

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - VERY EARLY IN THE MORNING

A single GHOST LIGHT sits in the middle of the square, windowless room. It's pretty small.

A kerfuffle kerfuffs at the door. DULLED VOICES have a brief, festive conversation. CLICK-CLAK. The doorknob turns.

A square of light spills into the room from the street, along with the sound of quick, consistent traffic.

THREE SILHOUETTES stand back-lit in the doorway. Their cheerful discussion stops when they look into the room.

JOHN TRAIN (O.S.)

Fuck me. I've gotten drunk in bigger closets than this.

A woman steps through the doorway. AGNES (can play 18-30 - it says so on her headshot) steps out of the shadows.

She hugs a TRAPPER KEEPER NOTEBOOK to her chest and wears a bulky outfit designed to cover a little extra mass.

A huge smile crosses her lips.

AGNES

It's perfect.

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER

JOHN TRAIN (30's) a pretty average guy with an ungroomed look about him, sits behind a table that faces a tiny stage.

PAULINE (40's) a short, trim woman, sits next to him. There's a free chair between them.

Agnes arranges a few folders on a small table. The folders have neatly typed labels on them.

"Duckworth Sides", "Olivia Sides", "Johnny 99 Sides", "Winston Sides", "Chase Sides."

She takes great pride in making them look just so. Pauline scans a spreadsheet.

PAULINE

I thought we weren't going unisex with Johnny because it's such a key role. Why are there a bunch of chicks coming in?

AGNES  
I changed my mind.

PAULINE  
Unchange it.

JOHN TRAIN  
You know, Paul, all you're doing is showing off the fact that you didn't go over any of this shit before now.

Agnes sits on the stage facing the table. She's directly in the middle of John and Pauline.

She cradles a cup of coffee like it's a cherished relic.

PAULINE  
Take it easy, "writer." You're only here as a courtesy.

Agnes closes one eye. She holds up her fingers in front of the open one so they make a little frame.

She proceeds to block out specific shots of John and Pauline's conversation.

John's face is in the lower right hand corner of her finger frame. He turns profile to look at Pauline.

JOHN TRAIN  
You're just cranky that we're not seeing more of your clients.

Agnes moves her fingers so both John and Pauline fit in her finger frame.

PAULINE  
We're not seeing any of my clients.  
Are we, Agnes?

Both John and Pauline turn to look at her. She lowers her finger frame so it centers on their feet.

John's left leg bounces up and down with nervous energy. Pauline's feet cross at the ankles.

She lowers her hands. The finger frame disappears. She gets to her feet.

AGNES  
I'm gonna grab some more coffee. You guys want?

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER

Agnes sits in the middle chair. Pauline sits next to her. A box of coffee sits between them.

A SINK sounds in the bathroom. Pauline leans close to Agnes.

PAULINE

You shouldn't be getting the coffee.  
Just so you know. It sends the wrong  
kind of message.

AGNES

Oh. No, it's OK. I wanted to stretch  
my legs before we get started anyway.  
I'm bursting with giddy.

John walks in. Pauline leans away from Agnes.

PAULINE

I'm just saying.

John sits on the other side of Agnes.

JOHN TRAIN

I couldn't find the light in the  
bathroom. And the door doesn't stay  
closed. You have to hold it.

The three of them busy themselves with distractions. John  
sends a text. Pauline scrolls through the sides.

Agnes puts on a pair of glasses and blows on her coffee. The  
fingers of her free hand tap on the table.

A heavily marked up copy of the script "Saint Huck" sits  
neatly beside her laptop. She straightens it.

KNOCK. KNOCK. The door pushes open a little at the end of  
someone's knocking fist. Agnes jumps up.

AGNES

And away we go.

She rushes to the door. Pauline tuts after her. John tugs on  
his beard. The door opens.

A square of sunlight lands on the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER

A TALL REEDY MAN stands on the riser. A page of sides shakes in his hand. He's nervous.

Pauline presses record on a smartphone set up on a tabletop tripod. Agnes leans forward.

AGNES

Do you have any questions before we get started?

TALL REEDY MAN

No, I don't think so.

PAULINE

Can you look at the camera and say who you're reading for?

Tall Reedy looks at the camera, then at the floor.

TALL REEDY MAN

Oh, um. I'm reading for Duckworth.

He takes a deep breath and doesn't release it.

AGNES

Hey, it's OK. It's cool. Take your time. Whenever you're ready.

Tall Reedy nods excessively. He finally exhales. The words from the script tumble out at a rapid pace.

