

CHARLOTTE enters, drops her coat with a flourish. She looks upset.

CHARLOTTE

Good evening, freaks and lovers! My apologies for my lateness, but sometimes life delivers a mountain of shit, that try as you might, just cannot be avoided.

MARLA

Charlotte? Are you okay?

CHARLOTTE

Nothing a glass of wine can't cure.

LISA

Is Gary coming tonight?

CHARLOTTE

Oh no, dear. Not tonight. You see, Gary and I have been together a long time. We have this pattern. He gets bored, drinks a little too much, and pulls out his old novel, the one he's been revising for ten years. He writes feverishly for hours. It doesn't go well. He blames me. He blames our life. He says he needs adventure, change. I offer to plan a trip. Someplace exotic. This makes him angrier. I don't know why. He puts the novel and an old typewriter in a box. He wants to be a writer but doesn't even own a laptop. He packs a bag and goes. And then after a few weeks, he comes back. Says he was foolish. Begs me to take him back. Which I do.

(she drinks, shaking it off)

He left a couple hours ago. So, no he won't be coming to the group for a while. But that's okay. We all need a break from time to time, don't we?

CHARLOTTE eyes the group. No one wants to say a thing.

CHARLOTTE

I missed something important, didn't I?

MARLA

It was not about you...

CHARLOTTE

But it's something. I can feel it in your fear.

(to ASHLYN)

What do you see, young Ash? Tell me.

ASHLYN

Nothing...

CHARLOTTE

Don't lie to me, child!

ASHLYN

I'm not!

CHARLOTTE

He's not coming back, is he? Not this time. (laughs) This is silly. He always comes back. He can barely take care of himself. Wants to write a novel but can't even pay his bills on time. He always leaves and comes back and that's the way it goes and this time...what are you saying?

ASHLYN

I'm not saying anything.

CHARLOTTE

Yes you are. TELL ME.

ASHLYN

He's not coming back this time.