

# *The Forbidden Fruits of Honey Frost*

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*“The world as we know it began with an apple and it will end with an apple.”*

Scarlet Maeveen Bailey



**CHARACTERS:**

HONORIA (HONEY) FROST, an American heiress raised in London, age mid-twenties

BEVERLY GRAVENSTEIN, a New York estate lawyer, age mid-forties

INGRID GRAVENSTEIN, Beverly's daughter, an archeology student, age nineteen

SCARLET MAEVEEN BAILEY, an Irish emigrant orchardist, age mid-forties

MILTON FROST, Honey's uncle, an astronomy professor, age mid-fifties

JONATHAN FROST, Milton's son, a medical student, age late twenties

**TIME:**

The present

**PLACE:**

New York City: a stylized set represents the operating theatre of a hospital on Wards Island, and a law office and vintage boutique in Manhattan.

## PROLOGUE

(New York City: the operating theatre of Wards Island Hospital. A choir is heard singing classical music as BEVERLY GRAVENSTEIN, a middle-aged lawyer, limps to the edge of the stage, facing the audience. SHE wears a robe, tinted glasses, a surgical mask, and speaks boldly as the choir fades.)

BEVERLY

Can you hear me through the mask? No...? Then I'm taking the damn thing off!

(SHE yanks off the mask and thrusts it into a pocket.)

BEVERLY

There's no proof of contagion at this distance, but feel free to leave. *(pause)* So you're staying after all. Good for you! I was told I'd be speaking to the nursing staff as well as your brightest physicians and visiting specialists, but I hope there's a few witch doctors among you because we're desperate here, ha, ha! I say that in all sincerity, though I'm not like those patients I've seen gorging on exotic plants under full moons. Even in my youth I was committed to conventional cures and concepts, destined to be a cog in a wheel, though I never expected to wind up handling the estates of wealthy New Yorkers, especially that of Oliver Frost whose daughter flew in from London.

## SCENE 1

(Choral music is heard as BEVERLY evokes the past, removing her robe and glasses. SHE enters an office and sits at a desk across from HONORIA (HONEY) FROST, a striking beauty of twenty four. HONEY speaks with a British accent and wears a stylish jacket over jeans.)

BEVERLY

With the passing of your father and as his sole surviving heir, you inherit all his accounts, assets, and properties which include the orchard and penthouse in The Beresford. You're a very wealthy young woman.

HONEY

So how much are we talking about or is that too vulgar a question?

BEVERLY

*(writing on a piece of paper)* This is an estimate, though it could be more depending on fluctuations in the market.

HONEY

Nice. Much better than trying to live off an allowance.

BEVERLY

It wasn't adequate...?

HONEY

Not for a wastrel like me.

BEVERLY

So Honoria, what are you going to do with the rest of your life?

HONEY

Haven't a clue, and please call me Honey.

BEVERLY

From what I understand you were accepted at Oxford but left after a year, so you only have a minimal advanced education.

HONEY

Right and no regrets.

BEVERLY

So do you have any specific goals or ambitions?

HONEY

Not really.

BEVERLY

No compulsion to leave your mark on the world?

HONEY

Not yet. *(pause)* You don't approve...?

BEVERLY

I try not to judge my clients, but you realize that people with your kind of money can make a difference -- a huge difference. I have clients who've contributed to cancer research, building schools, housing for the homeless, not to mention supporting the museums, symphonies, and city parks. There are people who could help you create a foundation to disperse some of your wealth. Several of my clients are financing the construction of wells in South Sudan where people lack access to potable water and latrines.

HONEY

Bully for them, but I'm not a philanthropist and I'm not ashamed of having more than everyone else.

BEVERLY

Not just more, most people spend their entire lives working for a fraction of what you already have.

HONEY

Lucky me! Now what about the orchard?

BEVERLY

Have you seen it?

HONEY

No, have you?

BEVERLY

Only on the website.

(BEVERLY taps her computer keys and reads the screen.)

BEVERLY

Frost Farms is located in the scenic Hudson River Valley and consists of six thousand trees spread over one hundred acres and is open for picking season from late September through early November. (*turning to Honey*) The woman in charge is Scarlet Bailey. She's called several times and is eager to meet you.

HONEY

Why apples? Whatever possessed Daddy to buy an orchard?

BEVERLY

He said he was investing in the Homeland. Even though he made his fortune in the Middle East, he wanted to own something that symbolized America -- you know, apple pies, Johnny Appleseed, the Big Apple.

HONEY

Where does he keep the antiques?

BEVERLY

He sold his share of the business to his partner, Gavin Winters, so you won't have to deal with that. By the way, are you planning a memorial service?

HONEY

Uncle Miltie's hosting a small gathering. Would you like to attend?

BEVERLY

Yes, I would. Your father and I became friends through the years. In fact, he gave me the coin on this necklace -- that's the head of Alexander the Great.

HONEY

Lovely.

BEVERLY

Your father had the Midas touch.

HONEY

I wouldn't know about his touch. Truth be told, I repulsed him. *(pause)* Oh dear, did he neglect to mention that he blamed me for Mummy's crash?

BEVERLY

He never spoke of it.

HONEY

Really...? Well, Mummy was driving me to school when we collided with a taxi. Daddy never believed she'd been drinking, and after the funeral he called me a deceitful little snitch and shipped me off to London. I was only twelve.

BEVERLY

I...I'm sorry. Are you saying your mother had a...problem?

HONEY

She wasn't a sot, just a tippler when depressed which was often, but there was no autopsy to prove it. Anyway, Daddy couldn't abide me living in the same city never mind the same flat, so off I went to Saint Edmund's to be prepped and polished.

BEVERLY

So you really haven't seen much of your father...?

HONEY

Oh, he endured the obligatory months of summer by sending me off to camps, and at Christmas was too busy or counting the hours for me to leave -- which explains why I'm more Brit than Yank. So you see, I'm not in mourning despite Uncle Miltie's efforts to make me feel guilty. He thinks I'm ungrateful, but really, I'm thrilled Daddy left his loot to little me.

BEVERLY

Yes, well... *(pause, she sighs)* Of course there are pitfalls to inherited wealth.

HONEY

Like what? Like being susceptible to spending it? Well, I am! I'm also susceptible to drugs, alcohol, and distractions of every kind, but I'm sure you already know that.

BEVERLY

Yes, your father mentioned that you didn't seem to have any sense of purpose or passions.

HONEY

Oh, bollocks! I may not have purpose, but I have passions -- like dancing, sailing, and clubbing with the minor celebrities I seem to attract. I'm a shameless hedonist really, sometimes I just lay about reading novels, playing videos, or binge watching trendy telly serials. My shrink says I was given too much too soon and lost my intrinsic motivation, but why does everyone have to have a plan? A profession? At least my education helped to cultivate my tastes, so I'm not a complete vulgarian, but come to think of it there is one thing I love most.

BEVERLY

And what's that...?

HONEY

Shopping! Especially for clothes and I don't mean online; I mean cruising the aisles for fashionable frocks, exquisitely tailored shirts and skirts. In fact, other than a gripping good read, shopping's the only thing I can think of that keeps me focused on something beside myself -- which has given me an idea, an inspiration! What if I open a shop? A boutique!

BEVERLY

A boutique...?

HONEY

Why not? It's even practical.

BEVERLY

Is it?

HONEY

Of course! What's the one question every woman asks herself every single day?

BEVERLY

*(pause)* What should I wear...?



HONEY

Right! And my shop will feature vintage couture -- one of a kind classics.

BEVERLY

Yes, well, a shop would give you someplace to go, but where? Here or London?

HONEY

Here since I've decided to stay in Daddy's flat. As a matter of fact, I passed plenty of empty shops on Columbus Avenue. *(pause)* Now the first thing I'll need is a personal assistant, someone young and energetic to keep things tidy, sort through the clutter, and help me stock the shop. Can you suggest anyone?

BEVERLY

No, but I know people who can. Now before you commit to this shop idea, don't you want to do some research? At least look around the rest of the city.

HONEY

But I like it here: the streets are wide, the park's in close proximity; there's plenty of theatres and restaurants; and three strangers smiled on my way here. Luckily, I won't have to fret about stock -- not to start anyway. The flat has a storage room stacked with chests full of Mummy's clothes as well as the trunks of Granny Germaine and Great Granny Belle.

BEVERLY

Your father kept their clothes all these years?

HONEY

Oh, yes. As a child I was forbidden to even sneak a peek, but the Frost women were great hoarders who loved haute couture. If they could, they'd be entombed like Egyptian queens under pyramids filled with all their jewels, hats and handbags, but especially their clothes.

BEVERLY

You weren't even allowed to look...?

HONEY

No, because then I'd be tempted to touch, but when Mummy wasn't around, I'd open her closets and fondle the fabrics as if they were alive. It may sound silly, but at the time it seemed as if certain gowns were crying to be liberated, to be kissed, caressed and draped onto my body. In fact, just last night, I opened a chest and pulled out the most gorgeous silk chemise with hand tatted lace. *(whispering)* I'm wearing it under my jacket. Now Mummy's treasures will be worn by louche living women from all over the city!

BEVERLY

Yes, well, you're lucky the moths didn't find them, and if these clothes are as old as you say, they might be of use to the city's theaters. Now I can't help wondering about your uprooting yourself from London. Won't you miss your friends?

HONEY

Not really, I'm rotten at sustaining friendships. People tend to drop me or I drop them, and they're getting older so they tend to get married, have children, or move to islands as expats so they can live like queens with feudal slaves.

BEVERLY

I see. Well, if you're serious about the shop...

HONEY

Absolutely!

BEVERLY

Then once you find your location, you'll need to purchase racks and shelves, then hire clerks, keep accounts, et cetera, but I'm curious, have you ever worked in sales?

HONEY

No.

BEVERLY

Have you ever held a job of any kind?

HONEY

Afraid not, I was considered unemployable -- because of my episodes -- but I'm feeling optimistic, as if I could begin a whole new life, as if something wonderful's about to happen. *(pause)* I can see you're wondering if I'm off my meds which I am. It's been eight months now and I'm managing quite well, but in case of a relapse, my shrink recommended a doctor here.

BEVERLY

*(pause)* Now I have to ask if you want me to continue managing your estate or do you have someone else in mind? I know you have a lawyer in London -- or should I say "solicitor."

HONEY

A supercilious old wanker! But since I'm here now, you'll do. Of course, I'll want all the accounts and assets turned over to my name, and I want them accessible.

BEVERLY

Fine, and I can help with future rental contracts.

(INGRID, Beverly's nineteen year old daughter, enters.)

INGRID

Oh, sorry to interrupt.

BEVERLY

Hello, dear.

INGRID

Are we still meeting for lunch?

BEVERLY

Come in! *(to Honey)* Let me introduce my daughter, Ingrid, and this is Mister Frost's daughter, Honoria.

HONEY

Hello, and please call me Honey.

INGRID

I...I'm sorry to hear about your father.

BEVERLY

Ingrid's just finished her freshman year at Princeton. In fact, we're about to have a celebratory lunch.

HONEY

Well, kudos to you!

BEVERLY

She's majoring in history and archeology, so she and your father had similar interests.

HONEY

How lovely. So I assume you have plans for the summer.

INGRID

No, not really.

HONEY

Would you consider being my assistant?

INGRID

Your assistant...?

BEVERLY

No, she wouldn't.

HONEY

Why not? Afraid I'll corrupt her?

