. DEIRDRE, PIPER, and WILL are all asleep at their desks. After a few moments of silence, THE INTERN enters carrying bags full of granola bars. THE INTERN is very dishevelled. They take a few moments to compose themselves, then start toward the kitchen.

JESS

Hi there.

THE INTERN

You're awake.

JESS

I don't need a lot of sleep.
You were gone for a while.

THE INTERN

I had a lot to do.

JESS

Lots of — granola bars to buy?

THE INTERN

Yes.

JESS

— Are you hurt?

THE INTERN

No.

JESS

You look like you've been through hell.

THE INTERN

I ran errands.

JESS

Got it.
— Why won't you tell me your name?

THE INTERN

I don't have one.

JESS

Everyone has a name.

THE INTERN

Not me.

JESS

So, what, just "the intern," then?

THE INTERN

Right.
— I have to go put these away.

JESS

Is Gene making you do it?

THE INTERN

Put these away? I guess.

JESS

Hide your name.

THE INTERN

I'm not hiding anything.

JESS

Why aren't we allowed to leave?

THE INTERN

You have everything you need here.

JESS

Right, okay, but it seems like something's going on out there. Is that why we have to stay here?

THE INTERN

It's nothing that you have to worry about.
You should work on your project.

JESS

Speaking of my project, why is it that Gene gets to take all the credit?

THE INTERN

You ask a lot of questions.
Excuse me.

THE INTERN starts to leave again.

JESS

Wait.
Do you think we should be credited for our work?

THE INTERN

It doesn't matter what I think.

JESS

It matters what Gene thinks.

THE INTERN

It's his art.

JESS

Is it, though?

THE INTERN

I don't know if I should be discussing this with you.

JESS

Everything here is so secretive. I don't get it.

THE INTERN

Uncertainty breeds better art.

JESS

Do you believe that?

THE INTERN

It doesn't matter what I think.

JESS

Fine. Do you like to work here?

THE INTERN

— I don't have to answer that.

JESS

Because I get the sense that you don't. So, maybe we can help each other.

THE INTERN

I don't need help.

JESS

Are you sure?

THE INTERN

I have to go.

JESS

Can I have a granola bar?

THE INTERN

— No.

JESS

Why not?

THE INTERN exits. JESS stands and tries to follow.

Come on, we're on the same team here!

DEIRDRE wakes up.

DEIRDRE

What? What's going on?

JESS

Sorry. Nothing. Sorry.

DEIRDRE

You're awake.

JESS

Yeah, I couldn't sleep, so I figured I'd try to at least work.

DEIRDRE

Usually I'm the first one up. It's nice to have some company!
How are you doing with the foxes?

JESS

It's a lot to do, but I'm handling it.

DEIRDRE

Must be overwhelming.

JESS

I'm handling it.

DEIRDRE

I can always help you with it, if you need.

JESS

I think I'll be okay.

DEIRDRE

You can ask for a different assignment, too.

JESS

Is that allowed?

DEIRDRE

Gene doesn't have to know.

JESS

So it's not allowed.

DEIRDRE

It's not *not* allowed.

JESS

I'm confused.

DEIRDRE

You mind if I take a look?
Just a peek.

JESS

— Okay, fine. Sure.

JESS tucks away a handful of papers that she's been writing. DEIRDRE moves over to JESS' desk and starts reading the other papers on the desk.

DEIRDRE

What was that?

JESS

What?

DEIRDRE

You just put some stuff away.

JESS

Oh, it's nothing. Really rough first draft writing. Not ready for anyone to see that yet. It's crap. Ha.

DEIRDRE

I don't mind.

JESS

I'll let you know when it's ready.

DEIRDRE

— Okay.

JESS

Promise.

DEIRDRE

I'm not bothering you, am I?

JESS

No, no.

DEIRDRE

Okay, good. I don't want to be distracting.

JESS

You aren't.

DEIRDRE

You're already adjusting to a new environment, I don't need to give you any more distractions. Ha.

JESS

Don't worry, you're fine.

DEIRDRE

You know, I always thought Craig was a weird choice for this project.
I mean, I'm sure you'll do a great job with it, though.

JESS

Thanks.

DEIRDRE

He never seemed to really care about foxes. Which, obviously, you need to for a project like this.
Just my opinion, though.