TALL REEDY MAN

I thought the tattoo was funny. I don't know why. At the deli. Then I saw the scar and I just. I felt like I had something to do with it. Like I expected it to happen and it did.

He pauses. John looks at Agnes. Pauline looks at Agnes. Agnes keeps her eyes on Tall Reedy.

AGNES

John, you read with him.

John flips through the sides.

JOHN TRAIN

(Stiff voice)

Don't look away. Look at me. Had something to do with what?

Tall Reedy looks up at John, then down at his sides. He lost his place. He looks nervously at Agnes.

TALL REEDY MAN  
Can we go back?

Agnes nods.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER

Agnes, John, and Pauline sit in the same position. Agnes is still giddy. John and Pauline are tired.

A CHUBBY THICK NECKED GUY stands on the stage. John leans over the sides.

JOHN TRAIN  
(Stiff voice)  
Don't look away. Look at me. Had something to do with what?

Chubby Thick Neck stops.

CHUBBY THICK NECK  
Wait, I'm confused. I thought I was reading with you, not the director.

He points the sides at Agnes.

CHUBBY THICK NECK  
Aren't you playing...

He flips through the pages.

CHUBBY THICK NECK  
Henry?

AGNES  
Um. No.

CHUBBY THICK NECK  
Who are you in this, then?

Agnes adjusts her glasses.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER STILL

Same positions at the table, different energies. John and Pauline are bored. Agnes sags a little. But only a little.

A BUBBLY BLONDE DUDE in a sort of sexy Actor Halloween Costume looks right into the camera.

BUBBLY BLONDE

(Horrible acting)

It doesn't matter. She's dead and I want to know why. The cops are sniffing me like dogs in a butchers alley. The head of the studio picks my name out of a hat the very next day. The gal who plays her in her own dreams shows up at my door.

Pauline leans forward.

PAULINE

(Nervous voice)

The gal you pine for like a lovesick dog, you mean?

BUBBLY BLONDE

(Horrible acting)

Winston lifts his hand. Chase flinches. Don't get fancy.

John and Agnes share a look. She looks down at the pages in front of her. Bubbly Blonde read the parenthetical.

PAULINE

(Nervous voice)

Sorry.

Bubbly Blonde Dude lifts his white-tee to show off his abs. He looks from the camera right at Agnes.

The eye contact is long, protracted, and crazy person awkward. His tee inches up even more.

BUBBLY BLONDE

(Horrible acting)

No. I'm sorry. I'm going to see this through. That's all.

Agnes squirms.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER

Agnes sits on the stage with a styrofoam container in her lap. It's filled with mega-breakfast. Flapjacks. Bacon. Etc.

John pushes a coffee cup around a sandwich. Pauline is nowhere in sight. The faucet runs in the bathroom.

JOHN TRAIN

Woof. Brutal times, Agnes.

AGNES

I don't know. I think that last girl was great for Olivia.

JOHN TRAIN

Yeah.

He watches her eat with relish.

JOHN TRAIN

You sure you don't want to play her?

AGNES

No way, hog-lumps. Playing the lead and first-time-directing? Pass.

John tugs his beard.

AGNES

You're cool with that, right?

JOHN TRAIN

Yeah, of course. It's just funny. I kind of based her on you, you know?

AGNES

Really? I didn't know that. We hadn't even met yet.

JOHN TRAIN

Well. Not based, I guess, but I pictured you when I started writing. It helps to have an actual face to fill in the blanks sometimes.

AGNES

John. That's adorable. And kind of a little bit creepy.

JOHN TRAIN

Oh, for sure creepy.

They smile and drift into their own worlds. Agnes eats the shit out of her mega-brek. John watches her more.

JOHN TRAIN

Hey. I overheard Paul earlier. You don't have to let her tell you what to do, you know? If you want to get the coffee you can get the coffee.

The faucet goes off. The toilet FLUSHES. Pauline walks in. Neither one of them look at her.

PAULINE

Are we ready for these Johnny's?

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - DAY

A series of faces flash from the POV of Pauline's camera. Men. Woman. Big. Small. Some laugh. Some cry.

They all hold the sides for Johnny 99. John's posture shows his waning enthusiasm. Pauline's shows her apprehension.

Agnes squints through one eye at the faces. A few times she holds up her finger frame and follows the face.

It always lowers before the actor finishes the scene. It only stays on one face.

CASSAVETES (20's) a lean, Latino man, lowers the sides. He only glances at them a couple of times.