BEVERLY

You just met; you don't even know her.

HONEY

I think she'd be perfect.

BEVERLY

You're being presumptuous.

HONEY

Oh, rubbish! It's my habit of sizing people up on the spot.

BEVERLY

I'm afraid Ingrid has other plans.

INGRID

Not really, nothing I couldn't change. What would you expect me to do?

HONEY

Help me open my boutique! But before that I'm rearranging the flat, tossing the kitschy curios, making the place my own. We'll have great fun going through the heaps and piles of clothes and stocking the shop. Do you fancy vintage fashions?

INGRID

Sure.

BEVERLY

Then why are you always in jeans?

INGRID

Because they're comfortable. So when would you want me to start?

BEVERLY

You're not serious?

HONEY

Your mother doesn't approve, but the shop was her idea. *(to Beverly)* You were my inspiration! You made me admit where my passions lie, and now I can afford to pursue them. I'm already imagining a glittery golden haven for women escaping their miserable lives, a refuge where they'll surrender to the beauty of crystal chandeliers as they sink into

HONEY (cont'd)

deep velvet cushions while listening to rhapsodic music and drinking champagne. Yes, the women who dare to cross the threshold will be enclosed in a delicious whipped cream of a dream as they adorn themselves in silken gowns that make them look like angels.

INGRID

Wow, sign me up.

BEVERLY

So you're ambitious after all, though your shop sounds more like a luxury resort.

INGRID

If I agree to be your assistant, when would I start?

HONEY

The memorial service is Wednesday, so Thursday will be fine -- sometime after noon. Your mother has my address. *(to Beverly)* Oh, and please text me the number of that woman who runs the orchard -- Scarlet was it?

BEVERLY

Scarlet Bailey. If you like, I'll facilitate a meeting and arrange the sale of the orchard -- if that's what you decide.

HONEY

Excellent!

BEVERLY

I can also arrange interviews with possible assistants.

HONEY

Oh, Ingrid will do fine, thanks. *(to Ingrid)* Au revoir!

(HONEY departs.)

INGRID

God, she's so...decisive.

BEVERLY

She's nuts! Off her meds and off her rocker! You'll have to text her and explain that you've changed your mind.

INGRID

But mom...

BEVERLY

Trust me, you do *not* want to get involved with that woman! She's an emotionally unstable, unprincipled brat who thinks the world was created for her pleasure.

INGRID

She seemed nice enough.

BEVERLY

Well, she's not! According to her Uncle, she's never even learned basic life skills.

INGRID

Like what?

BEVERLY

Like folding laundry, cooking a meal, creating a budget! My point is, why spend your summer with someone who will only be a bad influence and waste of your talent.

INGRID

Don't you think I'm mature enough to resist a bad influence? Besides, I could use the money.

BEVERLY

You don't need money.

INGRID

Actually, I do, and I'd like to start making some of my own.

BEVERLY

I thought you were going to use this summer to catch up on your reading, and let's be honest: does the city really need another boutique for bored women to squander their fortunes?

INGRID

I guess not.

BEVERLY

Look, I probably shouldn't tell you this, but the last time I spoke with Honey's father, he asked me to keep an eye on her. He said some terrible things. Apparently, she's been in and out of a dozen rehabs and there was a scandal involving a teacher who committed suicide -- on top of which she joined an occult group of arsonists.

INGRID

She started fires...?

BEVERLY

Yes, and I'm sorry, but I just don't want you to become part of the wreckage. Trust me, there are people who cause damage and still manage to sleep at night, and she's one of them.

INGRID

But maybe she's reformed. Did she really cause a suicide?

BEVERLY

That's what I've heard. Well, you can see how attractive she is, how impulsive.

INGRID

Maybe that's because she didn't have parents like you and dad to make her feel wanted or whatever kids need to keep from going insane.

BEVERLY

That's true, but Honey's even worse than my usual rich girl clients with their limitless credit. There's an arrogance about them, as if they're inherently superior: their odors less offensive, their manicures more exclusive, and Honey's watch cost more than I made my first year here!

INGRID

So does her handbag, but so what? You know, I could be your spy -- since you promised to keep an eye on her.

BEVERLY

I didn't promise; I nodded out of pity.

INGRID

Oh, come on Mom, it sounds like fun and if she's as crazy as you say, I'll quit, I promise. Pleeceeease...

BEVERLY

*(pause, she sighs)* Oh, all right, but if she dares to offer you drugs or attempts to seduce you...

INGRID

Seduce me?! Is she gay...?

BEVERLY

I don't know, but I didn't like the way she leered at you, and I suspect she's a fetishist. You should hear the way she rattles on about feeling fabrics. Just don't let her feel you.

INGRID

Mom...

BEVERLY

You've been forewarned. Look, all I want is for you to pursue your own personal rainbow -- whatever it is. Just try not to get sidetracked and wind up in the wrong profession.

INGRID

Why? Is this your wrong profession?

BEVERLY

Not wrong so much as a second choice because I wanted to be richer than a high school history teacher.

INGRID

You wanted to be a teacher...?

BEVERLY

Yes, and a poet, a singer, and olympic diver. Instead I followed my parents dreams for my brother who preferred to join the marines. Of course, I didn't think I'd wind up in trusts and estates and I'm good at it, but some days it's hard to get up in the morning.

INGRID

You can still become a teacher, and nothing can stop you from writing poems. Lots of people have second careers.

BEVERLY

Motherhood was my second career; teaching would be my third.

INGRID

What kind of singer did you want to be?

BEVERLY

Opera of course, a diva, darling, but I've settled for the choir.

(INGRID and BEVERLY leave the office as the Choir is heard singing.)

## SCENE 2

(The singing fades as BEVERLY dons her dark glasses and continues speaking to the audience of medical professionals.)



BEVERLY

You're probably wondering what Honey Frost's plans for a chic boutique have to do with the orchard and this waking nightmare, but before I continue I have a complaint about the medications you've been giving us: the gastrointestinal side effects are unacceptable -- not to mention the sensitivity to light and it's getting harder to concentrate, to keep the chronology straight, though I distinctly recall arranging a meeting with Scarlet Bailey the very next day.

(As BEVERLY continues, SHE removes her glasses and returns to her office where HONEY is seated by SCARLET BAILEY, a middle aged woman dressed in careworn jeans who speaks with an Irish accent.)

BEVERLY

Scarlet told Honey she could not in good conscience sell the orchard because...

BEVERLY

...it's infested.

SCARLET

It's infested...

SCARLET

...with worms! At the first sign of them, I tried every organic pesticide available. Of course, worms aren't inherently bad. They're nature's best recyclers, and these are full of protein, but they're not pleasant to find while biting into a fresh apple. Now if I may demonstrate.

(SCARLET retrieves an apple and a knife from her satchel and slices into the pulp.)

SCARLET

There, you see. Cheeky little buggers!

HONEY

Oh, gross!

SCARLET

Mind you, the apples aren't a total loss. You can mash them for sauces, jellies, vinegar and cider, but such a shame! I'd removed all the aging trees, and grafted a genetic cross between ambrosia, paradise, and several French and Asian varieties, hoping to create an apple with less of a core that didn't brown so quickly, and oh, what a marvel. I named it Crimson Rapture, and the apples were crunchy, juicy, tangy, even better than I imagined, but who knew the worms would find them irresistible? Oh, here I am rambling on, and I'm sorry, Miss Frost, I'm sure you want the orchard to prosper. It's such a beauty, and your pa had such grand plans, especially after we brewed the cider and discovered its potential. We thought we could change the world!

HONEY

With cider...? How?

SCARLET

There's only one word to describe it: *(pause)* Engorgement! One cupful and your blood starts to heat up and flow straight to the sensual zones, but it's more than carnal cravings 'cause beyond being aroused you feel a great glowing affection for whomever you're with along with the rest of humanity.

HONEY

So the cider's an aphrodisiac?

SCARLET

A euphoric! A pity the passion doesn't last beyond a few hours, though you feel the afterglow for days and it changes you, makes you less fretful, lighter on your feet. *(to Beverly)* I can see you're a skeptic, but we hired a pomologist named Chivers to do some tests, and even he thought what we had was a miracle, a potent stimulant that was actually good for you. "An apple a day" as they say. Your pa and I thought it might have a curative effect on crime, tribal wars, even his cancer, but he was too far gone -- though not too far gone to keep from falling in love.

HONEY

Really? With whom?

SCARLET

With me if you must know. The feeling was mutual, though we didn't have much time together.

HONEY

Well, bully for Daddy. *(to Beverly)* Did you know about this?

BEVERLY

Yes, I knew about Scarlet, though he never mentioned the cider.

HONEY

*(to Scarlet)* Did he ever mention me?

SCARLET

Oh, yes, pet, he was fretful about your future and full of regrets.

BEVERLY

You should be grateful to Scarlet. Your father wanted to leave her his entire estate, but she insisted he leave it to you.

SCARLET

The man abandoned his only child in life, so the least he could do was express some loyalty after death.

HONEY

Thanks, but why didn't he leave the orchard to you?

SCARLET

I didn't want it, and frankly things are a bit precarious. Chivers is afraid the worms are some invasive pesticide-resistant species. He thinks they're responsible for the euphoria, excreting chemicals into the pulp of the apples. He also insisted that your pa contact the Department of Agriculture, but he didn't want to risk them closing us down. Truth be told, your pa loved the orchard which was ironic considering his real reason for buying it was for the barn not the trees.

HONEY

*(to Beverly)* I thought he was investing in the Homeland...?

SCARLET

Oh, no, my dear, all he wanted was a place to stash his treasures from Syria and Iraq. His partner, Gavin Winters, came and took everything except a sarcophagus.

HONEY

A sarcophagus...?

SCARLET

A stone coffin.

HONEY

I know what it means, but where is it?

SCARLET

Still in the barn. It's yours now, and it's a beauty. From the inscription Gavin could tell it's at least two thousand years old. He hired six strong lads to pry it open. We expected a mummy, but instead there was a black rock and thousands of the sort of worms that infested the orchard, and trust me, they were a frightful sight. One of the lads fainted dead away and poor Gavin spewed up his supper. I made a crack about the mummy's curse and Gavin said, think what you like, Scarlet, but we unearth the tombs of the ancients at our peril. When I showed the coffin to Chivers, he couldn't say for certain that the worms were shipped here or been here all along and slithered inside, but I didn't notice the critters till *after* the coffin arrived. Your pa said he only wanted the sarcophagus because of the sculpted goddess, Pomona, with an apple in each hand. Now that we've met, I can see that her face resembles your own, but if you don't want her, you should contact the city's

SCARLET (cont'd)

museums. I'm sure you know your pa was a major player in the antiquities trade sacking the Middle East.

HONEY

"Sacking?" You're saying Daddy was a thief...?

SCARLET

Part of a network of traffickers brazenly selling their wares right on Madison Avenue. The trouble is some of the money goes to buying weapons for warriors and extremists of every stripe.

HONEY

I'd no idea.

SCARLET

When he told me, I wanted no part of it, but he insisted he was saving humanity's heritage from deranged fanatics. He even flew to Syria and met the diggers, desperate lads who survive the present by pillaging the past. It's a moral conundrum, but such a shame when the poor bastards bomb their own treasures and they're gone forever -- blown to dust.

(SCARLET retrieves a rock from her satchel and hands it to HONEY.)

SCARLET

Now here's the rock we found inside. Gavin thinks it might be a meteorite, and since Oliver's brother's an astronomer, he might find it of interest.

HONEY

Thanks, I'll give it to him.

SCARLET

Well, now it's up to you, Miss Frost. As I see it you have four options: one: you sell the orchard at a loss as it is: trees, worms and all; two: you cut and burn the trees and sell the orchard for the land; three: you cut and burn the trees and replant common varieties or other crops in hopes of discouraging the worms; or four: you keep the trees, keep the worms, and continue brewing the cider.

HONEY

I say keep the orchard and continue brewing cider.

SCARLET

I was hoping you'd say that. It takes thirty six apples to make a gallon; I've already made twenty barrels.

(SCARLET draws a bottle from her satchel.)

SCARLET

I brought you a bottle! Your pa wanted the label to read Frost Farms Homeland Cider.

HONEY

So if I drink it, I'll fall in love?

SCARLET

Very likely, so be cautious. Now the downside is that we can't open the orchard for picking season. Of course, I can't stop the local lads from climbing the fence so I put up a sign "Forbidden Fruits! Do not eat the apples!" But I'm afraid it doesn't dissuade them; they keep coming back.

HONEY

Forbidden Fruits...? I like that. *(to Beverly)* Yes, that's it!

BEVERLY

What...?

HONEY

The name of my boutique: Forbidden Fruits! After all, I was forbidden to touch the silky lingerie from the labor of worms, so you see the connection; it's preordained! Now when can I see the orchard and the goddess?

SCARLET

Now if you like. It's a trek, but I can drive you there and back.

HONEY

Let's go then! *(to Beverly)* You're coming of course.

BEVERLY

No, I have several appointments...

HONEY

Cancel them!

BEVERLY

...and choir practice.

HONEY

Scrap it! Come with us!

BEVERLY

Well, I...I suppose I could reschedule...

SCARLET

I'll get the car and meet you out front!

(SCARLET departs, followed by HONEY as the voices of the choir resound.)

### SCENE 3

(The singing fades as BEVERLY dons the glasses and turns toward the audience.)

BEVERLY

What Honey wants Honey gets, and being curious, I changed my plans and joined the jaunt to the orchard. Well, you've seen pictures so you know how charming it was: acres of green rolling hills full of trees laden with apples. But later for that because I need to mention the memorial reception for Honey's father that took place two days later at her Uncle Milton's apartment on Central Park West.

(As BEVERLY speaks the mourners names, they appear, champagne flutes in hand.)

BEVERLY

Oliver's former partner and associates left early leaving Honey, her Uncle Milton and his son, Jonathan, a medical student, and then there was Scarlet and my daughter, Ingrid. I'm afraid we'd all had too many glasses of champagne when Milton suggested that...

BEVERLY

...we should say a few words.

MILTON

We should say a few words...

MILTON

...about Oliver. *(pause)* Honey, since you're his daughter, you should be the first to speak.

HONEY

Why? I hardly knew the man, but all right. *(pause, she sighs)* Well, I know that Daddy loathed the idea that death meant stopping altogether. When Mummy died, I heard him tell Bishop Baldwin that he hoped she hadn't just vanished, that there was a portal to another plane. So, Daddy, I hope you're watching me living in your flat, rearranging your precious antiques which are now *my* antiques. Yes, now I'm learning to appreciate that you chose

HONEY (cont'd)

every Persian rug, every Tiffany lamp, and every Louis the Sixteenth chair with more loving care than you ever showed me.

BEVERLY

It was an awkward start to the tributes, but Milton said that even as a boy...

BEVERLY

...Oliver loved collecting.

MILTON

Oliver loved collecting...

MILTON

...things from street fairs and flea markets where he added to shelves of planes, trains, and soldiers for himself and rocks and science fiction comics for me. Our parents often remarked how we went in opposite directions: Oliver digging down in the ground for relics of the past, and me star gazing up to the future in space. Now Oliver was five years older, so when he attended Stanford, we parted ways, but years later we reunited in the city, and my most cherished memories will be of our strolls through The Natural History Museum.

(BEVERLY turns to speak to her audience.)

BEVERLY

Then it was my turn to say what a generous client he was and how much I enjoyed his company and tales of his travels. Then Ingrid spoke, referring to her future as...

BEVERLY

...as a student.

INGRID

As a student...

INGRID

...of archeology, I found Mister Frost to be fascinating. Most of my friends think that what happened last week is ancient history, so it was great to be with someone who wanted to talk about what happened thousands of years ago.

BEVERLY

Poor Scarlet couldn't keep her tears from flowing but managed...

BEVERLY

...a few words.

SCARLET

A few words...

SCARLET

...is all I can manage. I'll miss Oliver as a beloved presence in my life. Honey mentioned that he didn't like to think death meant everything stopping. Well, as a Catholic, I believe our souls are as real as our lungs and livers, so I imagine Oliver is gazing down from his perch on the limb of an apple tree in paradise.

BEVERLY

Jonathan was the last to speak and he was tired and tipsy, which is why we were hoping he'd stop at saying he was sorry...

BEVERLY

....Uncle Oliver's gone.

JONATHAN

Uncle Oliver's gone,...

JONATHAN

...but to me he was my father's eccentric brother breezing in and out of our lives bearing gifts and dramatic accounts of how he escaped being shot or arrested. Unfortunately, he also put my father in an untenable position, swearing him to secrecy, so now that he's gone, there's something Cousin Honey should know.

MILTON

Now's not the time, Johnny.

JONATHAN

You're right; it's twelve years too late! Listen, Honey, you've been led to believe your father resented you for reasons regarding your mother's accident, and you've had to live with that, but the truth is he didn't believe you were his.

MILTON

Johnny...

JONATHAN

Your mother had affairs during their marriage and your father was filing for divorce.

HONEY

*(to Milton)* Mummy had affairs...?

*(MILTON sighs and nods.)*

HONEY

And Daddy knew...?

JONATHAN

Not until a week before the accident.

MILTON

He could've taken a paternity test, but he didn't want to know, and he didn't want you thinking less of your mother at your tender age. Anyway, your father swore me to secrecy and I made the mistake of telling Jonathan, but the truth is he didn't see himself in you, and frankly, neither do I.



JONATHAN

I disagree. Honey has his eyes, and they both seem restless, rootless, not completely... themselves. Uncle Oliver was a boy in a man's body, and any psychiatrist could see he was digging in the desert to avoid digging inside himself.

MILTON

Oh, come now, Johnny.

HONEY

*(to Milton)* So you're saying Daddy's not my daddy, *(to Jonathan)* and you're saying we're both immature, stuck in some pubescent phase of development.

MILTON

Nonsense! *(to Jonathan)* Give Honey time; she's too young to have achieved her potential.

HONEY

While Jonathan's perfect! Exceptional! On his way to becoming a doctor and of great use to humanity while Daddy and I are what...?

INGRID

Beautiful.

JONATHAN

Yes! And enthralled by beautiful things like clothes -- which is why you're opening a dress shop. Isn't that the plan? At least that's what I've heard.

HONEY

Your condescension's showing, you pretentious prick.

MILTON

Honey!

HONEY

Well, he is! But someday he'll see that the only exceptional thing about him is that he's related to Honey Frost!

SCARLET

Why do you Americans always have to *be* exceptional?

JONATHAN

Because it's our work ethic, and it especially applies if you're richer than god.

SCARLET

God loves us no matter what.

JONATHAN

If there is a god -- which I seriously doubt -- then I'm sure he'd prefer us to be creative and productive, to be more than...ornamental.

HONEY

I don't remember you being so unpleasant.

JONATHAN

And I don't remember you being so ridiculous.

HONEY

Oh, bugger off!

JONATHAN

To think I actually envied you. *(to Beverly and Ingrid)* As a child she always managed to be the center of attention, the focus of everyone's adoration.

HONEY

While he was the focus of mine.

INGRID

Really?

HONEY

Oh, yes, I was madly in love with him -- pining away for years. Thank Christ I grew up!

JONATHAN

That's a matter of opinion...

HONEY

Were you always this snide?

MILTON

Now children, let's remember why we're here.

HONEY

Right, I shouldn't drink in offensive company.

JONATHAN

You shouldn't drink at all!

HONEY

Oh, piss off!

MILTON

I said enough!

HONEY

Sorry, Uncle, but speaking of drinking, I've brought a bottle of Frost Farms Homeland Cider which is chilling in the fridge. I thought we could all toast Daddy, especially since Scarlet claims it has a kick to it.

SCARLET

It's not a claim, it's a fact; even a wee drop will have some effect.

JONATHAN

So it's fermented...?

SCARLET

No, that would require adding yeast, and there's none.

MILTON

I'll get the glasses.

HONEY

I'll pour!

(MILTON and HONEY depart.)

JONATHAN

*(to Ingrid)* My father tells me you're working for Honey.

INGRID

Just for the summer; I start tomorrow.

BEVERLY

What kind of doctor are you studying to be?

JONATHAN

I'll be a qualified G P in another year and thought I'd join the Peace Corps, but lately I'm more interested in research, in studying zoonotic diseases like malaria and Zika.

SCARLET

Ah, the plagues of the earth.

JONATHAN

Unless we create vaccines accessible to everyone. In parts of Africa so many children die, they don't even bother recording their births. They live a few months or years, get bitten by anopheles mosquitoes, then sicken and expire as if they never existed.

INGRID

I can see why you think Honey's shop is frivolous.

JONATHAN

Oh, well, Honey's Honey; she has her priorities. So has she found a location yet?

INGRID

Actually, she has; my mom's meeting the agent tomorrow.

JONATHAN

*(pause)* Well, it's one thing to start a business, but I can't imagine Honey keeping regular hours, the shelves stocked and customers happy. She'll be bored after the first week.

INGRID

She seems...determined.

JONATHAN

I'm betting the shop closes in less than a month; I give it two weeks.

INGRID

Okay, you're on. How much?

JONATHAN

Fifty dollars.

INGRID

Deal!

BEVERLY

*(whispering)* Shush! She'll hear you!

(HONEY enters with a tray filled with glasses of cider followed by MILTON holding the bottle.)

HONEY

Here we are then, help yourselves.

(THEY each take a glass.)

MILTON

*(lifting his glass)* To Oliver!

(As THEY lift their glasses to their lips, the choir is heard, and BEVERLY approaches the audience.)

BEVERLY

Like lemmings to the trough they drank, though I held back. Of course you've heard how it makes your skin prickle, how it slowly fills you with waves of radiant heat; then suddenly an inner body you didn't know existed starts vibrating while your visible body is standing on tip toes and you can't stop smiling because you're in a giddy state of...

BEVERLY

...bliss.

SCARLET

*(to Honey)* Bliss...

SCARLET

...is what you'll feel, but be patient, pet, it takes a while.

(The choir fades and HONEY, INGRID, SCARLET, MILTON and JONATHAN become increasingly cheerful.)

BEVERLY

Honey spoke next simply noting that...

BEVERLY

...it's delish.

HONEY

It's delish!

JONATHAN

*(to Scarlet)* How long have you been drinking this?

SCARLET

Three weeks now, and haven't gained an ounce despite eating like a lumberjack.

HONEY

Scarlet's brewing barrels full. It's going to be the orchard's specialty since we can't sell the apples.

JONATHAN

Why not?

HONEY

Worms!

SCARLET

Worms!

SCARLET

Not to worry; they're nontoxic, and pulped, strained, and boiled in the brewing process.

