

THE WOMAN

Cast of Characters

Will:

A man in his mid-40s

Alison:

A woman in her mid-30s

SCENE

Located in a living room.

TIME

The present.

ACT I

SCENE 1

Setting:

We are in a decrepit living room that is mostly empty besides a couch on back wall, arm chairs on either side of the couch, a table in front, and a rug. The curtains are drawn, so the room is predominantly dark, TV is set to a random station: the only source of light besides the old lamp in the corner.

AT RISE:

WILL sits alone on the couch. He stares towards the empty wall at the door with a blank expression. Talks quietly to himself, rocks back and forth.

WILL

(says to himself quietly)

It's snowing again, I think. It's sad really. But you're a funny woman wearing bright red all lit up like some intersection light.

(Beat)

I guess, well, I guess you can always tell when it snows, right? Because it hits the window like an animal or something is trying to scratch—you know shh shh shh like that noise—through the glass and at night it's all I can hear like some animal is going to break through and rake its claws down my chest. You hate snow, right? You've always have.

(WILL pauses for a long time. Expression doesn't change, remains blank. Continues talking to no one)

I think, well this sounds kinda strange really but, you like being red against so much white like some sort of red-riding hood rendition. I don't know why but, but you're kinda funny like that.

(pauses)

Shh shh shh, I hate that noise.

(WILL pauses and closes his eyes, foot taps against floor, hands over face. There is a silence. After a minute the door in the corner of the room opens and ALISON appears in a red parka with long red hair, flushed cheeks)

ALISON

(says exasperatedly)

God, Will, you wouldn't *believe*... Is that wine?

WILL

You're a teenage girl sometimes, Alison.

(lights flash out. Voiceover)

She's wearing a sundress in the middle of winter. Like the one she used to wear when she worked at a mini-mart in Boca Grande.

(lights cut on. ALISON is wearing a light orange sundress with her parka still over top)

ALISON

(laughs)

You wouldn't believe how it's coming down out there, it's raining for Christ's sake. I looked up for a second and got ice in my eye, I thought my contact froze to my pupil. Do you think insurance would cover that?

(ALISON takes off her parka, hangs it over the back of a chair. Snow falls out the

pocket. WILL laughs)

ALISON

The weather we've gotten this year, are you even listening to me, Will?

(continues talking, not letting him respond)

Insane. I walked here, can you tell? My boots are filled with so much ice and I swear to you, my face has never been so cold in my life.

WILL

Why the hell are you wearing a sundress? It's 0 degrees, when I opened the backdoor to take out the trash out, I felt my breath freeze in my throat, I swear to you I almost choked.

(ALISON removes her boot and turns them upside down. Like her parka pockets, ice falls out of them)

ALISON

(defensibly)

I was in Miami last weekend visiting a great, great, twice-removed, something like that, aunt. She took me to these open-air shops and there was this woman right, old, all hunched over this cart carving these flowers out of fruit. I went over to buy one, 3 dollars, and the lady just raised her eyebrows, said *for you darling, it's free*. I refused though, you know, I couldn't just take it, right? She told me that she had a daughter, Isabella, that looked exactly like me, I think she even thought I was her at least for a moment, she called me Bella at least three times. Except she lives way out in Alaska, her daughter. She wanted to see a bear and just left one night-

WILL

(interrupts)

Doesn't that seem a bit-

ALISON

Yeah, unreasonable? Well sure, it did. I didn't believe much she said.

WILL

OK, well, what does this do with the dress?

ALISON

She bought it for me from the vendor beside her, she said Emma loves orange. I hate it though, I was try-

WILL
(interrupts)

She likes orange.

ALISON
She bought the dress for me and said that Emma would like it because she loves orange. I like orange, you know the warm kind, not the damage-your-corneas orange, you know?

WILL
Sure, sure. But it's the middle of January.

ALISON
Well, yeah. I guess I just woke up this morning and imagined I was still in Florida. I miss the weather and the smell there, you know, citrus-sunblock way too close to my grandmother's god awful perfume. You know, one afternoon she picked me up from school, I was like seven, and we never went home, we just kept driving all the way up to Delaware, of all places, only stopping to buy peanuts or go to the bathroom. She was psychotic, really, do you know how terrifying it was to drive with her? But she was always there, you know, crocheting socks in the corner and listening to Ray Charles.

(Beat)

Besides, I rubbed icy-hot down my legs. They're really just burning.

WILL
(laughs)
You should've called, really, I would've come and picked you-

ALISON
(interrupts)
God, no. No, you wouldn't be able to see a thing, I felt like I was walking through sheetrock or, you know, something like that.

WILL
I would've been fine, but-

ALISON

(interrupts)

I'm afraid your little scrap-o-metal tin can sedan couldn't handle a trip like that. Did you get it in the 80s or something?

(pauses and thinks)

Do you know what people call people like you, hypochondriac-

WILL

(interrupts)

That's not what-

ALISON

(interrupts)

I mean you're like the hypochondriac of the world. Sometimes I feel like you're my mother-in-law or something, going off about the amount of gluten my pasta recipe has or something.

(Beat)

Anyways, your car would've slid off the road, I'm telling you. Have you gotten those snow tires?

WILL

No.

ALISON

(says while shaking head)

You should. On the news there was this poultry truck that took a turn too fast or something and fell over. Chickens sliding all over the road, they were mostly white too and once they wandered off you couldn't find them only hear the little clucks, driver was sliding all over the place trying to grab them. It's really whitewashed out there, you should stay inside for a few days, dear.

WILL

No, no. She likes snow. I'm sure of it. Because she likes the way it looks and emptiness. She hates living in the city, but in winter it's tolerable.

(Silence)

ALISON

I love snow though, the good kind like the I'm-trapped-inside-that-snow-globe-in-Citizen-Kane-with-the-

cabin kind.

WILL
(laughs)

I should start calling you Rosebud.

ALISON

Sure, sure. But I wish it were really *snowing* outside, you know.

(WILL closes eyes slightly,
lights flicker out when
they come back on snow is
falling lightly inside the
living room from above set.
ALISON laughs)

WILL

We're outside the cabin. Make an angel or something.

(ALISON lays down in the
middle of the living room
and stretches her arms out.
After a few minutes stands
and messes up the snow angel
WILL stares intently at the
floor)

WILL

That's pathetic, it's shaped like, I can't even describe that.
You should put the coat over it so it'll look more like you.

(Lights flash out)

She lays on the floor. Imagine you're in New York or something,
you're parents had an estate in Woodstock, right? Think of that.

(Lights come back on
and ALISON is in her
coat lying back on the
ground where the snow
angel was)

ALISON
(laughs)

I'm flying.

(moves arms faster then
sits up)

I need a sled or something, you know.

WILL

She loves snow, she's the type of person who only likes things because everyone else hates them. You'll see her walking down the middle of iced over roads, *I really feel like a tourist* she says.

(ALISON laughs, lies back on the floor. Snow continues to fall from above)

ALISON

Perfect. Like this, exactly like this. Call me Rosebud.

(WILL shakes his head. Hear wind and snow hitting window)

WILL

God, I hate that noise

ALISON

What noise?

WILL

Just that scratching sound.

ALISON

I don't hear anything.

WILL

Yes, yes you do. Let's move south or something. I'm afraid my windows'll break in. Yes, she hates it too. Shh shh shh.

ALISON

Shh. Shh. Shh.

(Lights flicker, everything freezes. Snow stops falling, ALISON doesn't move, appears frozen, completely still. WILL sits on couch covered in snow. Stage goes black)

(END SCENE)

SCENE 2

Living room reverted to how it originally looked. Lights cut on.

WILL is lying on the couch alone
muttering to himself quietly)

WILL

(laughs)

She's an optimist, I think if you try and look hard enough, when she opens her mouth you could see her silver lining.

(Lights go off)

God, wouldn't that be hilarious. What would silver linings look like? Hardly noticeable, you'd have to be looking.

(Lights come back on.

ALISON, with short black hair, is laying on couch mouth wide open. WILL stands over her and looks into her mouth)

ALISON

(says with open mouth, muffled laugh)

See anythin'?

WILL

No, no, of course not. Oh wait, I think I see something.

(ALISON sits up)

ALISON
(emotionlessly)

Funny.

(ALISON and WILL sit
in silence. ALISON stares
at the chessboard on the
coffee table. After a
few second ALISON stands,
places a hand on forehead)

ALISON
Win my affection, darling, I'm a defenseless dryad.

WILL
What the hell are you talking about?

ALISON
You didn't read that poem in college?

WILL
I was hungover the whole time.

ALISON
(says mockingly)
Renaissance poet. Chess goddess. You're pathetic.

WILL
Yeah, yeah, I didn't much attention anyway. My dad taught me to
play
(gestures to chess board)

when I was seven or something, he drank too much to work and I'm
pretty sure he played himself all day. It was sad really. He
probably died with a piece in his hand. I guess the *only* reason
he taught me was so he'd have someone to play. He sat me, well
forced me, into a chair and placed all the pieces in my hand.
I'm King, he said.

(WILL picks up king piece,
grabs ALISON's hand, places
it in her palm)

WILL (cont)
What are you? I stared at him and said *I don't know*. I hated it,
chess I mean, I hated him. He hated me. Well he didn't really,

it only seemed like it. That's the only thing I really know. It just seemed like he did, you know?

(ALISON kneels next to the chess board and grabs a few more pieces, studies them)

ALISON
(eyes don't leave pieces)

What am I?

(WILL doesn't answer, remains quiet for a seconds)

WILL
Pawn moves a space forward; castle moves up-down, left-right as many spaces; knight moves in the shape of an L; bishop moves diagonally; and the queen can move anywhere really. In supermarkets I try to pick people as if they were pieces. Pawns are easy, but I'll tell you this Alison, the hardest are the castles. I guess it's the way they move. You'd think they'd be easy, but whenever I play they always get taken first.

ALISON
I think I'd like to be the queen. God, it'd be great to move anywhere.

WILL
Imagine looking down from the terrace and seeing people and cars. And you sit there-

(WILL stands on the table, puts his toes on the edge. Off stage city sounds play, he closes his eyes and gestures with his hands towards the floor as if outlining a chess board and distinguishing pieces)

WILL (cont)
and you can find the kings and queens easily, they move between intersections

(city noises such as car horns, shouts, construction from off stage grows louder)

and the pawns are just pigeons or newspapers or men in suits,
and the knights are taxis, everything moves together. And when
you find your pieces

(climax of city noises, then
silence as ALISON speaks and
interrupts his train of thought)

ALISON

But how, dear?

(WILL doesn't speak for
a second, eyes still closed)

WILL

Castles you can't find 'em, you know what I mean? I suppose my
father was one, or at least I think he was. He called himself a
king, but he wasn't. I know that—it's hard to explain Alison.

ALISON

Will—

WILL

(interrupts)

Don't worry. Most people don't get it anyways, they really
don't. It's complicated, a game I made up—

ALISON

(interrupts)

You're crazy.

(WILL laughs and takes
her hand)

WILL

(laughs)

I guess I am.

(Beat)

Castles, the ones in Scotland, Wales, Germany, you know the real
ones on postcards and whatever. They're always, well most of the
time falling apart. Crumbly bricks and graffiti. It's annoying
how people find that beautiful, right? As if they can imagine

what it looked like 500 years ago, but it doesn't matter. What they look like now does, right?

(ALISON remains silent for a few seconds)

ALISON

Teach me how to play.

WILL

She already knows how to play.

ALISON

I had this boyfriend in middle, Stu, taught me to-

WILL

(interrupts)

You had a boyfriend named Stu?

ALISON

(laughs)

He was an ass. My friends called him "Ew" until I, God that was so immature, wasn't it? He taught me to play in the library every day during lunch.

(WILL pushes the couch and arm chairs up against the left wall creating an open pathway in the middle of the living room. Places all of the wooden chairs, two lamps, two red pillows from the couch and two blue ones from the armchair. Aligns objects in the floor tiles against back wall)

WILL

I'll be king of this side, you be queen of that one. Stand there.

(Gestures to a floor tile on the edge of the room, in between the objects)

The chairs are the pawns—8 of them. The lamps are castles, red pillows are knights, blue pillows are bishops. Move forward, dryad.

(WILL picks up a chair and slides it aside)

WILL

Ew was not a good mentor.

ALISON

That was a years ago.

(WILL and ALISON continue to play across the tiles. WILL is evidently winning)

ALISON

I didn't realize I was playing a prodigy.

WILL

(Laughs)

I'm far from it.

ALISON

Sure, sure. Let me guess your dad entered you in chess competitions or something.

(They continue moving the chairs and pillows and themselves across the floor. When a piece is stolen, it is thrown aside. ALISON often throws the pillows at WILL. After a few minutes ALISON is cornered by WILL and a few chairs. She picks up a pillow and throws it at him)

ALISON

(laughs)

Can't move anywhere, right?

WILL

No, this is it.

(ALISON and WILL are silent
for a few seconds)

ALISON

Will?

(WILL turns and faces her)

ALISON (cont)

(says with a laugh)

I think I understand, well, not really. I probably don't,
but—well, I'm really not sure, I think you'd be a castle, right?

(WILL stares at her for
a few seconds)

WILL

(says with a laugh)

Checkmate.

(WILL pushes her slightly
in the shoulder. ALISON
laughs, stiffens and falls
over onto the ground.
Stage goes black)

(END SCENE)

Scene 3

WILL is on the couch talking to himself.

WILL

It's raining. You need to wear a coat or something, darling,
it's cold. Not that parka, you look like a stoplight.

(ALISON walks through the
door, she's wearing a thick
rain coat. Hair is long,
and blonde)

ALISON

I'm cold, Will. It's so cold in here I think my blood's freezing. How do you think that would work? You need to make a fire or something. Might as well burn down your entire apartment. How long would that last?

WILL

(says with a laugh)

I didn't know you were an arsonist.

ALISON

(says seriously)

No really, Will, would it hurt you to turn up the heat? Cheapskate, you've spent more money on socks than your bill would be if you just turned up the heat. I think I'm getting frostbite, do my fingers look blue to you?

(ALISON shoves hands into
WILL's face)

WILL

She likes when it's cold.

ALISON

I know this sounds funny, it does really. But I like being cold. In Florida, whenever I went outside the humidity practically drowned me.

WILL

Where've you been?

ALISON

It's raining, I'm freezing.

WILL

Where've you been?

ALISON

I was trying not to get my shoes wet. Bad day for heels, I suppose. I was walking around the puddles.

WILL

Oh. I like it when it rains. You know, when it pours.

ALISON

Why's that?

WILL

It's loud, but it's a *nice* loud. It's hard to explain, I guess it makes the walls feel closer together. Does that make any sense?

ALISON

I shouldn't know, I'm claustrophobic. I'll tell you, don't ever go to a hotel with me. I'll take the stairs, once walked up fifteen flights.

WILL

I guess, I'm not saying I'd want you to throw a blanket over my face and hold it there. Sometimes, it's too quiet at night, and you know how you can hear your own pulse at night? I hate that, it just reminds you of how alone you actually are. It's funny, pathetic really. Sometimes I'll fill a bathtub and sit under water for hours. I mean of course I come up to breathe and but, you know how it sounds underwater right?

ALISON

Sure.

WILL

It sounds like rain. When I was married, I convinced myself, this is just pathetic really, that it was my wife's, you know that for whatever reason I could hear it. I mean, I know it's crazy, but I realized it was just mine and that's even worse.

ALISON

My husband was a funny man, I'll tell you. He really was. You know where we met?

(Beat)

Wow, it's coming down, isn't it?

WILL

My wife, Linda, left me once. I mean, I came home from work and there was this note on the kitchen table, you know what it read: *I'll call you*. She was crazy, that woman that's all I really know. She called me from a gas station near Denver three days later. I was going to call the police, I was close. But I knew she was going to come back—

ALISON

(interrupts)

Did she?

WILL

Five months later with her hair chopped up to her ears. She knocked on the door like a stranger or something, I opened it and she wrapped her arms around me. That night we went out to dinner and she told me she traveled around the Midwest in a friend's old Volkswagen. I kind of knew it, you know, she had so much sand in her hair. That night we laid down to go to bed, she just rolled over and looked me right in the eyes, said nothing. Next morning I woke up and she was gone again. There was all this sand in the bed, I felt like I was at the beach or something. Three days later I got a call that they found her dead in some train station.

ALISON

(thinks for a second before saying)

My husband lived in Kansas and whenever we visited his parents we came home with all this dust-sand, whatever it was. It was a nightmare scrubbing every article of clothing I owned.

WILL

I still have sand in my bed, I do, it's so god awful to wake up with it between your shirt and back. And you know what's funny, after they called I walked up and down the street for hours. I mean, nothing had *really* changed. It didn't really matter if she was there or not, right? It didn't really. I came home and took my shoes off and all this sand fell out of them.

WILL

My wife went to Arizona. God, of all places. I can just imagine her dancing around in one of those deserts you see on TV shows, kicking up sand. That's probably why it's everywhere, the sand. It's a funny thought really, a woman alone with nothing but cacti and some rattlesnakes.

ALISON

(After a few seconds)

Do you hate her?

WILL

I'm supposed to right? After they called, I was worried that I would see her again, you know, which was crazy. I mean you'd think I'd want to, right? All I could think about was seeing her standing there on the street corner in her long yellow jacket. I thought I did once, I really did. And then I started following her right there to make sure it *really* wasn't her. Of course, it

wasn't, but it looked like her and I almost passed out right there on the side of the road. This man noticed and even asked if I was OK. I told him of course, then I vomited all over his shoes. I was crazy-

ALISON

No, no not crazy, Will. Maybe just-well I dunno. Once I ran into my husband at the pharmacy. It's kinda a laugh now really. You wouldn't like him, he's-well it's too hard to explain, but I just know you wouldn't like him.

(deepens her voice to talk
in her husband's)

Ali, dear, it's dark out, he said. *Of course,* I said, *it's midnight.* Then he just looked at his wristwatch and laughed. God it was awkward. We walked back to my house and there were boxes everywhere filled with his stuff and my stuff and just stuff. That was what was really sad about it, I guess. He asked to smoke a cigarette in the house and I said yes and it was funny because I never let him. We spent the whole night sitting there. He was smoking a cigarette and I was just staring at the god awful boxes.

WILL

Why were the boxes so *god awful*?

ALISON

I'm not sure, really. I guess I knew he, as sure as hell, never wanted to see my face again. Even if he didn't admit it. Later, I asked him if he remembered where he put this sundress, which box it was in. He couldn't remember and I convinced myself that he stole it from me. You know, I found it a few months later stuffed at the bottom of my dresser. I was sure that he took it. That, for whatever reason, he kept it, and I always wanted to go over to his house, knock on the front door and fight until he admitted he took it. Then I would slam the door in his face. I didn't even care about the dress.

WILL

Yeah. I don't sleep in my bed anymore, it's still sandy.

(Silence)

ALISON

The other night I found my husband's old copy of *The Great Gatsby* and this sounds crazy really, I started ripping pages out

(Lights go out)

not angrily or anything but just a page from every chapter. Then I put all the torn pages in a pile and stapled them together. Kinda imagined you as Jay.

(Lights back on. ALISON reappears in scene with a flapper dress)

Ever read it?

WILL

Course.

ALISON

I think I'd probably be Daisy or someone like that, you know? I'm surprised my husband liked this book, he wasn't much of a reader.

(ALISON grabs WILL's hand and pulls him to his feet to dance; offstage jazz music begins playing softly)

WILL
(laughs)

I'm not sure, Alison.

ALISON

You know, I can imagine staring across that sound. I mean, if it were real right, the green light? I'm really not sure what it would really be like, you know? Relief, maybe? But I can imagine you doing that.

WILL
God, Alison, it's been awhile since I read the book. In my head I always imagined the light as an orange-

ALISON
(interrupts)

I don't think-

WILL
(interrupts)

Like the lights you see in harbors. When I was a kid I lived a block from this small port and from my house you could see the orange lights. It made me want to run away.

ALISON

(laughs)

That makes no sense, Jay. Dance.

WILL

She understands.

ALISON

I lived by a dock when I was younger. Sometimes, after school, I'd go and sit on the edge and stick my feet in the water, it was almost red, like this weird silt. Sometimes I just wanted to fall in and sink to the bottom and look up and if the sun looked different.

(ALISON and WILL continue dancing around the living room)

ALISON

Stand on that chair.

(WILL stands on chair)

Look out the window there, and imagine for a second, can you do that? There's water and a small green orb balanced on the horizon like an egg or the moon or something. Now?

WILL

(after a few seconds, laughs)

I only see orange.

ALISON

(laughs)

Now that I really think about, maybe you'd be more of a George Wilson.

(WILL makes a gun out of his fingers, points it at ALISON, pretending to fire. ALISON puts hand on head)

ALISON

That's not how the book ends. Look out the window, green light.

WILL

She can only see the orange light too.

ALISON

I can't imagine it as green either. All I can think about is that water. I want to go swimming.

WILL

Well sport, I guess we can't all live on ashes.

(END SCENE)

SCENE 4

ALISON, with brown hair, sits next to WILL on the couch.

Will.

ALISON

Will

Hmm.

ALISON

Will

No, she'd talk to me .

ALISON

Stop it Will. God-

Will

No, she'd stand there and ask me about chess or snow. Dance with me, Daisy.

ALISON

Will, you're crazy

Will

She would sit down beside-

ALISON

You've lost it. I'm talking to a child or something-

Will

She'd ask me about-

ALISON

You're a real lunatic, you know that?

Will

She would come through the door with a laugh and she'd smell like the bakery down the street. I'd point that out and she'd just ask questions about pastries and we'd pretend to go to France. If I squint hard enough out that window, that tree looks like the Eiffel Tower-

ALISON

(laughs)

Psychotic, could you stop? Just stop. Stop. Stop. This is ridiculous, you're ridiculous, I'm ridiculous. You can't move, okay. He is a good man, a real good one, intelligent, can hold a conversation for more than two minutes, likes good books, hates coffee. No he loves it, only at night though. No, stop, don't move. He likes spring but is allergic to flowers, all of the good ones too daisies, pansies, tulips, and keeps a goddamn

Claritin on him until he ends up bringing the whole package because he can't go two hours without coughing up a lung.

(Chaotic lighting, flashes off and when it comes back on red-headed ALISON comes through the door, brown-haired ALISON has exited the stage)

ALISON (red-headed)

Darling, it's freezing outside. It's really coming down, you outta buy a good sweater or something. He loves a good winter, when the house smelled like kerosene at his grandmother's.

(Light flashes off again.

Comes back on redhead

ALISON exits and black-haired

ALISON is on stage)

ALISON (black hair)

Will, I always get taken by that god awful Bishop, I'm telling you, you're a castle. Stop.

(WILL appears to be completely frozen)

You've always wanted kids, right? He'll teach his kids to play chess, but he won't be like his father. We'll stay up all night discussing paint colors for the nursery—

(Lights flash out. Black-haired ALISON exits)

Sunflower, pacific-grove pink, whispering wind, mulberry, Poseidon, juniper, Utah sky, fresh lime, pelican beach.

(Lights flash back on.

ALISON with blonde hair

is standing in front of

WILL who is still motionless

on the couch)

ALISON (cont)

(says hysterically)

You're a my-feet-are-planted-in-the-doorway type of man and hate traveling because you're broke, but the good kind. The fun kind

when you sleep in your van for two weeks until you can scrap up enough chump change for rent. But it's a good kind of chump change. I bet you've lived off of gas station granola bars and Mountain Dew.

(Beat)

I might burn down your house, it's so cold. He will turn up the heat, he likes when the hall is warm, but his bedroom is cold. He hates when it thunders because he's afraid that the lightning'll hit that sycamore out the window and—

(Lights flicker out again.

Blonde-hair ALISON exits stage)

Boom! The tree's on fire, then the grass, closer to the house, now the porch is on fire, the door, the hall, your bedroom.

(lights come back on

ALISON with brown hair stands in front of WILL on the couch)

ALISON

He likes the beach, probably because it's always warm. No, you wouldn't like the beach would you. Is it because of the sand? He hates sand. Cutting his feet on shells and the way the ocean makes his lips dry. I've always liked collecting shells though, he doesn't understand. They make beautiful jewelry though. One day the sky will be this weird shade of blue, you can't name it though. But you want to paint your kid's nursery—well if you had a kid—that color.

(ALISON places a hand on WILL's shoulder. Lights flash out)

ALISON

After Midnight, Grandma's Sweater, Blue Suede Shoes, Nova Scotia, Hudson Bay, Watertown, Lapis.

(Lights come back on, spotlight on WILL who is alone, lying on back on couch, eyes closed)

WILL
(to himself)

You're perfect, Alison.

(END SCENE)