

Lake Forest Oasis

by: Heather Meyers

Cast:

Maddy- female (30s-40s) dressed in jeans & plain t-shirt, keeps to self

Victoria- female (30s-40s) well maintained hair & fresh acrylic nails

Shirley- female (30's-40s) wears glasses, slightly frumpy

Tiki- female (30s-40s) friendly but mysterious

Setting:

Act 1, sc 1: Lake Forest Oasis parking lot off I-94 toll road, mile marker 18

At Rise:

In the darkness we hear cars and semis pulling in and out of the Oasis, vehicles speeding by on the toll way and a brief burst of birds chirping as lights come up. It is daytime. Maddy sits on a bench under a tree next to a giant cement ashtray. She scrolls on her phone, smoking, a Big Gulp sits at her feet. Tiki is upstage of the bench, sweeping up trash- she will remain on the outskirts of the action until she reveals herself at the appropriate time. Victoria enters, talking on her phone.

Victoria:

Look MaryAnn- I know you want a balloon arch for 8th grade graduation but it simply isn't possible. You remember the fiasco of 2018! *(pause)* What do you mean you've never heard of it? The PTO spent \$450 bucks on that blue & white arch and the school nurse marched into the gym and popped every last balloon. *(pause)* Because of the latex allergy policy. Look we're still a month out- plenty of time to rethink this. I recommend a Luau theme. Palm trees and leis are all the rage this time of year. We'll serve punch in hollowed out pineapples. They'll love it! Listen- I'm heading into a meeting now- let's talk later. Ciao Ciao.

Victoria briefly sizes up Maddy and sits on the opposite end of bench. Maddy continues to scroll & smoke. Brief silence.

Victoria:

Excuse me- could I possibly have one of those, please? *(Maddy looks up, startled. She looks around assuming Victoria is speaking to someone else. She isn't)* I know we don't know each other but I'd truly appreciate it.

Maddy:

Um. I don't know. I mean- they are pretty expensive these days.

Victoria:

Oh come on- its just one cigarette. How much could they possible be? *(pause- Maddy doesn't answer)* Listen- I'll buy one from you. I'll give you 50 cents.

Maddy:

Um I guess so. *(She pulls out a battered pack with half the cigarettes gone and offers her one)*

Victoria:

Can you break a \$50?

Maddy:

No, sorry.

Vicki sighs & digs in her designer handbag, producing her matching designer wallet and counts change.

Victoria:

I'm about a dime short. *(She holds 40 cents in her hand)* Will you take this? I've always counted on the kindness of strangers. How about it?

Maddy:

It's "depended".

Victoria:

What do you mean?

Maddy:

It's a line from an old Marlon Brando movie. A Streetcar Named Desire. "I've always depended on the kindness of strangers".

Victoria:

That too. So how about it?

Maddy figures she has no other choice, hands her a cigarette & pockets the change. Victoria pops it into her mouth and waits.

Victoria:

Aren't you going to light it? *(Maddy hands Victoria the lighter. Victoria looks at it)*
Oh honey- could you give me a hand? My nails are fresh. They only allow touch ups once a week.

Maddy lights the cigarette, Victoria inhales deeply. Suddenly Victoria's phone rings to a recognizable love tune. Victoria drops the cigarette & smashes it under her foot- making it impossible to re-light. Maddy looks shocked.

Victoria:

Hi sweetheart! How are you? Me- I'm out & about as usual. No silly, I'm on my way to the gym. I'm definitely not at the salon. *(pause)* Sure- I can put together cocktails & appetizers for your clients tonight at the house. No problem, honey. OK Sweetums, I love you too. Kiss kiss. See you tonight. *(she ends call)* That fucking asshole! Why can't he just take them out to the Deertrail Inn and write it off like most normal people?

Shirley suddenly appears with 2 large blue Ikea bags, one in each hand. She sees the ladies & squeals with delight. Shirley runs and sits between them on the bench, dropping her huge bags at her feet. Both ladies look as if they wish they could disappear at this very moment.

Shirley:

Oh Victoria- how nice to see you again! It's been awhile. Gosh I haven't seen you since our girls were in dance class over at the Tiny Tappers back in their preK days! That was the year you all moved out of Lake Bluff into Lake Forest. I remember that sweet little house you lived in a block over from us on Center Street. It's a shame we were in different school districts- the girls used to be such good friends. Remember how they used to trade tutus in the park during play dates? Oh- I can't believe they'll be back together again in high school next year! Planning for graduation sure has been keeping me busy. I'll bet it's been the same for you. The party planning and graduation dress shopping. Oh and I still need to order a cake. I think I might go down to the Cake Box Bakery. You remember how much we loved those cookies, don't you? *(Victoria smiles and begins to say something, but Shirley continues in her whirlwind fashion turning to Maddy)* Oh where are my manners? I'm Shirley Quinn. My you look familiar to me. I'm sure our paths must have crossed somewhere. Do you have kids in middle school? *(Maddy shakes her head no)* Farmer's Market? *(No)* I know- you must play pickle ball- am I right? *(No)* Gosh there has got to be some connection. *(Shirley thinks for a moment, looking out into the distance as she does so)* Wait- is that your van parked over there? The blue one with the sign in the back window "You are enough"? Why I'd recognize that van anywhere! Miss Maddy from daycare over at the fitness center. You used to change my girls diapers while I worked out! I see you driving around over in Knollwood! How have you been? I didn't know you were a smoker.

Maddy: *(sheepishly)*

Um yeah. I guess so.

Shirley:

Well I wouldn't have guessed it in a million years.

An uncomfortable silence settles in. The sounds of vehicles passing. Maddy puts out her cigarette in the giant ashtray. She picks up the Big Gulp and takes a long sip. Victoria inspects her nails. Shirley begins to wring her hands.

Shirley (bursting):

Well what an uncommon place for us all to meet again! I suppose I should explain why I'm here. I really love the falafel at the Tasty Treats of Middle East restaurant. It's so good. If you haven't tried it- you really should! Lovely people who run it. *(She looks at Victoria)*

Victoria:

Oh- uh I have clients here. *(Both look at Maddy)*

Maddy:

I come for the Big Gulps.

Tiki stands directly behind the bench by now, and begins laughing until the ladies realize she is laughing at them. They all turn to look at her.

Tiki:

I am so sorry, ladies. I apologize for my rudeness. I'm sure you are all very nice people. But if you will excuse my language- you all are feeding each another a load of horseshit right now. I've been around this here Oasis long enough to know better. I've been observing you.

The ladies scoff at Tiki- perhaps Shirley tossing out "Well, I never". Victoria stands to leave. Maddy takes a long pull from her Big Gulp.

Tiki:

Now before you all get huffy and leave- I have a proposal you might find interesting. *(Nobody makes a move)* I think each of you is here with a purpose. And I if I were a betting person- I'd bet this is all about money. The bottom line. Anybody want to talk about it?

Victoria:

And why would I talk to a complete stranger about anything? I don't know you.

Tiki:

Truth- you don't. Name's Tiki. Now we aren't strangers. And I think I have you figured out. That lady who pulls in here once a week- Rosa? You know who I'm talking about. The one with the nail salon in her trunk. Ooooooh she does your nails up good every week. Makes 'em all pretty for you. She's got those knockoff bags, too. Like that flashy

little number you are carrying right now. (*Victoria sits back down on the bench, clutching her bag*)

Victoria:

Oh for fuck's sake. Fine. You got me. Peter has cut off my allowance. He says I don't need to go to the salon (*mimics his voice*) "every Goddamn week! Between the tanning, hair removal, facials, nails, and shopping- you're making us bankrupt" But he doesn't get it. I have to keep up appearances with everyone to stay relevant. To look the part. To be include in the right social circles. To get invited to all the places he wants to be. Where he expects our entire family to be. That lifestyle comes at a price. There is pressure to keep up. So yeah- I'm dabbling in the off-brand market. I wish I could be back in the real salon sipping freshly squeezed orange juice rather than stuffing myself into the backseat of an old '88 Cutlass with removal plates every Wednesday morning in this Godforsaken parking lot.

Shirley:

Oh Victoria- I never knew it was like that for you.

Tiki (*to Shirley*):

OK lady- tell us what you've got in those bags.

Shirley (*taking a deep breath before launching in*):