JONATHAN

You're sure it's not laced with opiates? Because something's increasing the levels of my neurotransmitters.

SCARLET

Not according to the pomologist we hired. All I can say is after a nip with my morning coffee, I feel on top of the world the rest of the day. Somehow it seems to cleanse my soul of resentments I've lived with for years. Truth be told, ever since my sister, Sophie, stole my beau, I wished her dead -- even said as much before leaving for the States.

BEVERLY

You really think it's the cider and not your better nature surfacing?

SCARLET

I confess when I succumbed to the charms of Oliver, something opened up inside me, but we Baileys are great grudge holders. I was determined to curse the lot of them to the grave. but now -- God help me -- we send texts every day.

BEVERLY

*(to Honey)* So have you decided what to do with the sarcophagus?

MILTON

What sarcophagus?

HONEY

I'm the proud owner of a coffin from Syria. The inside was full of the worms and a rock that might be a meteorite. In fact, I brought it with me in case you want to add it to your collection.

*(HONEY retrieves the rock from her purse and hands it to MILTON.)*

HONEY

Well, what do you think?

MILTON

It certainly looks promising. Let me test its magnetism; I'll only take a minute.

*(MILTON departs as SCARLET turns to Ingrid and Jonathan.)*

SCARLET

The coffin lid has a sculpture of Pomona lying supine. She's the goddess of fruit and fertility who bears an uncanny resemblance to Honey here. Beverly agrees, don't you?

BEVERLY

Oh, yes, she's Honey's ancient doppelganger preserved in stone.

INGRID

If Pomona's Roman, then she really is ancient. Syria was part of the Roman empire when Pompey the Great captured Antioch.

SCARLET

Well, aren't you the fount of information! (*to Honey*) You might consider donating her to the Metropolitan Museum.

HONEY

I'm not sure what I'll do; she hasn't told me her plans.

SCARLET

Ah, so you think she'll speak to you?

HONEY

She needs to explain the absurdity of our resemblance since I'm neither fertile nor fruitful.

SCARLET

Now how do you know that? You're young and there's plenty of time to meet a nice lad and have children.

HONEY

Well, I might find the lad, but children are out of the question.

JONATHAN

Because then you'd have to become an adult and start thinking of other people.

HONEY

Right, the little despots would force me to feed, clothe, and educate them, but in any case it's never going to happen because it can't.

INGRID

You mean you're...?

BEVERLY

Ingrid!

HONEY

My Pomona's the goddess of *infertility*, which given our overpopulated planet makes perfect sense, and she's on a coffin after all -- possibly of a woman who was too fruitful and multiplied herself to death. *(pause)* I wonder if she'd mind awfully if I propped her in the shop window -- an ancient goddess flanked by mannequins.

BEVERLY

But wouldn't a coffin in the window remind potential patrons of death?

HONEY

So what? They'll realize they're *not* dead; they're very much alive which is terribly exciting, and they might as well look smashing while they're here.

JONATHAN

So when's the grand opening?

HONEY

Soon if I get my location, and then I'll need to paint, lay carpet, hang lights, and since I'm calling the shop Forbidden Fruits, I'm thinking of adding a tree laden with apples.

(MILTON returns with the rock.)

HONEY

So what's the verdict, Uncle?

MILTON

I still need to test for nickel, but it looks like a genuine meteorite.

HONEY

How marvelous!

MILTON

It's certainly old and weathered. I wonder where it's from?

HONEY

The moon...?

MILTON

Maybe, but our galaxy has over a hundred billion stars and if each star is hosting several planets, it could've come from any one of those. But notice how it has a perfectly round hole that looks like it's been drilled by a tool. *(pointing)* See there.



HONEY

Oh, yes, the hole must have contained something.

SCARLET

Ah, some aliens sending a package...?

HONEY

Special delivery to planet earth! How thrilling!

MILTON

One of my colleagues is an astro-biologist who believes our first contact with alien life will be with microbes.

HONEY

Or worms! Alien creepers sent to spike our cider!

SCARLET

And enrich our soil! They've certainly turned the orchard a lovely shade of green.

MILTON

Your worms could be altering the carbon and nitrogen cycles, keeping us from destroying our ecosystems, even saving us from extinction, but it's highly unlikely they came from another planet. Interstellar distances preclude it, though I suppose someday an advanced species could encode and transmit themselves through light particles.

BEVERLY

But let's not forget the coffin came from Syria. Some fanatics could have known it would be stolen, so they created genetically altered worms to attack our apples and turn us into a nation of addicts.

INGRID

Mom!

BEVERLY

And they just drilled the hole in a rock to distract us.

HONEY

Or the hole contained a freaky mother worm programmed to propagate.

SCARLET

Well, all I can say is it makes perfect sense for alien creatures to wind up in an apple orchard. After all, our world as we know it began with an apple.

INGRID

You don't really believe that?

SCARLET

What I believe is that there are no accidents. Everything has a reason and season for happening how and when it does.

HONEY

*(to Scarlet)* Do you think we should offer the cider to my customers -- to put them in jolly spending moods.

SCARLET  
Yes.

INGRID  
Yes!

BEVERLY  
No!

JONATHAN  
No,...

JONATHAN

...it would be irresponsible and possibly illegal until you know exactly what's in it.

HONEY

You heard Scarlet: it's safe, it's been tested and we're fine.

JONATHAN

It's been tested by a botanist, not a chemist, and we're *not* fine; we've become progressively high, happy, and flushed.

HONEY

Isn't it lovely? We're blushing like schoolgirls.

INGRID

*(to Beverly)* If you don't want yours, can I have it?

*(INGRID takes the glass from Beverly's hand.)*

HONEY

*(to Scarlet)* Since the cider has such a mellowing effect, we might sell it to the army. They could slip it to the enemy.

INGRID

Mom could serve it to bickering couples before dividing their assets.

HONEY

And Jonathan could prescribe it to the desperate and dying.

SCARLET

Now there's a thought: a tonic that comforts our sorrowing souls.

JONATHAN

I admit it's amazing. *(to Honey)* I'm no longer even tempted to scold you.

HONEY

Likewise, Cous. In fact, I'd like to kiss you.

INGRID

So would I.

*(INGRID kisses one of JONATHAN'S cheeks while HONEY kisses the other.)*

BEVERLY

Ingrid, behave yourself.

HONEY

Yes, Ingrid, he's dangerous -- broken dozens of hearts, including mine.

JONATHAN

Ha! She doesn't have a heart to break.

HONEY

*(to Scarlet)* You're right about it's warming effect.

*(HONEY strips off her blouse, revealing a lace camisole.)*

BEVERLY

Really, Honey.

INGRID

Oh, god, I'm starting to melt.

*(INGRID drapes her arms around HONEY and JONATHAN.)*

BEVERLY

Ingrid...

JONATHAN

I'm taking off my jacket and tie.

HONEY

Oh, let's take it all off and dance naked in the street!

BEVERLY

*(to Ingrid)* Oh, for goddsake!

INGRID

You're funny, ha, ha!

JONATHAN

You first, cousin.

BEVERLY

*(to Ingrid)* Are you all right?

INGRID

Yeah, never better, though I'm starving.

SCARLET

An increase in appetite is one of the effects.

HONEY

They should serve this to anorexics.

JONATHAN

You should know. Wasn't that one of your afflictions?

HONEY

Oh, yes, darling, one of many, but now I'm famished.

MILTON

There's a new bistro a block from here. Jonathan, why don't you treat the girls to dinner.

HONEY

What a brilliant idea!

INGRID

You're sure three's not a crowd?

HONEY

No, ducks, three's ideal.

SCARLET

Don't forget me, pet, that makes four.

HONEY

Four's even better!

BEVERLY

*(to Honey)* Put your blouse on. *(to Milton)* They shouldn't be going out in their condition.

SCARLET

Oh, they'll be fine. I'll keep an eye on them.

BEVERLY

But who's keeping an eye on you?!

JONATHAN

Let's go ladies!

(HONEY slips on her blouse and departs with SCARLET.  
JONATHAN and INGRID, leaving BEVERLY and  
MILTON alone.)

BEVERLY

Why aren't you going?

MILTON

Because I only had a drop so I'm not as affected. Now please sit down and relax.

(Pause as BEVERLY sits with an audible sigh.)

MILTON

So, what do you think? Is this shop of Honey's a good investment?

BEVERLY

Who wrote: "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers."

MILTON

Wordsworth. *(he sighs)* I feel badly about Honey, about the course her life seems to be taking. Years ago when Oliver sent her to boarding school, Susan and I offered to keep her with us; we even suggested adopting her.

BEVERLY

That's very generous, so why did he refuse?

MILTON

Because he's a damn fool. It was obvious to everyone that he didn't want her and even if he did, he was always traveling. He couldn't be a real parent and believe it or not, Honey was a delightful child, smart as a whip, but Oliver was determined to ship her off to London and since Julia was Catholic, he felt a Catholic school was best. Poor Honey was devastated. Not only had she lost her mother, but she was wrenched her from her classmates and from Susan, Johnny and me. And then with my teaching position at Harvard, we moved to Cambridge and didn't see her much after that.

BEVERLY

Why London of all places?

MILTON

One of Oliver's cronies recommended the school. He assured us it was a warm, nurturing environment, but if that's true, why did she do so many self-destructive things?

BEVERLY

*(pause)* What about Honey's mother? Was she really...

MILTON

A wanton whore...? That's what Oliver called her. He was livid with rage, caught her buck naked in their bed with one of his buyers. You never met her, did you?

BEVERLY

No.

MILTON

Julia was a beautiful, seductive woman, and he was always galavanting around the world, leaving her for months at time. What did he expect? It's amazing that she kept her secret life from Honey who followed her like a shadow.

BEVERLY

Maybe she didn't keep it from her; maybe Honey knew. She didn't seem sufficiently surprised.

MILTON

Who knows? I've spent years trying to fathom Honey, hearing about her escapades: the drugs, her attempted escapes, the sordid affairs with actors and musicians.

BEVERLY

I'm worried about her influence on Ingrid.

MILTON

She's not untalented, you know. After she left Oxford, I encouraged her to take art lessons, rent a studio and get on with her painting. But seeing her here, looking lovely as ever, she seems fine, though she's always been an enigma -- a mystery containing multitudes.

BEVERLY

Maybe, though sometimes the people we compare to oceans turn out to be shallow ponds.

MILTON

*(pause)* I keep wondering if Honey was waiting all these years for Oliver to leave so she could come home, and who knows? Maybe this shop will give her a sense of purpose. In any case, I'm glad she has you and Ingrid in her life.

BEVERLY

And I'm glad she has you.

MILTON

Do you mind if I ask if you're seeing anyone?

BEVERLY

No, I'm not.

MILTON

*(pause, he smiles)* Ha! It seems the cider's finally having an effect. Why else am I feeling compelled to sweep you off your feet?

BEVERLY

Oh, please do!

*(MILTON embraces BEVERLY and THEY kiss as the choir sings and lights fade to black.)*

#### SCENE 4

*(The singing fades as BEVERLY steps forward and dons her glasses to address the medical specialists.)*

BEVERLY

Those were happy days, all of us blissfully unaware of the coming winter.

*(A masked NURSE arrives armed with a syringe.)*

BEVERLY

Ah, here comes Nurse Jeffries to give me a shot without which I'd be too fatigued to finish dragging a coherent narrative from what's left of my mind.

*(NURSE JEFFRIES inoculates BEVERLY, then leaves.)*

BEVERLY

Milton and I stayed in touch, eagerly awaiting the opening of Forbidden Fruits, and I ceased worrying about Ingrid because she studied hard, though she appeared to be losing weight which I attributed to her falling in love with...

BEVERLY

...Jonathan Frost.

INGRID

Jonathan Frost,...

INGRID

...Jonathan Frost, Jonathan Frost, Jonathan Frost.

(INGRID has appeared, grasping her phone, joining  
BEVERLY in her office.)

INGRID

I can't seem to stop checking to see if he's texted. But what I feel most is relief since I wasn't sure I'd ever feel this way.

BEVERLY

You've only gone out twice, right?

INGRID

Right, but I know, I just know...

BEVERLY

You haven't "hooked up," have you?

INGRID

Not that it's any of your business, but he just had time for dinner between shifts. God, he's so awesome looking. Oh, I wish Daddy were alive to meet him; I'm so glad you like him!

BEVERLY

Yes, but he's eight years older; you're barely nineteen! Does Honey know you're dating?

INGRID

No, I haven't said a word.

BEVERLY

What if she still has a crush on him?

INGRID

I doubt it.

BEVERLY

Or what if he still has one on her?

INGRID

Then why is he seeing me? Besides, they're cousins -- though he does ask about her.

BEVERLY

What does he ask?



INGRID

“How’s my cousin?” “Does she smoke?” “Does she drink?” or “What’s it’s like working for a dilettante?”

BEVERLY

Really? He called her a dilettante?

INGRID

Yes, but he also said she had potential. She didn’t just get into Oxford; they offered her a scholarship.

BEVERLY

Well, it sounds to me like he still has feelings for her.

INGRID

He’s just curious; he even asked if she flirts with me.

BEVERLY

So does she?

INGRID

A little. I mean she stares when we’re trying on clothes, and says I have the body of a model. It’s like being a kid again, playing dress up. She’s always asking my opinion, and I’m helping design the website. I think she really likes me.

BEVERLY

But not excessively? She doesn’t...

INGRID

What...? Touch me? Only to button or zip up the clothes, but so what if she does?

BEVERLY

You’re not that way though, are you? I mean, you just admitted you’re attracted to Jonathan.

INGRID

Yes, but I wasn’t always attracted to men which is why Jonathan’s so...unexpected. *(pause)* Sorry, I can tell you’re shocked, but things are different than when you were my age. Sex is more fluid now; people are free to change, to redefine themselves; to have lovers of both sexes.

BEVERLY

Are you’re saying you’ve had relationships with women...?

INGRID

Yeah, but it's probably not appropriate to discuss these things with you since you're obviously upset.

BEVERLY

*(pause)* Look, I'm not one of those parasitic mothers who thrives on her daughter's social life, but you know you can talk to me about anything, that I'll love you no matter what. You know that, right?

INGRID

Sure.

BEVERLY

I just want you to be careful, especially with Honey. Don't let her become overly dependent on you, and don't you become overly influenced by her. She's...careless.

INGRID

Maybe, but she's nothing like you described. I mean, the phone never rings unless it's you or Scarlet or some contractor. When I'm not there, she says she just hangs out or takes walks around the city. In fact, the only other people I've seen are the driver and the cleaning lady who comes once a week, and by the way, she does her own cooking.

BEVERLY

You've actually witnessed her cooking?

INGRID

For lunch yesterday she whipped up a spinach and cheese soufflé.

BEVERLY

Really? I'm impressed.

INGRID

*(glancing at her phone)* Shit! I'd better get going; Scarlet's bringing Pomona's today!

*(INGRID departs as choral music resounds.)*

## SCENE 5

*(BEVERLY speaks to the audience while strolling into the shop as lights sparkle and HONEY approaches wearing a vintage gown.)*

BEVERLY

Despite foreboding wagers, Forbidden Fruits opened its doors three weeks later, and I was...

BEVERLY

...the first customer.

HONEY

The first customer...

HONEY

...gets a fifty percent discount on any purchase plus a glass of cider!

(HONEY hands BEVERLY a glass of cider which SHE takes but doesn't drink.)

BEVERLY

Oh, my god! I...I'm speechless.

HONEY

The window's supposed to reflect contrasting times and textures: the stoney goddess escorted by her plastic minions, but I'm particularly proud of our green walls replicating shades of ripening apples.

(INGRID has entered, also wearing a vintage gown.)

INGRID

I like the ceiling! Honey found thousands of crystals shaped like raindrops to look like they're watering the tree.

BEVERLY

I never imagined this space could become so utterly transformed. I've never seen such exquisite gowns. I'm very impressed -- no, I'm bedazzled. "Bedazzled" is the word. And Ingrid, darling, you look lovely. I must take a picture. Don't move!

(BEVERLY snaps several pictures of INGRID.)

INGRID

Now take one of the team.

(INGRID drapes her arm around HONEY, and BEVERLY snaps more pictures until HONEY moves aside.)

INGRID

Don't you love the lighting? It's so golden that it flattens the furrows on your forehead. You look ten years younger.

BEVERLY

Thanks.

(JONATHAN enters, followed by MILTON who stands in awe.)

INGRID

Jonathan, you came!

JONATHAN

Of course.

HONEY

Welcome to Forbidden Fruits!

MILTON

Oh, Honey, Honey, you've done it! I can't believe I'm saying this, but it's stunning, absolutely stunning, isn't it Johnny?

JONATHAN

*(sniffs)* It even smells like apples.

HONEY

We've been open an hour and you're the only ones who've dared to cross the threshold, but we also take online orders. Ingrid's put the entire inventory on our website.

MILTON

I'm sure it's the most beautiful shop in the city!

INGRID

Thanks. May I offer you some juice of the forbidden fruit?

(INGRID pours two glasses of cider.)

HONEY

We plan to model the goods and greet our customers as if they're the most marvelous creatures on earth. We want every women of every age, race, and ethnicity to find something smashing to wear.

JONATHAN

*(glancing at a tag)* As long as they're loaded; look at these prices!

HONEY

At Forbidden Fruits we prefer the posh to the poor, pearls to paste, satin brocades to polyester plaids.

JONATHAN

You're such a snob.

HONEY

You may not approve, but the only emotions I want to see on our opening are optimism and reverence.

JONATHAN

Reverence...?

HONEY

For the Goddess Pomona!

JONATHAN

Oh, right. She really does resemble you.

MILTON

She even has your smile; it's as if you posed for the sculptor!

HONEY

I think I might have. I once had a session with a hypnotherapist whose specialty was past life regressions. It seems I fell into a deep trance and claimed to possess a noble soul that's been wafting about for centuries. I also claimed to have been the muse of an artist, so it might have been Pomona's sculptor.

JONATHAN

You know you're insane, don't you? Besides, if you possess such a noble soul, why are you catering to the rich and shallow.

MILTON

Now Johnny...

JONATHAN

I'm serious. Why is everyone so obsessed with accumulating stuff? I mean, look at this gaudy gown. Who in their right mind would wear it?

MILTON

Your mother might have.

HONEY

Really? Aunt Susan in that...?

MILTON

Oh, sure, her closet was a black hole that kept having to be filled. She loved shopping, especially for shoes. She must've had a hundred pairs.

JONATHAN

At least! All that spending to the bitter end. It was like she was feeding her ravenous cancer with things, things, and more things.

MILTON

But they made her happy, they distracted her in a way we couldn't.

HONEY

You see, my dear cous, many women purchase fanciful frocks as a way of making themselves feel more desirable, more worthy of love, and for some women, their clothes are more alluring, lasting, and real than the men in their lives.

JONATHAN

That's pathetic.

HONEY

Isn't it though?

MILTON

Now let's not argue, and Johnny, be honest, Honey's made something very impressive here. You don't have to paint or sculpt to be an artist. Honey's shop is a work of art, like one of those museum installations -- except this is beautiful.

HONEY

Why, thank you, Uncle.

MILTON

I confess I had my doubts, but you're full of surprises -- a safe we'll never crack!

HONEY

Well, I am a bit cracked, you know. My shrink said I suffer from the existential funk of the privileged class. It seems we're so overwhelmed with choices that we tend to be paralyzed and do nothing.

MILTON

But now you have the shop.

JONATHAN

But she has to show up. Instead of a carefree, spontaneous life, she's enslaved to schedules, inventory, checks and balances. *(to Honey)* And what happens when you run out of stock?

HONEY

I'll buy from estate sales and Internet sites, but there's still trunk loads of treasures -- if anyone ever comes.

MILTON

Your ads were very impressive.

INGRID

The Times even sent a reporter. She asked all about Pomona and took dozens of pictures.

BEVERLY

*(to Honey)* I hope you didn't tell her she was from Syria.

HONEY

Of course, why ever not?

BEVERLY

Because radical factions might want her back. They resent Americans looting their treasures; they'll see Pomona as a violation of their heritage. Did you mention that your father was a dealer in antiquities?

HONEY

Yes.

BEVERLY

Oh, Honey...

INGRID

But true Islamists reject figurative art. They believe only Allah can create images of humans or animals.

BEVERLY

Haven't you been reading about all the attacks on museums lately?

HONEY

But who'd steal Pomona? She's too damn heavy.

BEVERLY

Not too heavy to be bombed.

INGRID

Aren't you being paranoid?

BEVERLY

No, I'm being vigilant. I'm not sure I want you working here.

HONEY

You're not serious...?

INGRID

You're being ridiculous!

BEVERLY

We'll discuss this later.

INGRID

I'm *not* leaving!

BEVERLY

I said "later."

HONEY

Not to worry, we'll hire guards, install more cameras! (*pause*) Poor Pomona, just minding her own business, immune to the ravages of time or the adoration of multitudes, though what if there are no multitudes? What if you're my first and only customers?

BEVERLY

Scarlet's coming isn't she?

HONEY

No, she texted that she might have the flu.

MILTON

Don't be discouraged. It looks like rain and people tend to postpone shopping till the sun comes out.

HONEY

Oh, good, blame the bloody weather, but even if people come, what if they breeze in and out? What if Jonathan's right and everything's too pricey and nobody buys anything ever.

INGRID

At least they'll leave feeling better than when they came.

JONATHAN

If you mean from the cider, I hope you've had it thoroughly analyzed.



HONEY

Scarlet took samples to an independent laboratory. It turns out the pomologist was right and the worms are responsible for its potency. The chemists said they'd never seen our particular species, so Uncle, our creepy alien theory might be spot on.

MILTON

Ha! Don't bet on it. Besides, new species are discovered here on Earth all the time. Just last week I read about a glow worm found lighting up the Peruvian rain forest -- luminescent pinpricks that no one's ever recorded sighting.

JONATHAN

What was the result of the analysis? *(lifting his glass)* What's in it?

HONEY

Something that stimulates the hypothalamus and parts of the brain that release pheromones.

JONATHAN

So it's a drug.

HONEY

A wonder drug that makes the body aware of what the body wants, so let's hope the bodies of our patrons want to step out of their jeans and into these gowns.

JONATHAN

I still can't believe you're actually selling it.

HONEY

We're swamped with orders. Scarlet can't keep it on the shelves and had to hire more help. Oh, drink up, Johnny, and put a smile on your smug, disapproving face.

*(JONATHAN takes a swallow.)*

JONATHAN

It's still tastes like apple juice laced with tequila and club drugs.

HONEY

Feeling randy, are you? Is that why you're leering at Ingrid, though it's perfectly natural since she's a beauty, and aren't you seeing each other on the sly?

INGRID

As a matter of fact...

JONATHAN

There's nothing sly about it.

HONEY

I thought so! I'm not as clueless as I look and I'm delighted for you both -- truly. (*lifting a glass*) Cheers!

(HONEY drinks as INGRID and BEVERLY exchange glances.)

HONEY

I just hope he's not treating you the beastly way he treated me.

JONATHAN

(*to Ingrid*) I think Honey's referring to when I beat her at badminton.

HONEY

And tennis, ping pong, and miniature golf! It wasn't fair; he was older and bigger.

JONATHAN

And better!

HONEY

And meaner! When I was banished to boarding school he never wrote, never called, never gave me a second thought.

JONATHAN

Of course I did, but I was busy studying. Unlike Honey, I was a conscientious student.

MILTON

Which is why he'll make a great doctor.

HONEY

(*lifting her glass*) Here's to great doctors! (*to Beverly*) You haven't sipped your cider. Don't you like it?

BEVERLY

I have choir practice tonight and need to read the music.

HONEY

I notice you didn't drink it at Uncle Miltie's either.

BEVERLY

I'd already had too much champagne, and I don't like losing control.

HONEY

One sip won't hurt.

BEVERLY

*(she sighs)* Well, all right, but just a sip. *(lifting her glass)* To Forbidden Fruits!

*(The moment BEVERLY'S lips touch the brim, the choir holds a high note while HONEY, INGRID, JONATHAN and MILTON freeze in time and BEVERLY speaks.)*

BEVERLY

There are pivotal moments in every life when things take a turn, and for me it was when that cider exploded its sweet-tarty flavors on my tongue, then flowed down my throat. Nevertheless, I've only consumed a small amount, much less than the others which is why I'm here, why I'm the one chosen to narrate the origins of our affliction. Apparently, I'm less damaged, my memories less muddled though I recall feeling a slight reflux as if my gut knew what my brain failed to grasp just as Ingrid put her foot in her mouth by saying...

BEVERLY

....sorry.

INGRID

*(to Jonathan)* Sorry,...

INGRID

...but if nobody comes, then your prediction might be right.

HONEY

What prediction?

BEVERLY

Ingrid....

INGRID

Oh, shit...

HONEY

What did he predict?

INGRID

Nothing!

JONATHAN

Nothing.

HONEY

*(to Jonathan)* Ha! You predicted my shop would flop, didn't you? That I'd be bored, take my losses, and count it among my failings? Am I right?

JONATHAN

Not exactly...

HONEY

You don't think I have the stamina? The moral fiber? Well, perhaps not, perhaps I don't -- especially if we don't attract customers.

JONATHAN

I have no right to judge you; it was a flippant, insensitive bet.

MILTON

Yes it was.

BEVERLY

*(to Ingrid)* Some thoughts are best left unspoken.

INGRID

Sorry...

JONATHAN

Forgive me...?

HONEY

Oh, chill, cous, I really don't mind because this is it, this is who I am, though I realize my values aren't your values; that I'm obscenely rich and irrelevant, that you see me as a greedy, grasping capitalist swine, but the business of America is business, and I intend to give the shop a fighting chance. As a matter of fact, I have an idea: Let's all meet here at the same time next week for a progress report, shall we?

JONATHAN

Okay, sure, but the bet was for two weeks which gives you more time.

HONEY

Fine, we'll meet in two weeks.

BEVERLY

I'll be there.

MILTON

I'm free.

HONEY

Great! Then we'll see if we've made some peachy profits or become a venture lemon.

JONATHAN

By the way, I never meant to imply that you're irrelevant; everyone matters.

HONEY

Oh, goody.

JONATHAN

Am I sounding like a self-righteous prig?

HONEY

You just haven't learned to forgive people for not being who you think they ought to be -- especially family.

JONATHAN

Right.

HONEY

You know I still love you.

JONATHAN

Good. You don't have anything here for men, do you?

HONEY

Afraid not though I'm thinking of adding flat caps and fedoras.

MILTON

Well, you're going to have at least one sale; I'm buying this butterfly brooch for Beverly.

BEVERLY

Oh, Milton, you're shouldn't!

HONEY

Yes, you should! And as our very first sale, you get a fifty percent discount so it's only two hundred dollars, and that's a bargain. Those are real diamonds.

MILTON

*(to Beverly)* It's perfect; they match the sparkle in your eyes.

BEVERLY

Why thank you, Milton, you're much too extravagant, but I'll treasure it.

(BEVERLY kisses MILTON and the choir sings as MILTON and JONATHAN depart and the lighting dims to the sound of falling rain.)

## SCENE 6

(The rain overwhelms the choir's voices and BEVERLY approaches the audience.)

BEVERLY

Ingrid and I lingered in the shop, but two hours later not a single soul had passed through the door, so Honey said...

BEVERLY

...thank you.

HONEY

Thank you...

HONEY

...for staying, but it's pouring, so catch a cab and go home.

BEVERLY

Oh, we'll stay till the rain dies down. *(pause)* Listen, Honey, no matter what happens, you've created a unique boutique. You should consider being an interior decorator.

HONEY

Thanks, though given the state of the world, I suppose a boutique does seem somewhat... nonessential.

BEVERLY

Oh, I don't know, if it makes people happy then it may not be "essential," but at least it's meaningful.

HONEY

Is it? *(she sighs)* I wonder what makes life meaningful?

BEVERLY

That depends. Some people need more attention; they want fame, fortune, fabulous careers, but most of us are content with our friends, families, and children.

INGRID

Did you mean it when you said you couldn't have children?

BEVERLY

That's none of our business, Ingrid.

INGRID

Sorry, the cider's turned me into an asshole.

BEVERLY

Must you use that word?

HONEY

Yes, Ingrid, I'm afraid it's true. One of my abortions was botched causing cervical damage. Truth be told, I was too young, too ignorant, and -- well, such is life.

BEVERLY

Now young?

HONEY

Thirteen.

BEVERLY

Thirteen!

INGRID

Jesus...

HONEY

One of the profs at Saint Edmund's had at me in every possible way. *(pause)* Oh, dear, I see I've shocked you.

INGRID

Yeah.

BEVERLY

Yes, you have.

HONEY

He was a priest, mind you, dashing and seductive and I was totally enthralled. Can you believe I thought I was lucky, one of the "chosen," as if pain was a reward.

BEVERLY

Did you inform the school? The police? Did you tell anyone?

HONEY

Not till long after he'd dumped me and I was starving myself to death. The school nurse wheedled it out of me, but I'm a cliché -- like countless girls who repress their misery, then turn it against themselves. At least I wasn't a cutter.

INGRID

He was priest...?

HONEY

Father Harold Harcourt. Handsome Harry the girls called him, and somehow he convinced me that we were a sacred union, destined to be conjugally coupled -- Christ, I was so bloody naive.

BEVERLY

Did you tell your father?

HONEY

God no, never. I was afraid he'd hold it against me, call me damaged goods.

INGRID

Did you tell your Uncle or Jonathan?

HONEY

God no, and don't you tell either! Besides, it's ancient history.

BEVERLY

Was the bastard ever caught? Was there a trial? Reparations of any kind?

HONEY

He's dead -- bludgeoned by some poor sod whose sister he was shagging. Then the police found Harry's little black book and all hell broke loose. There was an investigation and it turned out he'd had his way with dozens of students -- boys as well as girls. Maimed casualties came crawling out of the woodwork.

BEVERLY

Your father should have known; the school should have informed him.

HONEY

I wouldn't let them; I told them he'd sue.

BEVERLY

Did the priest arrange the abortion?

HONEY

Yes, but I paid the butcher.

BEVERLY

Oh, Honey, I'm so sorry, but look at you: you're lovely, talented and you've...survived.

HONEY

Yes, well, like I said, life happens and lots have it worse.

BEVERLY

But they shouldn't! Girls should discover sex for themselves, not have it thrust on them by an unscrupulous pedophile. If it were Ingrid, I'd be out of my mind. It's an unspeakable violation -- to be wrenched from your childhood like that.

HONEY

Well, I'm over it. The medications and therapy helped, and lately I pray to Pomona.



INGRID

You're kidding, right -- about Pomona?

HONEY

Who am I to question the existence of a goddess? I've seen too many marvels to accept the limitations of what we call reality.

INGRID

If you mean when you've hallucinated, then I hope you've seen Harry in hell. *(toasting)* Here's to a hot seat for Harry! So is it true all the things we've heard about you?

BEVERLY

Really Ingrid.

INGRID

I'm curious.

BEVERLY

You're intrusive!

HONEY

What have you heard?

INGRID

Rumors about drugs, suicide, and starting fires.

HONEY

Oh, bugger all! It's a pack of lies and my own fault, encouraging Daddy to think I was a nutter, a nympho, a menace to civil society; and it's true I was into some feel good opiates, but that suicide was an accident at a roof party. A psyche major I dated overdosed and simply walked off the edge so I was hardly responsible. As for the fires, I joined a coven, and we started a blaze that went wonky and scorched a few houses, but only the once.

INGRID

But you've been in rehabs...?

HONEY

God, yes, and I'm going off my meds, though I still get broody, convinced I'm destined to live alone with six cats, having failed to find what everyone seems to want, but so what? I can't change the past, but at least I can advise girls like you not to waste your precious youth on the wrong man.

INGRID

I don't intend to, but why do you talk like you're not young yourself.

HONEY

I'm only chronologically young; inside I'm a bitter old hag who never wants to be pawed by anyone ever again.

INGRID

Even when you drink the cider?

HONEY

Oh, I love how it warms the cockles, but it only takes me so far and then I'm back to being myself. My shrink said I need more time, more patience -- the kindness of friends.

BEVERLY

Well, you're here now for a fresh start, a new beginning.

HONEY

True. My life so far feels stuck on the "pause" button and now I'm back home, ready to hit "start."

INGRID

And you have friends; you have us.

HONEY

I haven't scared you off?

INGRID

No way.

BEVERLY

No.

BEVERLY

Thank you for trusting us, for speaking so candidly.

HONEY

Thank you for listening.

INGRID

Why don't you come to dinner tomorrow? *(to Beverly)* Is that okay?

BEVERLY

Great! Ingrid can give you directions. Now before I leave, I'd like to try on this gown. I've been invited to a charity ball next month and it might be perfect -- assuming it fits. I'll just slip into the dressing room.

(BEVERLY picks up the gown and departs, then INGRID whispers to HONEY, but soon forgets and raises her voice.)

INGRID

Did you mean it when you said you loved Jonathan?

HONEY

Oh, I'm not wholesome enough for Johnny boy; he's all yours now.

INGRID

But do you still have feelings for him?

HONEY

What difference does it make? Why do you even ask?

INGRID

Because he asks about you.

HONEY

Really? The cheek! He's just trying to make you jealous, so tell him to piss off.

INGRID

He said that even as a child you were the most sensual person he'd ever known. He asked if you flirted with me.

HONEY

Hah! So he thinks I've become a sapphic sex fiend?

INGRID

*(pause)* My mother thinks he's too old for me, that he might still have feelings for you.