JESS

Right, of course.

DEIRDRE

And not much of a distinct voice, stylistically. I read his stuff on occasion, and it always came off as a bit bland.
Your syntax here is weird.

JESS

Where?

DEIRDRE

Bottom of page fourteen.

JESS

I'll take a look.

DEIRDRE

Do you have much writing experience? From before?

JESS

This paragraph here? Page fourteen?

DEIRDRE

Yes.

JESS

Yeah, I'm still playing with that. Seeing what works.

DEIRDRE

I see that. Let me write down a few alternate options for you.

JESS

I thought you were just taking a peek.

DEIRDRE

Right, of course. I'll write them down anyway, in case you need inspiration.

DEIRDRE writes.

For example, did you know that in the Middle Ages, foxes were sometimes burned as symbols of the Devil?

JESS

Great. I can take it from here, though.

DEIRDRE

I don't know if I'd call burning foxes "great."

JESS

That's not what I meant.

DEIRDRE

— What sort of writing do you usually do?

JESS

All sorts.

DEIRDRE

And you were paid to do it?

JESS

Does it matter?

DEIRDRE

I'm only curious. You're an interesting person.

JESS

Do you have to work on your project?

DEIRDRE

I'll get to it.

JESS

If you don't mind, I'm going to try to focus.

DEIRDRE

Sure, sure, go ahead. Don't mind me.

JESS works. DEIRDRE hovers.

JESS

— Do you need something?

DEIRDRE

You don't mind if I watch, do you?

JESS

Yes, actually.

DEIRDRE

I'll be quiet.

JESS

I don't like people looking over my shoulder.

DEIRDRE

I'm looking over your arm.

JESS

It's the same thing.

DEIRDRE

I promise, I won't be a bother.

JESS

Please, just let me work in peace.

DEIRDRE

I am. I'm being peaceful.

THE INTERN enters with the buzzer, notices DEIRDRE.

THE INTERN

Do you need something, Deirdre?

DEIRDRE

Deedee. And I was talking with Jess.

JESS

I'm trying to work.

THE INTERN

You can talk from your desk.

DEIRDRE

She asked me to come over here.

THE INTERN

That's fine. But you can go back to your desk now.

DEIRDRE reluctantly returns to her desk.

Thank you.

THE INTERN presses the buzzer. WILL and PIPER jolt awake.

WILL

I swear to god —

THE INTERN

Good morning.

THE INTERN exits.

WILL

One of these days, I'm going to take that buzzer and throw it in the ocean.

THE INTERN *off*

I heard that!

WILL

Damn it. Well, how's the morning going for you early birds?

DEIRDRE and JESS sit in silence, working.

— Oookay.

PIPER

Ominous.

WILL

Seriously.

I'm getting coffee, anyone want some?

PIPER

—

WILL

Besides Piper.

PIPER

Thank youuu.

Silence from DEIRDRE and JESS.

WILL

Suit yourselves.

WILL exits.

PIPER

— You guys okay?

JESS

Just working.

PIPER

Got it, cool, cool, cool.

DEIRDRE

The intern does like me, right?

WILL *off*

GRANOLA BARS ARE NOT THE SAME AS FRUIT BARS! THEY'RE NOT THE SAME!!!

Transition.

Four

Later. JESS is filming PIPER in various poses. WILL and DEIRDRE at their desks.

PIPER

How's this? I'm going for sultry, but threatening.

JESS

Okay, yeah.

PIPER

Maybe try a lower angle.

JESS

So what are you trying to say with this film? Is there a message?

PIPER

My message is — I don't know. I'll decide later, I guess.

JESS

Shouldn't there be a reason, though?

DEIRDRE

Ideally.

PIPER

Maybe it's art for art's sake.

JESS

But is that what you want to do, or what Gene wants you to do?

PIPER

Does it matter?

Once I get a bunch of footage, maybe I'll find a message hidden somewhere, and pull it out.

JESS

Got it.

PIPER

Come in for a close up.

JESS comes closer to PIPER. WILL bangs his head on his desk.

WILL

Damn it, damn it.

JESS

— What?

WILL

Nothing's funny. There isn't a single funny thing.

JESS

I'm sure it's better than you think.

PIPER

He gets like this.

WILL

What am I even doing?

I should just leave. I'm going to leave. Just like Craig. That's it.

PIPER

You don't mean that.

WILL

I do. I really do.

PIPER

You don't.

WILL

I do.

PIPER

Don't.

WILL

Do!

DEIRDRE

Oh my god.

JESS

Can we hear what you've been working on? Maybe saying it out loud will help.

WILL

No thanks. It's not ready yet. It's not funny.

JESS

But stand-up is supposed to be heard, not just read.

DEIRDRE

That's debatable.

JESS

— Is it?

WILL

Why does he even want to do a stand-up set? Why? Why?

WILL bangs his head on the desk again.

Damn it!

JESS

— Do you need anything?

WILL

No, no, no, no.

JESS

Just let us know if you do, okay?

WILL stands up and exits into the kitchen.

Um. Alright.

DEIRDRE

Let him be.

PIPER

Yeah, he'll be fine.

Do you have the close-up?

JESS

Yes.

PIPER

Good. Now closer. I want to be able to see my awful, awful pores.

JESS

Your pores are fine.

PIPER

Then you're not close enough.

JESS gets closer.

Pore status?

JESS

— Awful?

PIPER

Excellent.

PIPER speaks directly into the camera, deadpan.

When I was a child I was a child, and when I was a child I was already grown. I grew so tall, Jack and the Beanstalk, I grew so beanstalk tall I could be climbed. Boy did I climb myself, up every tree I could get my arms halfway around. I climbed myself up into nooks and crannies, surrounded by leaves and branches, and gazed out like I was bird watching grey winter clouds roll in, thinking of the inevitable trip south to warmer skies. How I wanted to be a bird, only with feathers rough like bark. The skin on my knuckles and knees was calloused — I called the marks feathers. I ruined so many pretty dresses, my family spending too much money on these dresses that I would invariably muddy and tear on knots and bark, too much money on these dresses that I would invariably grow out of, though I was already beanstalk grown. They put me in these dresses, I guess, to mark me still young, still theirs, still home, though I was already winter-bird flown. Chirp, chirp.

PIPER takes the camera from JESS and goes to her desk.

JESS

I wouldn't have guessed you to be the tree-climbing type.

PIPER

Who says I was?

JESS

I guess I thought that — never mind.

WILL enters eating a banana, laughing.

PIPER

Oh boy.

PIPER films WILL.

JESS

What's going on?

PIPER

Just a part of his process.

WILL

What even *is* funny? Is anything? Is "funny" anything? Or is "funny" a made up concept? A state of being we strive for, distracting us from the larger and more tragic realities in the outside world?

PIPER

Oh, this is good stuff.

WILL

Funny?

PIPER

You better believe it.

WILL

Funny is never permanent, there is never a guarantee of funny. Something that was once funny may never be funny again. It depends on who's laughing.

JESS

Shouldn't we help him?

PIPER

He'll tire himself out.

WILL

But no, funny is instead temporary, fleeting, a mirage in the desert of despair.

JESS

Are you sure?

WILL

The desert of despair is filled with the sands of time, sands which cover everything that has been and everything that will never be funny.

PIPER

His metaphor's going off the rails.

JESS

He's going off the rails.

PIPER

I know, it's great.

WILL

Despair is funny, however. As long as the despair is someone else's, and not one's own.
WILL places the banana peel on the floor, classic splayed banana peel, ready for someone to slip on it. WILL stares at it, commands it:

Do a flip.

The banana peel does nothing.

JESS

I don't like this. We should do something?

DEIRDRE

Like what?

PIPER

Shhh. Watch.

They all watch the banana peel.

WILL

We wait. It does not flip. It does nothing. The banana peel in itself is not funny. It is the expectation of what follows that is funny. We await the fall.

WILL hovers his foot over the peel.

Ah, the unknowable future.

JESS

Will. Stop.

WILL

You're right. I don't know what I'm doing.

JESS

Thank you.

WILL

I need a running start.

JESS

Not what I meant —

WILL backs up, prepares to run at the peel. THE INTERN enters, notices the peel.

THE INTERN

Will, clean that up before someone trips and hurts themselves.

THE INTERN, distracted by the peel, walks into a desk and falls over it. WILL claps and laughs.

WILL

Would you look at that!

JESS *going to THE INTERN*

Are you okay?

THE INTERN

I'm fine, I'm fine.

WILL

Now that's funny.

JESS

Do you need anything? An ice pack?
— Do we have ice packs?

THE INTERN

Really, I'm okay.

WILL

I'm putting that in the act. Desk, fall, laugh! Ha!

WILL goes to his desk and writes.

PIPER

— How are you feeling, bud?

WILL

I'm great, why?

PIPER *to JESS*

See? Nothing to worry about.

DEIRDRE

Back to normal, back to work.

JESS

I'm worried about the intern. Are you sure you're not hurt?

THE INTERN *standing*

Yes. Thank you.

JESS

Don't mention it. When you work together, you look out for each other.

PIPER

If we'd really been looking out, no one would've run into the desk.

THE INTERN

It's not a problem.

JESS

Okay. I'm glad you're not hurt.
Hey, by the way, I have a question I want to ask Gene — is he in his office?

THE INTERN

Any questions for Gene can go through me.

JESS

I just want to pop in, I won't take too much of his time.

THE INTERN

What's your question?

JESS

Never mind, it's no big deal. I'll figure it out.

THE INTERN

Good to hear.

THE INTERN starts to leave.

WILL

Hey, watch out for the desk! Ha!

THE INTERN

Good one.

THE INTERN exits.

WILL

Ha. Comedy is so easy.

Pause. They all work in silence for a while.

DEIRDRE

— Can you guys call me Dee?

PIPER

Deedee?

DEIRDRE

No, just Dee.

WILL

What happened to Deedee?

DEIRDRE

It didn't really catch on the way I wanted it to. Plus, I think I like Dee better.

PIPER *condescending*

Really? Why?

Catching herself.

I mean, really? Why?

DEIRDRE

Never mind.

JESS

We can call you Dee if you want.

WILL

I mean, I might forget for a while, but yeah, if you want us to.

DEIRDRE

I think it sounds more authoritative. Deedee was too childish, but Dee is — I don't know, commanding. It's sure of itself. A childish name like Deedee was never going to help me get better assignments from Gene. I need an authoritative name.

PIPER

So — Dee.
Yeah, totally. Great.

DEIRDRE

Do you not like it?

PIPER

I love it. Now whenever I talk to you, I can say I'm getting the Dee.

WILL

Ha! That's going in the act.

DEIRDRE

If you're just going to make fun of me, then forget about it.

PIPER

Not in a bad way. Promise.

WILL

If it'll make you feel better, we can do the same thing with my name.
Everyone, start calling me Willy.

PIPER

Gross.

WILL

Ha. It really is.

PIPER

Dee isn't *nearly* as bad as Willy.

DEIRDRE

You think so?

PIPER

I've never been more sure of anything in my life.

DEIRDRE

Ha. Thank you. That's a relief.
I was worried you wouldn't like it.

PIPER *to WILL*

I'm never calling you Willy, by the way.
But no, I can get on board with Dee. It's good.

DEIRDRE *standing*

I'm going to go tell the intern to tell Gene the news. I'm excited!

DEIRDRE exits.

PIPER

Wow, the intern's about to get the Dee with no warning at all.

Pause. No response from WILL or JESS.

Oh come on, that was funny.

— Wasn't it?

WILL

What? Sorry, I stopped listening.

JESS

It was very funny, Piper.

PIPER

Then why did no one laugh? Have I lost my edge?

WILL

Happens to the best of us.

PIPER

Let me try again.

Wow, the intern's about to get the Dee with no warning at all.

Ha!

JESS

Ha!

WILL

Ha ha!

PIPER

Ha!

This isn't forced, is it?

WILL

It's the most natural laugh I've had in my life.

PIPER

That makes me feel better.

You know what?

WILL

What?

PIPER

Comedy is so easy.

WILL

It really truly is.

PIPER

Isn't that right, banana peel? Isn't comedy easy? Wouldn't you say so? Wouldn't you say comedy is easy? If someone had a gun to your head, banana peel? Or should I say stem? If someone had

a gun to your stem, would you say comedy is easy? I bet you would, banana peel. Oh, how I bet you would.
Now do a flip.

*The banana peel does nothing. They watch.
Transition.*