I'm a crafter. Like I loooooove crafting. There isn't a yarn color I can resist. I have miles of fabric and rolls of sequins every color of the rainbow. I can rhinestone anything. And I do mean anything. I once blinged out an entire refrigerator for this neighbor who was night-blind so she could find it without turning on the kitchen lights. She used wake up her husband and he'd get mad something fierce. Well we fixed that right up. But maybe it's gotten a bit out of hand lately. Recently after looking at my credit card bill, my hubby, Scott, told me I can't buy any more crafting supplies until I start selling some of this stuff off. So I came to the little shop in the Oasis called Tadz Jewelry & Apparel. They agreed to carry some of my product. I think I'm going to make a killing off my friendship bracelets. (*claps & giggles with glee*) With all those Swifties coming to town for the Eras Tour- I'm hoping to break even and then some. At least on these materials. But I know my real future is in (*as if the heavens have opened up*) The Cricut* Machine (*note: pronounced cricket). I could personalize almost anything! Think of it- entire school team jerseys, dance bags, hydro flasks: you name it!! Sky's the limit!! The perfect birthday gifts- holidays, graduations, oh I could go on & on!! One day I could be a real entrepreneur. My own boss. Maybe I could save up money so my girl wouldn't have to worry about taking out student loans like I did. So she could get ahead and have everything she dreams of having. So maybe I can't afford to buy my daughter concert tickets to see Taylor Swift- but just maybe I can do something bigger for her instead.

Victoria:

You always made the cutest matching hair bows for our girls.

Tiki:

That's so sweet. OK Big Gulp- talk to us.

Maddy:

Um. Yeah. *(She shifts uncomfortably in her seat on the bench. Lights another cigarette. Considers what to say for a moment. After a long exhale she begins)* So I recognize you both. *(to Shirley)* Yeah so I changed your kids' dirty diapers while you took a Pilates class. *(to Victoria)* And you I remember from working a kid's birthday party at some huge mansion whose garage would fit my whole home inside. I am a catering server- my second job. I have kids, too. But they are little. Their friends are too young to recognize me right now. But one day they will. The only reason we live in Knollwood is because there is a trailer park off Rt. 41. It's important that we are in a good school district like Lake Bluff. And one day they'll go to Lake Forest High School. I want better for my kids than I had. But if you are stressing about keeping up with the Jones' and you are worried about not taking out school loans- imagine my fears. I'm still trying to get my Associate's Degree while holding down 2 jobs. The bills don't stop piling up. And I smoke because I gotta put my stress somewhere. So I come up here to the Oasis and sit on this bench trying to figure out my next move. Because nobody recognizes me here. Nobody cares. Plus it's the only 7-11 in close proximity.

Tiki:

Well bravo, ladies. That took a shit ton of courage. Truly. I admire your honesty.

Victoria:

Well we hardly had any choice. You were going to out us all anyway. So what's the deal?

Tiki:

No, No. You got it wrong. There's no deal. Merely a proposition. You can stay and listen, or walk away. No skin off my nose.

Victoria:

Bullshit. There must be something in this for you. You aren't doing this out of the kindness of your heart.

Shirley:

I have to agree with Victoria. Like my Granny used to say- "you can't get nothing for something".

Maddy:

Its "You can't get something for nothing".

Shirley:

What?

Maddy:

You can't get something for nothing. It means you can't expect to receive some benefit if you do not pay for it in some way. It's all about the counterbalance. *(to Tiki)* What's your angle?

Tiki:

OK Big Gulp- I'll lay it out for you. My bills are piling up, too. Let's just say I'm feeling my own heat. But I've got a get money quick game. You willing to play?

Maddy:

Tell me the rules.

Tiki:

There's a lot of big money in car parts. And they are easy for the taking. But I need a team to help me get at them. I know a guy who owns a Chop Shop. You know what that is?

Shirley:

Sure- it's a place where they take parts off stolen cars and sell them to potential buyers.

Victoria *(doing a double take)*:

How in the world do you know that?

Shirley:

She might not get her sayings right, but my Granny taught me many valuable lessons. I mean- she really knew her way around a kitchen. Martha Stewart could take a lesson.....

Tiki:

Alright. Alright. Cool. Cool. So the more expensive the car, the more we could potentially make. All profit. I mean we aren't putting much money into the operation besides some basic tools.

Maddy:

My husband does automotive repair on the side. He travels to people's driveways to work on them there so there's no overhead in renting a garage space.

Tiki:

So he's got tools?

Maddy *(nodding)*:

Boxes of them. But he threw his back out a few months ago while ratcheting under an old Jaguar & hasn't been able to work much lately.

Tiki:

Will he miss any if they're gone for a bit?

Maddy:

Not if we move soon. *(Takes a pull off her Big Gulp)*

Victoria:

Hold on. How are we going to find the cars?

Tiki:

That's where you come in, Nails. You know people. You've been to all those big mansions. Now I've been reading about a few car thefts recently up in your end of town.

Shirley:

She's right! It's been all over Facebook. The Lawrence family's SAAB was taken just last week. The Nest camera caught the perpetrators entering the garage, but they didn't get the license plate on the car that dropped them off. It was too far down the street. It all happened so fast. Sandra was incredibly perturbed about it. She had to cancel their plans for a weekend away in Lake Geneva. Thank goodness the Airbnb gave them a credit so they booked another weekend. But I can't imagine you are on those pages- those are closed groups for residents of Lake Bluff & Lake Forest only.

Tiki:

Hey- I'm on NextDoor. I know the score.

Victoria:

I remember that. Sandra was so mad at Dan. She said it was all his fault because he didn't lock up like he should have.

Tiki:

Tell me how they got the car.

Shirley:

Oh well its no secret most people in Lake Forest think they are incredibly safe. It's a false sense of security, really. They don't always lock their doors. And worse yet- people like Dan simply leave their keys in their car because it's just easier in the morning when leaving for work. Which I think is just silly. I mean- keep your keys with your wallet. Its only common sense. In Dan's case- he not only left his keys in the ignition- but he never locked the garage door. And never set the garage security code. Sandra said the house alarm was secure- but the garage is detached and is on a separate system.

Tiki:

Facebook is amazingly specific. Much more detailed than NextDoor.

Shirley:

Well Sandra did go on quite a tirade. And it is a group for ladies only. So many other ladies had so much empathy for her situation. You wouldn't believe how many people admitted their husbands do the same thing. Especially after they've been drinking over at Captain's Pub. I mean they act like a bunch of 20 year olds sometimes. You think they'd stolen their sons' fake IDs the way they carry on.

Tiki:

So let me get this straight- they don't lock up their mansions?

Victoria:

Do you know how much land people own in general in Lake Forest? Its not like these homes sit on the street. The street is their driveway.

Tiki:

This is going to be way easier than I thought.

A silence settles over the group as each contemplates.

Maddy:

So what's the proposal exactly?

Tiki:

Well Nails will do the intel. She knows the major players. I'll bet Big Gulp knows her fair share as well- particularly about the layout of the houses, especially on the main floor around the kitchen area. And I'll bet because of your old man- you've handed a few different cars during test-drives. Can you handle a stick?

Maddy:

My Dad made me hold the old Dodge on a hill steady before I could take it out by myself.

Shirley:

Well what about me?

Tiki:

You're crafty. Can you take things apart?

Shirley:

Well I am pretty handy if I do say so myself. I've been known to unscrew my entire Singer 7469 quilting sewing machine with a flathead after some denim bound up the timing. My bobbin got all jacked up this one time and I fixed it myself after Scott gave up.

Tiki:

You are a very resourceful woman, Shirley.

Shirley:

Thank you! Scott made such a big deal out of having to take it to a specialty repairman and tried to shame me for buying such an outrageously expensive machine that was impossible to fix. My Granny always said, "No job is too big".

Tiki:

Your Granny was a smart lady. (*Shirley smiles big*)

Maddy: (*looking directly at Tiki*)

And what is your role in this whole proposition?

Tiki:

Like I said- I know I guy. I'm along for the ride. A look out, of sorts.

Maddy:

The supervisor, so to speak?

Tiki:

You could say that. So we target the most expensive cars with the easiest removal scenario. We case the joint for a few days. Learn the comings & goings. What security system do they use? When do the cops patrol the area? How close are the nearest neighbors? Do we have access to the highway? Are there dogs or teenagers that might come home late with Daddy's car?

Victoria: (*interrupting*)

Oh no- they all have their own cars.

Tiki:

Understood. We'll take a practice run the night before. Talk through every move until we could do it in our sleep. And then like *my* Granny used to say "Just Do It".

Victoria:

What if we get caught?

Tiki:

Who is gonna suspect 4 women from the Northshore? They'll look at teenagers out for joyrides. Local bangers. Gang initiations. Never us in a million years.

Maddy:

What's the split on the take?

Tiki:

Most basic cars go for 5K. But we're dealing in high-end. It'll be more. We'll split it evenly. We could clear upwards of \$1,500 each for one night's work.

A silence falls over the group as they take this in.

Shirley: *(almost in a whisper)*

I could buy 2 Cricuts and a new loom with that.

Tiki:

It means returning to that freshly squeezed juice bar at the salon. And maybe going to school full time. What do you think, ladies?

Pause (for as long as seems necessary)

Victoria:

I'm in.

Maddy:

Me too.

Shirley: *(with joyous excitement)*

I could make us matching T-shirts!

Tiki:

Excellent. Sleep on it. Make a list of potential houses. Create a supply list of available tools. We meet tomorrow back here at the Oasis to start making a plan.

Black Out. End of Act 1, sc 1