HONEY

Well, if you're wondering if he's called, he hasn't, and if he does, then he'd soon see there's a hollow pit inside that even he can't fill. Still, I'm grateful to Johnny in my way. When I lived in London, Uncle Miltie would send pictures of him growing up -- all the ceremonial milestones: Johnny winning awards, Johnny graduating, Johnny with his first stethoscope -- so after Harry, whenever someone wanted to paw me, I endured it by pretending he was Johnny, always Johnny, but it's time to move on.

INGRID

But what if he's the only one? For some people true love only happens once in their lives.

HONEY

You're such a romantic, Ingrid.

INGRID

I guess. *(pause)* You know, I've been wondering why you chose me as your assistant?

HONEY

When you stepped into your mother's office you were like a bright ray of sunlight. *(pause)* I think that by seeing you, I saw myself -- how I might have been if I'd been luckier, if my mum hadn't crashed at the tender age of thirty-five.

INGRID

Do you remember her?

HONEY

Oh, god, yes, she was unforgettable, one of those women who's always saying she looks a fright but was utter perfection, an authority on fashion not to mention every shade of lipstick and knew all the rules about matching foundations, powders and blushes.

INGRID

Did you know she had lovers?

HONEY

Not really, though of course I saw her flirting, hugging and kissing her friends. Lately I've been thinking that all those times she was claiming to be doing volunteer tours at the Met she could've been meeting her lovers.

INGRID

Was she as beautiful as you?

HONEY

Far superior, a knockout, always turning heads, but ruthless in her judgment of other women, especially if they had droopy bums, exposed roots, and shabby taste in clothes, but she'd have approved of you. Truth be told, the real reason I chose you was I thought you'd be an asset to the shop, that women would be inspired by your beauty. In fact, I'd love to paint you someday, and frankly, I'm surprised you aren't besieged by beaux, or are you?

INGRID

Not really. To be honest, I haven't had much experience and mostly with women -- one in particular whose parents found out and freaked. She transferred to Cornell, and I thought I'd die or go insane.

HONEY

Did your mother know?

INGRID

No, she's too conventional, though I'm trying to educate her. Until I met Jonathan, I only had feelings for women.

HONEY

Then stick with him; he's a catch -- though you have plenty of time to go fishing.

INGRID

But what if he still has feelings for you?

HONEY

Oh, rubbish. If he ever felt anything, it was just a schoolboy crush.

INGRID

I guess, and besides you're cousins.

HONEY

So you think because we're cousins he's "forbidden fruit?"

INGRID

Well, isn't he...?

HONEY

Actually not. Cousins can marry in New York. It's just that sometimes their children turn out a bit wonky.

INGRID

Which wouldn't be a problem in your case. Besides, you might not even be cousins.

HONEY

Oh, we're cousins all right. Daddy and I have the same clubbed thumbs which is a clear indication of genetic parentage. There, see, they're short and stubby, but nobody's ever noticed and I never mention it.

(Pause as HONEY shows off her thumbs.)

HONEY

So does your mother approve of Jonathan?

INGRID

I think so.

HONEY

But she still doesn't approve of me, does she?

INGRID

She's warming up, but she tends to resent her rich clients, even though she gave up her dreams so she'd be rich too. Both her parents were teachers, and mom always had jobs growing up -- which is why I thought she'd be glad I wanted to work.

HONEY

But not for the lewd, licentious Honey Frost.

INGRID

She was afraid you'd try to seduce me.

HONEY

Well, tell her not to worry; I consider you forbidden fruit.

INGRID

What about you? Are you forbidden fruit?

HONEY

Afraid so, ducks. Why? Are you interested?

INGRID

I might be. I mean, I was.

HONEY

Really?

INGRID

You're so...beautiful, I couldn't keep my eyes off you, and I...I've always wanted to touch your hair. May I...?

(As INGRID moves to stroke Honey's hair, BEVERLY emerges from the dressing room, the gown in hand.)

INGRID

Jesus! I forgot you were here! Oh, shit, could you hear us?

BEVERLY

No, why...? Did I miss something?

INGRID

No!

HONEY

No.

BEVERLY

Well, I'm afraid the dress doesn't quite fit.

INGRID

Oh, look! Look! (*pointing*) Someone's coming! Someone's here!

(The shop door chimes as the choir sings hallelujah!)

### SCENE 7

(The singing fades and lights dim as HONEY and INGRID depart and BEVERLY approaches the audience. MILTON appears and sits beside her, holding liqueur glasses.)

BEVERLY

Of course, if I hadn't heard every word, I wouldn't be telling you now. But I'm not sure what these personal asides have to do with our affliction, though Doctor Cortland said to tell you the whole story, that every detail matters. (*pause, she sighs*) Anyway, a few days later Milton Frost proposed cooking dinner, so we widowed loners were seated sipping a liqueur when he said, "There's something..."

BEVERLY

...you should know."

MILTON

You should know...

MILTON

...if you don't already, though I'm sure Ingrid regrets her indiscretion, but I suspect she assumed Jonathan would think less of Honey. Instead he thinks less of Ingrid for violating Honey's trust.

BEVERLY

What are you talking about?

MILTON

The predator priest, the abortions...

BEVERLY

Oh, no, she didn't!

MILTON

Fortunately, being the kind of man Jonathan is, he didn't find her past off putting; instead he came to me in tears and told me everything.

BEVERLY

I'm so sorry.

MILTON

I'm not, and neither is Johnny. What happened to Honey was upsetting, but I think it makes Johnny more intrigued, more likely to see her as a tragic heroine who was denied the childhood she should have had. As I see it, someone had to pay for Oliver being cuckolded, so he chose his daughter -- sent her off to fend for herself. She was probably vulnerable to any man who paid attention to her.

BEVERLY

Ingrid understood that which is why I'm stunned she could be so imprudent, so...disloyal.

MILTON

Well don't forget she was drinking the cider.

BEVERLY

And she's in love.

MILTON

Which makes people reckless.

BEVERLY

Yes, but I'm still disappointed in her.

MILTON

I'm grateful because it makes me determined to be a better uncle, and Johnny's determined to be a better friend.

BEVERLY

What if he wants to be more than a friend?

MILTON

It's his life; he's always loved Honey. *(pause, he sighs)* Well, time will tell, but I don't think Jonathan's been in touch with Ingrid since they last met.

BEVERLY

No wonder she's been so moody. *(she sighs)* Poor Ingrid...



MILTON

Poor Honey.

BEVERLY

Yes, I...I got her all wrong. I mean, I completely misjudged her, which makes me question everything I ever thought about anyone -- even my daughter. It's sad isn't it, how we can't protect our children -- especially from themselves.

MILTON

And having children doesn't mean we outgrow our own needs. Maybe it's the cider, but being with you now, I have the strangest sensation...

BEVERLY

What...? Does this have cider in it?!

MILTON

Just mine, but I love how it makes me feel I have no past, no future, no responsibilities except to cherish and be cherished, to take your hand and draw you in.

(MILTON grasps BEVERLY'S hand, then embraces her as the choir sings.)

## SCENE 8

(Sparkling lights reveal the boutique where HONEY, INGRID, JONATHAN and MILTON stroll about then freeze when BEVERLY appears to speak.)

BEVERLY

The two weeks of the wager passed, and we all reconvened at Forbidden Fruits which was nearly...

BEVERLY

...out of stock

HONEY

Out of stock!

HONEY

Every single trunk in the storage room is empty!

INGRID

Thanks to our media marketing, and awesome merchandise. Now all that's left are a few Chanel's, Valentinos, and some costume jewelry, but we have shipments coming in from Paris and Milan.

HONEY

Even our supply of cider's running low.

JONATHAN

You're selling the cider here...?

HONEY

We offer a complimentary glass, and sometimes our customers want a bottle so I send them to the website or the orchard. Scarlet's designed our own label with Pomona holding an apple in one hand and a flag in the other -- it's awfully tacky, but we love it.

MILTON

Honey's become a real entrepreneur, and I think it's great! Congratulations! *(to Jonathan)*  
Let's drink to her continued success!

JONATHAN

Yes. *(lifting his glass, staring at Honey)* To Forbidden Fruits!

MILTON

Beverly tells me that Vogue and Vanity Fair are planning to interview you.

HONEY

Vogue wants to bring in models to show off our most ravishing classics. The trouble is they've been sold, so we'd have to borrow them back from our customers.

MILTON

Good for you! Maybe you'll expand to other parts of the city.

BEVERLY

You should open a shop in The Village.

HONEY

Oh, I don't think so.

MILTON

Why not? You're a blazing success!

JONATHAN

You've certainly proven yourself; I'm eating crow and owe Ingrid fifty dollars.

HONEY

Good! But seriously, do we ever know? I mean, does anyone really know what they should be doing with their lives?

BEVERLY

Yes, if they're lucky.

JONATHAN

But not if they're starving or living in war zones or born into patriarchal theocracies or...

MILTON

Enough, Johnny! Right now we're talking about Honey who seems to be expressing doubts about her vocation.

HONEY

This isn't my vocation; it's more like a detour on a wayward journey.

INGRID

A detour...?

MILTON

Since when?

BEVERLY

I thought you were happy.

HONEY

I am, but... *(pause, she sighs)* Years ago when I squandered my scholarship, I was painting expressionistic portraits, and lately, watching Ingrid and some of our patrons, I keep having this irresistible urge to grab a brush and capture their joy. At the flat yesterday, when I was clearing out the trunks, I realized the storage room could be my studio. It has six tall windows with plenty of light -- it's perfect.

MILTON

That's great, Honey, but can't you do both?

INGRID

Yes! You can run the shop, then paint in your free time.

HONEY

The thing is, being here every day -- the time and effort it takes -- well, I know something I didn't before.

INGRID

What!?

MILTON

What...?

BEVERLY

Go on.

HONEY

*(pause, she sighs)* I know that I'm not meant to be here.

INGRID  
Shit.

BEVERLY  
You're abandoning the shop...?

HONEY  
Not till I sell everything coming in, then I'll put it on the market.

INGRID  
Can't you hire someone to take it over?

MILTON  
Yes, why can't you?

HONEY  
Because I want to be free. *(to Jonathan)* You see, cousin, you've won your wager after all.

JONATHAN  
If it means you'll go back to painting, then I'm glad. You'll be making something instead of selling it.

HONEY  
Better a painter than peddler, eh?

JONATHAN  
Not if you want to be rich, but you're already rich, and painting's a rare talent so it's a shame not to use it.

BEVERLY  
Do you intend to keep the orchard?

HONEY  
Definitely. Scarlet has plans to convert the barn into a factory for mass production.

JONATHAN  
You have enough of a demand for a factory...?

HONEY  
Oh, it's all the rage in Manhattan, and we're getting orders from all over the world. Some people consider our cider to be a safe alternative to addictive opioids, *(to Beverly)* which reminds me, I've been thinking about your idea to create a foundation. Since the worms enrich the soil, I'm planning to purchase a whole fleet of drones, then dropping them!

BEVERLY  
Dropping worms...?

HONEY

Yes! On the planet's wastelands. They'll squirm down deep, turning deserts into lush verdant fields. Pomona's my inspiration; we'll be making the earth fruitful again. Of course, I'll have to fund more research to prove the worms don't infest other crops the way they do the apples.

INGRID

And what about Pomona? Will you sell her as well?

HONEY

Never! I'll mount her on a wall in the flat -- unless she has other plans, though she's been quiet lately, and sometimes furrows her brow as if she already misses her window and all that adoration. *(pause)* Oh, Ingrid, don't look so crestfallen; you'll still be my assistant.

INGRID

But I love Forbidden Fruits.

HONEY

And I love that you love it, but it was only temporary.

BEVERLY

She's right, darling, you're going back to Princeton, so no need to sulk.

INGRID

I'm not sulking, I'm thinking! *(to Honey)* Listen, I could take over; I'll work weekends, vacations, and all summer.

BEVERLY

You know that's not practical; you'll need your weekends to study.

INGRID

I'll take fewer classes; I'll transfer to Columbia.

BEVERLY

Don't be silly, you're doing so well.

JONATHAN

Your mother's right, Ingrid, you have your whole future ahead of you.

INGRID

What do you care? You haven't texted in days; all you care about is Honey.

HONEY

Don't be silly, he doesn't text me either.

INGRID

I'm not silly; I'm perceptive and you're blind!

BEVERLY

I think you've had too much to drink.

HONEY

*(to Jonathan)* My dear Cousin, please inform Ingrid that she's mistaken.

JONATHAN

She's not mistaken; I do care about you.

HONEY

That's sweet, Johnny, but not in the way she means.

JONATHAN

Yes, actually, exactly the way she means.

*(Pause as HONEY turns to stare at JONATHAN.)*

INGRID

*(to Honey)* You can have him, and don't think he won't want you if he knows about your past because he does and doesn't care!

HONEY

What...?

*(SCARLET bursts in, shouting and snatching the glasses of cider from Beverly and Honey's hands.)*

SCARLET

Close the shop!

BEVERLY

Scarlet...?

SCARLET

*(to Honey)* Didn't you get my texts? My voice mails?! Close the shop!

BEVERLY  
But why...?

MILTON  
What the devil...?

INGRID  
I'll do it!

(INGRID locks the door.)

SCARLET  
Stop drinking! Right now! I'm serious! Not another drop!

INGRID  
What's wrong?

BEVERLY  
What's going on?

HONEY  
For gods sake, Scarlet...

JONATHAN  
You don't look well.

SCARLET  
I'm not! Now sit down and listen! I have something to say that affects us all.

(Pause as THEY sit and SCARLET takes a deep breath.)

SCARLET  
At first my only symptoms were fatigue, a bellyache, and a bit of weight loss, but then I developed a rash on my chest and a yellow tinge to my eyes -- which is why I stopped by the nearest clinic where Doctor Fuji was concerned enough to drive me to the city for an MRI. The doctors at Mount Sinai grilled me like detectives, so naturally I explained about the cider. Well, that piqued their interest and soon I was telling them about the worms, the meteorite, the coffin they came in, and how it could be aliens sending creatures to save the planet. They looked at me like I was daft, *(to Beverly)* then I told them your conspiracy theory which got their attention, but I also mentioned Pomona and how she's connected to fruitfulness, which led me to Genesis, to how the world began with an apple and could end with an apple. Well, then one of the smart ass doctors said the logic of the sick is not the logic of the sane, but really, I said, is what I've got any more of a freakish horror than viruses coming from bats and mosquitos like Ebola and Zika? Well, that shut the bastards up!

HONEY  
So what's gone wrong?

SCARLET  
I'm getting to that. *(pause, she sighs)* Well, lo and behold, the MRI revealed three full bodied worms inside my stomach and two outside, one devouring my liver, the other my spleen.

HONEY  
Bloody hell.

INGRID  
Oh, shit...

MILTON  
Christ Almighty...

SCARLET  
Shush! Let me finish! It seems that after we mash, boil, and imbibe the buggers, they regrow themselves inside the swamp of our innards. Then they start munching our meals, then our organs, feasting on our bodies from the inside out. Of course, I'm the one who's imbibed the most, so I'm the sickest, but you're sick too, and everyone else who's been drinking Frost Farms Homeland Cider!

BEVERLY  
Dear god...

JONATHAN  
Did they give you any biltricides or anti-parasitics?

SCARLET  
Christ, yes, I'm chock full of drugs! The hospital heads called the CDC in Atlanta, and they're sending a team to track everyone who's consumed the cider.

BEVERLY  
Last night I served it to the entire choir!

MILTON  
I served it to my students!

SCARLET  
I mailed a case to Dublin!

HONEY  
This means tracing all our customers, plus online orders sent to London, Paris, Montreal...

SCARLET  
They've got it covered; they're putting notices on the Internet, the radio and telly, and by the by, the doctors want to see all of you as soon as possible.

INGRID  
You mean *now*...?

SCARLET  
Afraid so.

BEVERLY  
I'm due in court in an hour!



INGRID  
No way!

JONATHAN  
I'm on call tonight.

INGRID  
I'm leaving!

SCARLET  
Wait! Wait! I'm not finished! *(pause)* Before I left, I promised I'd return for more tests, and they mentioned that it's likely we'll be quarantined.

HONEY  
Quarantined...?

JONATHAN  
Quarantined?!

INGRID  
Fuck...

MILTON  
Where?

SCARLET  
Wards Island.

BEVERLY  
You can't be serious; you mean isolating everyone who's ever...?

SCARLET  
That's right, everyone who's ever taken so much as a sip.

HONEY  
But that's thousands of people!

SCARLET  
Millions if it's contagious.

MILTON  
Contagious...?

BEVERLY  
Please tell me this is a nightmare.

JONATHAN  
Look, let's not forget this is New York. We have the best hospitals and doctors in the country.

HONEY  
Why do I feel so...responsible?

SCARLET

Well, you're not! Don't forget it was your pa -- not you! -- who bought the orchard, and I'm the fool who's been brewing it by the barrels. (*checking her watch*) I should go; some inspectors are meeting me at the barn. (*to Honey*) You should come too, pet.

HONEY

They'll confiscate all our equipment...

SCARLET

Worse! They'll burn the trees and extract the worms from the soil before they contaminate other farms -- if they haven't already. And they'll want to inspect the sarcophagus.

HONEY

We should call it "Pomona's Plague", her revenge for our gluttony. For consuming the world, she sent her beastly army to consume us.

INGRID

You know you're batshit, don't you?

BEVERLY

Now Ingrid...

INGRID

So much for your worm-dropping drones!

(A siren is heard in the distance.)

SCARLET

Oh, Jesus, it sounds like they're coming already.

BEVERLY

What...? They're coming to get us?!

SCARLET

They said they might. I told them where you were.

BEVERLY

You didn't.

INGRID

I'm not going anywhere!

JONATHAN

(*to Honey*) Stay with me!

BEVERLY

Listen, whatever happens, let's all stick together!

HONEY  
(to Jonathan) Yes!

MILTON  
Absolutely!

(JONATHAN grasps HONEY'S hand as sirens blare and lights dim to black.)

### EPILOGUE

(The choir hums as BEVERLY is illuminated once again, approaching the audience of medical specialists.)

BEVERLY

Since then we've been trapped here for eighteen fun filled days with nearly six hundred fellow prisoners and more on the way. It's hard to believe that our busy lives have narrowed to a morbid monitoring of blood, bowels, and the daily dwindling of our mental health and hygiene. In between, I'm writing a poem about rotten apples as a metaphor for the corruption of the ideals of democracy, civilization, and our future lives on Earth. *(pause)* As you know, those of us who were first afflicted have formed our own therapy group. Several of you have asked to witness our process so others can form comparable groups, and we've agreed. This is our way of coping with the side effects of your treatments, especially the depression, constipation, and hives. *(gesturing)* Now please come up and join me.

(INGRID, HONEY, MILTON, JONATHAN and SCARLET approach, all wearing tinted glasses and surgical masks.)

BEVERLY

There's Ingrid, Honey, Milton, Scarlet, and Jonathan you already know since he's joined your research team.

(As BEVERLY continues, THEY arrange chairs in a semicircle facing the audience.)

BEVERLY

We always begin our sessions by confessing something we feel and we have to use the word "fear." I usually start, so today I fear that despite the Internet and video conferencing, the head of my firm is becoming impatient with my absence. I fear he'll hand over my clients to another attorney, though I can't blame him really. Who wants an attorney facing a death sentence? Go on, Ingrid darling, you're next.

## INGRID

We can also use the word “afraid,” and I’m afraid you won’t find a cure in time for me to return to Princeton, or even in time to live the rest of my life, to become whoever I was meant to be. It’s funny, but now I’m sad that I’m the youngest instead of the oldest, that I haven’t seen as much of the world as the rest of you, though I try not to be envious, but sometimes I am -- which is when I most miss the cider. Sorry to be such a downer.

## BEVERLY

Oh, darling, we understand. Now it’s your turn, Milton.

## MILTON

I’m afraid I’m not as pessimistic as the rest of you. In fact, when I’m not feeling nauseous, it’s like a utopian retreat here with Honey ordering books and films, not to mention all the arts, crafts, and science clubs; and there’s chess, poker, and Beverly’s Sacred Music Chorale which I’ve joined since I’m a fair baritone and since I’m nuts about Beverly. (*grasping Beverly’s hand*) So you see, I’m afraid I may not want to leave.

## BEVERLY

Milton thinks he’s at summer camp. Now Jonathan, it’s your turn.

## JONATHAN

I’m afraid these invasive invertebrates behave in ways beyond any frame of reference, so they’re an assault on our minds as well as our bodies, and we still haven’t traced their origins. They haven’t responded to drugs or extreme temperatures, though there’s a glimmer of hope for volunteers who were fasting alone in a cold, dark room. It seems if there’s no light, no sound, no nourishment, some of the parasites start to shrivel, expire, and be...expelled.

## BEVERLY

Like unloved infants...?

## JONATHAN

Like anything living left to languish.

## MILTON

Oh, to be a bird!

## SCARLET

It’s my turn, and I’m glad to hear there’s some hope though I’m afraid my liver’s mostly gone. So if any of you doctors still believe in divine intervention, please pray for me -- pray for us all.

BEVERLY

Now, it's Honey's turn to speak.

HONEY

Fine. *(to Beverly)* I'm afraid that Beverly's been shockingly indiscreet, divulging lurid details of my past which are totally irrelevant! *(pause)* Of course, I'm relieved that my orchard appears to be the only one infested or is it cursed? I keep asking myself why now when life was finally starting to make sense? And why Frost Farms? Why New York? Why planet Earth? So you see, I'm afraid my money hasn't immunized me, hasn't kept me from being as sick and depressed as everyone else.

INGRID

Yeah, well, bad shit happens.

BEVERLY

No one's exempt.

HONEY

I know that, and don't think I'm giving up or succumbing to bitterness. I want to do something good before it's too late, but in the meantime I'll be taking my turn in that cold dark, room, and *(to Jonathan)* if I survive, I hope you'll be there to warm me up.

JONATHAN

I'm afraid I'd like nothing better.

INGRID

I'm afraid of losing more weight.

MILTON

I'm afraid of losing hair.

SCARLET

I'm afraid of losing hope.

BEVERLY

I'm afraid the choir will be singing without me. *(pause)* So now you've witnessed how our little group conducts itself, and we end our sessions by holding hands for a moment of silence.

(THEY grasp hands for a moment, then release them to focus on BEVERLY who stands, then limps to the edge of the stage, facing the audience, pointing a finger.)

BEVERLY

So now I'm afraid the pressure's on all of you to restore us to our health and homes. If the world began with an apple, it may end with a worm, but I'm sure you've noticed some of us on the hospital grounds. Sick as we are, we're still planting trees, still dreaming we'll see them bear fruit.

(The choir's song crescendos as BEVERLY sings along and lights dim to black.)

*End of Play*