CASSAVETES

I love everything about this city. It's promise. It's streets. The feeling that there's nothing wrong with leaving everything behind. The feeling that everything you've heard about happening here has really happened here, around any corner, down any subway tunnel. The city opens everything up.

Everyone behind the table takes a collective breath.

CASSAVETES

Who wrote this? It's pretty dope.

PAULINE

You didn't read the sides before you came in?

CASSAVETES

Nah. I only came with a buddy of mine. She wanted me to go first so she could do some prep. She's big into this kind of shit.

AGNES

What about you?

CASSAVETES

Acting could be cool, I guess. You got any dough to throw around?

Pauline opens her mouth to speak. Cassavetes gets a text.

CASSAVETES

Yo, one sec.

He checks his phone.

CASSAVETES

It's my buddy. She's set. You want I should grab her?

AGNES

Yeah, OK.

Cassavetes moves to the door and cracks it open. Sunlight spills around him. He gestures.

CASSAVETES

Yeah, you're good.

He turns to Agnes.

CASSAVETES

Good luck with your shit.

He slips out. PENNY (20's) a stunning young woman, swerves in around him. The light vanishes when she closes the door.

AGNES

Oh my god, Penny.

Agnes stands up, excited. They know each other. Penny moves to the center of the stage and nods formally.

PENNY

Agnes, hi. Thanks for seeing me today. Pauline. Good to see you.

Agnes gets it. Penny wants to keep it business like. She lowers into her seat.

AGNES

Do you have any questions?

Penny shakes her head. She looks into the camera.

PENNY

I'm reading for Johnny 99.

She bows her head and takes a breath. Her posture changes. She looks up. Her mouth opens.

CUT TO:

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - BATHROOM - LATER

John and Pauline bicker or flirt or whatever the hell they do in the theater. Their voices are muffled.

The bathroom door CREAKS open. Agnes doesn't bother to close it. She's not using the toilet anyway. She's hiding.

John and Pauline's voices are clear.

JOHN TRAIN (O.C.)

You're putting too much pressure on her. It's just one day.

PAULINE (O.C.)

One wasted day. Shooting starts in a week and a half and we cast how many parts today?

JOHN TRAIN (O.C.)

That Cass dude was pretty solid.

PAULINE (O.C.)

How many, John?

She sits with her elbows on her knees. Tears slide down her cheeks. She presses both hands over her mouth.

PAULINE (O.C.)

That's what I thought.

JOHN TRAIN (O.C.)

What do you want, Paul? All I did was write the damn thing. It's her vision now. It sinks or swims with her.

PAULINE (O.C.)

I just want her in front of the camera where she belongs.

CREAK. Agnes slowly pulls the door closed. The voices grow muffled. She straightens her shoulders.

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - LATER

Agnes walks in a circle around the ghost light. John and Pauline are gone. Everything is tidied up.

She drops her bag on the table and slips her phone into the table top tripod. She presses record.

She walks to the ghost light and looks at the lens.

AGNES

I'm reading for Johnny 99.

Her head lowers for a quick second. When she lifts it again her entire bearing is different. She's a fucking pro.

AGNES

And that's how it was. Regina Marie didn't get very far. She opened her own agency out in Tahoe. Riley was pleased as punch for a while. All she had to do was act like herself. We even got a place over in West Hollywood. Yard, clothes line, the whole shebang. I tried to stay out of the Dream Biz for a while, but you know how it goes. Offers started rolling in and I never did have the hands for heavy lifting. But everything was different. Something in me curdled a long time ago, see. When you know what kind of things people dream about...well, it's not such a leap of faith to figure that we're all capable of anything. Awake or asleep, it really doesn't matter. Rex - my old boss, remember? Rex got away with murder just because he could. Ain't that a peach of a thing? I thought so, anyway.

She sits on the edge of the stage.

AGNES

You don't even look that much like  
her. Just something in the mouth.

Her head lowers. When she lifts it she's herself again. And  
her joy fills the room.

INT. SMALL BLACK BOX THEATER - DAY

Agnes sits cross legged on the table. Her hair is pulled  
back in a tight bun. Her posture is loose.

Papers CRINKLE somewhere in the room. Her phone BUZZES with  
a text from Pauline. She ignores it.

She presses her fingers together in a triangle under her  
chin. Her eyes scan the stage across from her.

Cassavetes, Penny, Tall Reedy, and Bubbly Blonde sit with  
full scripts. They look at Agnes. Waiting.

AGNES

OK. Let's get to work.

CUT TO BLACK: