

# GIRL IN THE RED CORNER

BY STEPHEN SPOTSWOOD

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spotswood@gmail.com  
(301) 512-4247

## CHARACTERS

**HALO:** a woman in her late 20s-early 30s; a bit of a punk in her youth; a year or so finished with a dead-end marriage, she's spent a decade working crap jobs for crap paychecks; she grew up (and still lives) in a world dominated by strip malls, cash-for-gold joints, and roadhouse bars

**BRINN:** Halo's big sister; the planner, the fixer; confidant in her choices; old enough to have a 12-yr old daughter

**GINA:** a woman in her late 20s-early 30s; Halo's trainer; recovering addict turned trainer and MMA fighter; not a bit of wasted energy; she has feelings--she's just not going to show them to *you*

**TERRY:** Halo and Brinn's mother; a former rough-and-tumble roadhouse girl; lost a lot of the fire but kept the drinking problem; too many years working the checkout line have worn away some edges and sharpened others. (also plays NANCY FROM HUMAN RESOURCES, GINA'S OPPONENT)

**WARREN:** Brinn's husband; married young to his knocked-up girlfriend; honestly trying to do the best for his family and to tread water in a busted economy (also plays KYLE, ANNOUNCER)

**SETTING:** A stretch of the country that's more strip-mall than suburbia; where cash-for-gold joints outnumber corner stores; a place where people are just trying to get by. It manifests as an amateur MMA octagon.

## SCENE ONE: YOU'VE GOT THE DEMON INSIDE YOU

The cage: a padded ring surrounded by chainlink you'll never climb over even with a running start. Spaced equidistantly around the inside of the ring are five stools. Beside each are gym bags stuffed with towels, hoodies, jackets, handwraps, gloves, mitts, cell phones--everything you'll ever need.

When the light is at full, it is bright and unforgiving. There are no shadows here. There is no hiding here.

At the moment, the lights are dim, streaming in from somewhere high above.

HALO enters the cage.

HALO

You ever hit someone?  
It hurts.  
I mean, it hurts you, too.  
One of the first things they teach you.

Everyone else enters the space, circling, taking their corners.

HALO (CONT'D)

An inch either way is the difference between breaking your fingers and breaking their nose. Because at the end of the day, it's bone and meat ramming into bone and meat. And I know you don't like to think of yourself like that. Like meat. But one good punch...and you remember.

When I was little, I had an aunt who said I was so sweet and innocent I should have a halo. Then I got old enough to act up, act out, and she stopped. Instead she started saying, "You've got the demon. You've got the demon inside you, Halo."

There's no room for mistakes in here.  
No room for regrets.  
No room for apologies  
No room to run.  
No room to think.  
No room to imagine what I could have done, should have done  
There's just bone and meat and blood and sweat, and hit after hit, locked together, waiting for an opening

(MORE)

HALO (CONT'D)

or the bell  
or to see who breaks first—they...  
Or me.

KYLE and GINA walk to the middle of the stage--GINA in gloves, KYLE wearing kickboxing strike pads HALO watches as they begin to spar--a routine of punches, kicks, and knee strikes that builds in speed, intensity, and sheer violence.

KYLE halts the training when he sees HALO.

The lights snap to full.

KYLE

Hey. Can I help you?

HALO

I um...I saw the flyer. The one on the door?

KYLE

For mixed martial arts lessons?  
You interested?

HALO

Yeah.  
Yeah, I am.  
If there's still room in the class.

KYLE

Totally, totally.

They shake hands.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Kyle.

HALO

Halo.

KYLE

Halo.  
It's not actually a class, though. It's one-on-one training  
with Gina here.

HALO

Hey.

GINA

Hey.

Do you have any experience with martial arts? Boxing?  
Kickboxing?

HALO shakes her head.

GINA (CONT'D)

Know anything about MMA?

HALO

Watched a ton of it on TV. Online.

KYLE

Hey--you want to see the best two minutes and twenty  
seconds ever? Google Gina Wheelock vs. Lydia Torres. The  
take down right at the two minute mark? Textbook.

GINA gives him a look like "Please don't do that."

GINA

Any physical training?

HALO

Dance classes. But that was ages ago.

GINA

Ever been in a fight?

HALO

Nothing like this.

KYLE

Hey everyone's a beginner once. (to GINA) It might be  
good to start with somebody from scratch.

GINA

(to KYLE)

We talked about this.

KYLE

I know

GINA

This is my thing. I get to choose.

KYLE

Yes. You get to choose.

From the many, many people walking through the door.

(to HALO)

What um..what Gina's concerned about is that these kind of one-on-one lessons are usually for somebody with a certain baseline / of experience.

GINA

I think you're probably looking for something less intense. We've got conditioning classes. Or if you need something a little slower there's always yoga. (to KYLE) Right? We've got room in yoga.

KYLE

Yeah, sure. Calendar's full of yoga.

HALO

I think I want intense.

If that's okay.

KYLE

This is Gina's thing, so it's her call.

A moment as GINA considers.

GINA

Let's see a punch.

She walks over to HALO and holds up a hand.

HALO

Now?

GINA

Just hit the hand.

HALO punches. It is a sad punch. Not comically sad. Just the kind of hit that someone who's never thrown a punch would make.

HALO tries again. Still not pretty, but there's something behind it. A little hint of something.

GINA (CONT'D)

Stop.

GINA begins positioning her. She moves HALO's arms into place, swivels her hips, touching her casually the way trainers do. It's a little startling for HALO.

GINA (CONT'D)

Look at my feet. Left foot forward. Like that. Hands up, head down. Give them your forehead, not your face. You're swiveling at the waist, right leg's turning. When you swing, your shoulder's coming up to your chin. You're hitting with your whole body. Feel that?

HALO feels out the stance, giving a few practice swivels.

GINA gets back into position.

GINA (CONT'D)

Line it up and try again.

HALO lines up the hit. She punches. It's nowhere near perfect. But it's better.

GINA (CONT'D)

Again.

She punches again, this time with a resounding crack that leaves HALO rubbing her hand.

GINA (CONT'D)

How'd that feel?

HALO

Good. It hurts

KYLE

And that's why we wear gloves. (to GINA) Told you. Natural teacher. So?

GINA takes a long second to appraise HALO.

GINA

Okay.

KYLE

All right. You two can talk details. I'm gonna go dig up a liability form.

KYLE exits.

HALO

So...What do I need to know?

GINA

It's three nights a week; three hours at a stretch. You get up to speed, we start adding to that.

HALO

Wow.

GINA

It's not a casual thing. That okay with you?

HALO

Yeah.

GINA's not sure she believes that.

HALO (CONT'D)

That's...That's why I'm here.

HALO's not sure she believes it either.

GINA

Okay.

HALO

When do we start?

GINA

What are you doing right now?



**SCENE TWO: IT'S A PHASE**

Stools are arranged as if around a kitchen table. HALO and TERRY are at Brinn and Warren's house. If we could see it, it'd be a modest two-story starter home that in a perfect world would have been traded in for something bigger years ago. TERRY's got a beer. There are at least two empties. WARREN is examining TERRY's new cell phone. HALO is standing in the same place, slowly practicing that right cross. TERRY breaks her concentration.

TERRY

What is this again?

HALO

Mixed martial arts.

TERRY

Okay, I don't know what that is.

HALO

It's a combination of things? Kickboxing, wrestling.

TERRY

Like Hulk Hogan? That doesn't look very safe.

HALO

Not like / Hulk Hogan.

TERRY

I know it's fake, I'm not stupid. But I can't imagine you can fly off those--those--whatever. The bungee things. And not get hurt.

HALO

It's not that / kind of wrestling.

TERRY

You ever see the show with his family?

BRINN enters.

TERRY (CONT'D)

(to BRINN)

You've seen it, right?

BRINN

Seen what?

TERRY

That show with Hulk Hogan's family.

BRINN

I watched the first season, but I had to stop. Who puts your family's baggage on display like that?

TERRY

Right? And he was so weird on that show. It's probably brain damage from you know.

HALO

You don't fly off any ropes / in MMA.

WARREN

(to BRINN)

You talk to her?

BRINN

Yes. Whether she listened...

TERRY

She tell you about this?

BRINN

Yeah. Could be fun. Good exercise. Like Tae Bo. Remember, I had those DVDs.

HALO

I'm not doing it for /the exercise.

TERRY

Is the trainer cute?  
Your aunt--she took tennis lessons for two years. This is back before she found Jesus. Hated tennis, but the instructor had the tightest ass in three counties. God, what was his name? Barry something? Barry? Gary?

HALO

My trainer's name is Gina. I haven't checked out her ass yet.

TERRY

Your trainer's a woman?

HALO  
Yes, my trainer is a woman.

TERRY  
Huh.

HALO  
What?

TERRY  
I didn't say anything.  
(looking over WARREN's shoulder)  
Can you fix the thing or not?

WARREN  
Soon as I figure out what you did to it.

TERRY  
I didn't do anything. I tried to drop the Queen of Hearts  
on the spades pile, next thing I know my phone's a fucking  
brick.

WARREN  
Did you wipe the operating system?

TERRY  
You're the tech guy, you tell me.

BRINN  
Warren works for an Internet service provider, Mom. He's  
not a / programmer.

TERRY  
You're the one who talked me into buying this thing. My  
old flip phone never used to do this. It didn't have bells  
and whistles, but at least it fucking made / phone calls.

BRINN  
How'd it go at unemployment? Any movement on your  
appeal?

HALO  
I don't know. I didn't go. I couldn't deal with it today.

TERRY

That's an option we have now? You can just not deal with something?

HALO

I've been in there every week for two months going through the same routine over and over again.

BRINN

I know it sucks, but all the blogs say it's important to remind them there's a human being involved.

HALO

They know. The problem is they don't care.

TERRY

You should have put in your notice and stuck it out.

HALO

You said the same thing when I told you I was leaving Roy. Still think I should have stuck that out?

TERRY

Well, if you could put up with that shitweasel for five years, two more weeks at the Ship 'N Save wouldn't have killed you.

BRINN

She told you what her manager was like.

TERRY

It's not like he got handsy. I'm just saying--two more weeks and you'd be able to get unemployment without having to go through all this bullshit.

HALO

Yeah--unemployment. That'll fix everything.

BRINN

How's the job hunt? Any word?

HALO

Nothing.

BRINN

We can work on your resume again.

HALO

There's only so many ways you can say I no college education and, no, you can't contact my last employer for a reference.

TERRY

You know what? Sheila's retiring next month. Sheila from Safeway with the wonky eye? I'm gonna put in a word. Hey, good enough for me for twenty years. And beggars can't be choosers.

BRINN

Warren?

WARREN

(face in the phone)

Yes, dearest?

BRINN

Isn't your office hiring?

WARREN

No, we've still got a freeze on.

BRINN

You said they were expanding direct sales.

WARREN

Right, yeah. I guess we are doing that.

HALO

Telemarketing?

WARREN

We don't call it that anymore.

HALO

Because people hate telemarketers?

TERRY

Is it just me or are the walls actually vibrating?

BRINN

Elle! Music!

The music drops to a whisper.

TERRY

Elle likes this crap?

WARREN

I know. Last year, it was all Disney. Now this.

HALO

Would you prefer "Let It Go" on repeat all day long?

WARREN

When all her music is ef this and ef that? Yeah, I would.

BRINN

She's punishing me for grounding her.

TERRY

Elle's grounded?

BRINN

That's right, you haven't seen the Very, Very Bad Life Choice.

HALO

Stop calling it that.

BRINN whips out her phone, pulls up a picture, and shows it to TERRY.

TERRY

What did she do to her hair?

BRINN

Atomic Turquoise. But that's not the thing. Check out her lip.

TERRY

Is that a lip ring?

BRINN

No, it's *two* lip rings. And if I find out who pierced my twelve year old daughter, he's gonna walk away with a new hole of his own.  
A hundred likes. She'd put it on her resume if she had one.

HALO

She's experimenting.

BRINN

She can do that without punching new holes in her face.

TERRY retrieves another beer.

TERRY

It's a phase. Girls have phases. She'll grow out of it. As long as she doesn't get a neck tattoo like your cousin Beth. Or get knocked up. That kind of runs in the family.

HALO

How many is that?

TERRY

I don't know. Three? Four?

HALO

Five?

TERRY

They come in six-packs for a reason, you know? Want me to touch my nose? I can still walk a line. Want me to / walk a line?

WARREN

Okay, Terry.

I think I figured this out. But we have to hook it up to my computer to update it.

TERRY

I need a computer to use my phone that's also a computer. Progress, ladies and gentlemen.

WARREN and TERRY go to leave. Right before she walks out...

TERRY (CONT'D)

Barry Freakin' Crouch!

Tennis instructor. Ass that would not quit.

TERRY follows WARREN out. BRINN starts to clean up, disposing of TERRY's empties.

HALO

I get to go home with that.

BRINN

I wish you wouldn't pick fights with her.

HALO

It's becoming a problem.

BRINN

Four beers over two hours.

HALO

Five. Not counting what she had at home.

BRINN

It's Mom. It's just the way she is. You just notice it more because you're living with her again.

Hey-- I didn't want to get into this in front of Warren, but did you have a conversation with Elle where you told her it was okay to get a lipring?

HALO

No. I definitely never said she should get one.

BRINN

But you did have a conversation.

HALO

She found one of our old yearbooks and saw I had some piercings and asked if they hurt. I said, yeah, but the pain's temporary and afterwards they, you know, feel kinda good.

BRINN

They feel kinda good?

HALO

They do.

BRINN

You don't tell *her* that.

HALO

What was I supposed to do?

BRINN

Lie. That is what you do with children.



HALO

She's not a child. And she's my niece. I'm not lying to her.

BRINN

She is right at that age where things start to get complicated. I don't want her to make bad choices now and end up ruining her life.

HALO

Is that what you told her? That getting a couple piercings is going to ruin her life?

BRINN

You know what--forget it. I don't want to fight about this.

WARREN enters.

WARREN

Fight about what?

BRINN

We're not fighting.  
What's up?

WARREN

Terry doesn't remember her Apple password.

HALO & BRINN

NeilDi@mond69.

HALO

The A is the @ sign.

WARREN

Please tell me she saw him in concert in '69.

BRINN and HALO shake their heads.

WARREN sighs and turns to leave.

BRINN

Hey--when you're in there, print out an application for the direct sales thing.

HALO  WARREN  
Brinn.  Honey.

                                BRINN (CONT'D)

There's dental. You can finally get that tooth fixed that's  
been bothering you.  
And it's a nice office. Isn't it a nice office?

                                WARREN

It's an okay office.

                                BRINN

And Warren can help smooth over the whole reference  
thing.

WARREN gives her a look. She gives him a look.

                                WARREN

Okay. I'll print out an application.

WARREN exits.

                                BRINN

It could be good.  
And you need something quick. If you have to keep living  
with Mom much longer, someone's gonna get hurt.

**SCENE THREE: CONDITIONING**

GINA and HALO already well into a round of conditioning training. HALO is seventeen burpees in and on the verge of gassing out.

GINA

Eighteen, nineteen, twenty / twenty-one.

HALO tries for twenty-one and can't quite make it.

HALO

Fuck.

GINA

Come on. Four more.

GINA joins her in the burpees, spurring HALO on.

GINA (CONT'D)

Twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five. Take half a minute.

HALO looks like a twenty-sixth burpee might kill her.

HALO

When do we get back to the punching?

GINA

You're developing stamina.

HALO

Right.

GINA

We'll ramp you up. Couple weeks, you'll be doing fifty without breaking a sweat.

Well...there'll still be sweat. But you'll feel less like wanting to die.

GINA (CONT'D)

Sit ups. Twenty-five. Come on, come on. Stop for too long, you'll never get started again.

HALO begins to do sit-ups.

GINA (CONT'D)

One. Two. Three. Four.

GINA leaves. HALO continues. Five, six, seven--

NANCY enters. The gym transforms into a fluorescent-soaked office.

NANCY

Halo?

Is that right? Halo?

HALO

Yes.

NANCY

What an interesting name. I'm Nancy? From Human Resources? I'll be leading you through the training exercises. Very easy, very brief.

NANCY hands HALO a script.

NANCY (CONT'D)

We're going to do a little role playing; and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask. You are reading for "Compuserve Direct Sales Associate." And I will be "Mr. John Smith."

Whenever you're ready.

HALO mimes a phone with her hand.

HALO

Hello, / is this--

NANCY

You don't have to...

HALO puts her hand down.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Relax. Just be yourself.

HALO

Hello, is this John Smith?

NANCY

Yes, it is.

HALO

Fantastic. This is (a quick glance at the script) Amanda from Compuserve Customer Support...I thought I was applying for Direct Sales.

NANCY

Sometimes you'll introduce yourself as Customer Support. It smooths the way. Keep going.

HALO

Our records indicate that you have our basic Internet package, which provides up to 15 megabytes per second speed for only \$39.99 a month. Is that correct?

NANCY

I'm not sure. Is it?

HALO hesitates and NANCY gestures for HALO to keep going.

HALO

Yes it is, Mr. Smith. And we appreciate your loyalty. Which is why I'd love to tell you about our Fourth of July Firecranker Special.

NANCY

Typo. That's a typo.

More keep-going gestures.

HALO

...Our special would double your Internet speed for a nominal increase in / your monthly fee.

NANCY

I'm not really interested.

HALO

Okay.

She runs down to the bottom of the script.

HALO (CONT'D)

Thank you for your time, Mr. Smith. You have a wonderful day.

NANCY

Okay, that was good. Good tone. Very polite. But you let him off the hook.

HALO

You--Mr. Smith--he said he wasn't interested.

NANCY

We go by the three-times rule here. No doesn't necessarily mean no. If you keep them on the line long enough, you can coax them from a hard no to a soft yes. Or get them to sign up for a 30-day trial, which is almost as good. Usually they don't remember to cancel.

If they seem resistant, hit on how brief the call will be. Right here. (she points to a place in the script) Then keep right on going. If they try to break away again, go right to the streaming quality.

HALO

(finding the place in the script)

Do you watch a lot of movies online? It bet it stalls sometimes, doesn't it?

NANCY

Exactly. People will almost always answer a yes or no question. There's an instinctual desire to please. So...Yes, it does stall.

HALO

A lot of time that's because so many people are using the service at once. With this new package, you'd get top priority for any high-definition video streaming. You'd be put right to the front of the line...Does it really work that way?

NANCY

Not really. But it makes people feel special. Now let's move on to the next scenario.

The office slips away and the gym returns.

GINA and HALO are doing planks. Eventually GINA stops and adjusts HALO's form.

GINA

Planks. One minute.

HALO

I finally watched your last match.  
Kyle was right.  
That was pretty amazing.

GINA

Thanks.

HALO

But that last shot to the face?  
That was brutal.  
Ever get used to it?  
Taking hits like that?

GINA

Nope.

HALO

But after a while.  
Does it hurt less?

GINA

Nope. That shit accumulates, too.

HALO

When's your next fight?

GINA

Whenever they find me one.

HALO

Find you one?

GINA

Already fought everyone in my weight class.

HALO

What are you going to do?

GINA

Kyle says I could go pro. Need at least one more win, though.

HALO

You need a win, but you can't get a fight.

GINA

Therein lies the paradox.  
But you don't have to worry about that.  
All you have to worry about is planking without shivering like a chihuahua.

HALO straightens her plank.

GINA steps away. NANCY appears. The gym becomes the office.

NANCY

You're a natural at this. Give it a little time, you'll be zipping from call to call like an old pro. Now, do you have any questions?

HALO

The List of Approved Names?

NANCY

Those are your pseudonyms. You don't want to use your real name, so you're always Sarah, Samantha, Amanda, Melissa, Melinda -- people find women with that soft "ah" at the end of their name less threatening. Men especially. They've done studies.

Bottom line--be friendly, but not too friendly. I like to call it business casual friendly. That reminds me--remember to smile.

They can hear it in your voice. Try it. Introduce yourself but don't smile.

HALO

Hi, my name is Halo.

NANCY

Now try it with a smile.



HALO  
 (smiling normal)  
 Hi, my name is Halo.

NANCY  
 Bigger.

HALO  
 (she smiles bigger)  
 Hi, my name is Halo.

GINA hands HALO a pair of gloves. HALO puts them on as NANCY speaks.

NANCY  
 Hear that? Doesn't that sound so much better?  
 I think you'll find that in this job you develop the kind of  
 people skills that will help you in so many other areas of  
 your life. I started in direct sales almost twenty years ago.  
 I wouldn't be where I am now if it wasn't for that  
 experience.  
 I'm going to go see where they are with your paperwork.

NANCY exits. GINA and HALO square off in fighting stances. GINA has on mitts.  
 The feeling is that they've been at it a little while.

GINA  
 Again. Jab, cross.

HALO throws a jab/cross combo that is slow and unshapely and just what you'd  
 expect from a student in her first week.

GINA (CONT'D)  
 Straight out with the jab. Don't forget the hip with the  
 cross. Again

Again. A tiny bit better. Maybe.

GINA (CONT'D)  
 Bring that left back up quicker.

HALO  
 Sorry.

GINA  
 Pretend there's a rubberband connecting your hand to  
 you corner of your mouth.

GINA demonstrates.

GINA (CONT'D)

Again.

Again. HALO reverses her hands on the jab/cross.

HALO

Shit. Sorry.

GINA

It's all right. Again.

HALO does it again. Better, but flatfooted and still ugly.

GINA (CONT'D)

Remember to step with that jab. Again.

HALO does it again. She remembers the footwork but reverses her hands again.

HALO

Fuck. Sorry.

GINA takes off the mitts.

HALO (CONT'D)

I haven't gotten this yet.

GINA

You will. It's still days.

HALO

Is it this hard for everyone?

GINA

Pretty much.

HALO

Yeah, I'm guessing not for you.

GINA

I was worse.

HALO gives her a look like "Yeah, right."

GINA (CONT'D)

First time I threw a right cross, I missed the mitt entirely.  
Broke my trainer's nose.  
No joke. Kyle says I'm the reason he can never go into  
modelling.

HALO

Guess he must have forgiven you.

GINA

Yeah, he's a big softie.

HALO

I'll try not to break your nose.

GINA

That would be good.

GINA tosses HALO a jumprope.

GINA (CONT'D)

First thing's first. Feet, then hands.

HALO begins to jump rope.

GINA exits as WARREN enters.

WARREN

Saw Nancy in the hall. She said it went really well. She  
thinks you should fit right in.

HALO

Great.

WARREN

Yeah.  
Look--I went in the system and put down that your  
references had been checked, including the Ship 'N Save.

HALO

Thanks.

WARREN

You're welcome.  
Just do the work; keep your head down; it should all be  
good.

WARREN (CONT'D)

And um...Welcome to the company.

He holds out a phone headset. HALO stops jumping rope and reluctantly takes it.

**SCENE FOUR: YOU CAN'T DO PALE AND BRIGHT**

TERRY's house.

TERRY and BRINN are walking the perimeter examining the walls. HALO is getting ready to go to the gym.

BRINN

What about a light ochre?

TERRY

What's that?

BRINN

It's like an orangish brown.

TERRY

Orange?

BRINN

Light orange.

TERRY

I don't want to live inside a pumpkin.

BRINN

What about blue?

TERRY

It's already blue. The point is to make a change. I want something pale and bright.

BRINN

You can't do pale *and* bright.

TERRY

Yes, you can. I have swatches from Home Depot. It's um...Oh, what's the name? They have such weird names. (to HALO) What's the name of that yellow?

HALO

Muted Sunbeams.

TERRY

That's it! Muted Sunbeams in the kitchen. Some kind of green in the bathroom.

BRINN

If you know what you want, why ask me to come over?

TERRY

Because I want a second opinion. This one's never around these days. When she comes home, she smells like a pile of dirty socks.

HALO

You do a hundred burpees, see how you smell.

TERRY

You should watch out. You don't want to get too muscly. A little bit is fine. Too much on a woman is just ugly. Now the big question is mint or avocado in the bathroom. (to HALO) Which did you like better?

HALO

I honestly don't care.

TERRY

You live here now, too. You should have a say.

HALO

They're both green.

TERRY

They're very different greens. Mint is light and avocado is-- well, it's like a goddamn avocado.

BRINN

Mom, it's just the bathroom.

TERRY

I read on Facebook that a person--the average person-- spends a year of their life in the bathroom. A *year*. Where are my goddamn swatches.

HALO

Have you checked the bathroom?

TERRY

Son of a bitch. I taped them to the wall.

TERRY exits.

BRINN

Jesus Christ. When can you afford to get your own place again.

HALO

Roy pretty much burned my credit rating to the ground before he left. Every place I look wants a security deposit plus three months, so...Who knows.

TERRY

(from off-stage)

Found 'em!

BRINN

When did she start giving a crap about her walls?

HALO

Safeway cut her hours.

BRINN

How many?

HALO

Couple a week. But you know how she gets.

BRINN

Maybe it'll be good for her. She hasn't redecorated since she kicked Dad out.

HALO

Aside from throwing all his stuff out on the lawn.

BRINN

Maybe there'll be less setting things on fire this time.

TERRY

(from offstage)

I think the mint, but I'm not sure!

HALO

What happens when she retires?

BRINN

They'll have to drag her away from the register.

HALO

Okay, then what happens when they cut all her hours?  
You think she drinks now...

BRINN

What can we do about it?

HALO

I don't know.

BRINN

I could start taking her to yoga.

HALO gives her a look.

BRINN (CONT'D)

Yeah, I don't know either.

HALO

I gotta go. I can't handle any more swatches.

BRINN

Hang on a sec. I want to ask you something.  
I'm thinking about going back to work.  
I was thinking maybe the outlets. Van Huesen's hiring.  
It'd take a lot of pressure off us if I was bringing in money,  
too.

HALO

You should.

BRINN

Yeah? It'll be good to get out, right? Have something else in  
my life.

HALO

Absolutely. What are you waiting for?

BRINN

I don't know. Elle's having trouble in school. I don't know if  
it's a good time.

HALO

She'll be fine. It'll be good for her to see you doing  
something new.



BRINN

Right. Good. I'll drop off an application later today.

TERRY

(from off-stage)

Girls!

BRINN

Run. Escape while you can.

**SCENE FIVE: SORRY**

The gym. Training. GINA is holding a kick-pad. HALO is throwing kicks into it.

GINA

Let's see it.

HALO kicks. It's a shallow, weak thing.

GINA (CONT'D)

For real?

HALO

Sorry.

Kick.

GINA

Leg up.

HALO

Sorry.

Kick.

Kick.

GINA

Kick with your hip.

HALO

Sorry.

Kick.

GINA

Good.

Kick.

Kick.

GINA (CONT'D)

Hip.

HALO

Sorry.

Kick.

GINA

Right above my knee.

Kick.

Kick.

GINA (CONT'D)

Kick through.

A nice hard kick.

HALO pauses to rub some feeling back into her leg.

GINA (CONT'D)

Good, but you're dropping your left. And if you say sorry again, you're doing a hundred crunches.

HALO almost replies "Sorry."

GINA (CONT'D)

Take a second. Walk it off.

HALO

I'm having gym class flashbacks.  
"Walk it off, Preston. Don't be such a pussy."

GINA

Yeah, Mr. Loche was a douchebag.

HALO stops and stares at her

GINA (CONT'D)

You know we went to high school together, right?

HALO

No.

GINA

Yeah.

HALO  
Aaronsville?

GINA  
Yeah. Go Hawks.

HALO  
I was 2004

GINA  
I know. I was 2005. I mean, I was supposed to be 2005.  
Car accident my junior year.

HALO  
Huh...Was it that thing that happened at the intersection  
right outside the school? Where 273 meets--what is that  
street? Razorback?

GINA  
Yeah.

HALO  
I remember being in class and hearing that happen.

GINA  
Guy ran a stop sign and T-boned me.

HALO  
That was awful. I remember the cars being just shredded.

GINA nods.

GINA  
Yeah, it was pretty bad.

HALO  
I still don't remember you, though.

GINA  
No big deal.

HALO  
It's not like it was a big school.

GINA  
I looked a lot different.

HALO

Different how?

GINA

Like a hundred pounds different.

HALO

Wow.

Good for you. Was it because of the MMA?

GINA

No, it was mostly the oxy.

HALO gives another of those "what the fuck" stares.

GINA (CONT'D)

Accident messed up my back. They prescribed oxy. I liked it a little too much. About five years too much.

HALO

I'm sorry. I had no idea.

GINA

That's all right. I don't usually wear my Recovering Opioid Fiend T-Shirt.

HALO

Right.

GINA

Come on. Back to work.

GINA lifts the pad on the other side.

HALO

Okay.

That's really cool, though. That you went from that to where you are now. That must have been really hard.

GINA tries to choose between a simple "Thank you" and telling her a little about just how hard it was. Instead she ends up saying...

GINA

Yeah. It was.

But that is not important.

(MORE)

GINA (CONT'D)

What's important is that you can throw a kick without totally destroying your sense of self worth or some shit.

GINA lifts the pad on the other side.

HALO kicks.

GINA (CONT'D)

Good.

Kick.

GINA (CONT'D)

Good.

Kick.

GINA (CONT'D)

Leg's dropping.

HALO

Sorry.

GINA puts down the pad.

HALO (CONT'D)

Seriously?

GINA shrugs.

HALO drops and starts doing crunches.

GINA

One. Two. Three. Four.

**SCENE SIX: PERSONAL CALLS**

HALO at work. She's sporting a wireless headset. When she talks to customers, she smiles. When she talks to BRINN, not so much. The Customers cannot be heard.

HALO

Hi, this is Amanda from Compuserve, how are you today?

*CUSTOMER 1*

*I'm okay.*

Great. Our records indicate that you have our basic Internet package, which / provides up to...

*CUSTOMER 1 (CONT'D)*

*Not interested.*

HALO

Okay, thank / you.

They hang up.

Autodial.

HALO (CONT'D)

Hi, this is Amanda from Compuserve. How are / you today?

Hang up.

Autodial.

HALO (CONT'D)

Hi, this is Amanda from Compuserve, how are you / today?

*CUSTOMER 2*

*Who? Who's this?*

HALO

This is Amanda calling from / Compuserve.

*CUSTOMER 2*

*I'm sorry, who?*

HALO

Amanda. From Compuserve?

*CUSTOMER 2*

*I'm sorry, there's nobody here by that name.*

HALO

No, I'm calling / from--

Hang up.

BRINN

Are you still there?

HALO

Yeah. Sorry. They record call frequency. I go thirty seconds without making a call, I get flagged.

BRINN

So tell me what I'm supposed to do.

HALO

It doesn't sound like there's anything you can do.

BRINN

I can get her a wig.

HALO

They'll tear her apart at school.

BRINN

Like being the bald girl is better.  
I can't believe she shaved her head. I told her I was sick of the clown hair and I was making her dye it back and my dumbass daughter shaves her head.

Did she tell you she was going to do this?

HALO

No. Of course not.

BRINN

You'd tell me if she did, right?



HALO

Yes. Hang on.

Hi, this is Amanda from Compuserve. How are you today?

*CUSTOMER 3*

I'm doing just fine.

HALO

That's great. Do you have a minute to talk about your Internet Service?

*CUSTOMER 3*

*Sure.*

HALO

Okay. I see that you have our / basic package--

*CUSTOMER 3*

*You have a really nice voice.*

HALO

Thank you. Um...You have a nice voice, too.  
I uh...I see you have our basic package for \$39.95 / a month.

*CUSTOMER 3*

*Are you wet?*

HALO

I'm sorry, what was that?

*CUSTOMER 3*

*You sound like your pussy's real / wet.*

HALO hangs up.

HALO

Ugh.

She takes a moment to shake it off.

HALO (CONT'D)

I'm back.

BRINN

I have to cancel the interview with Van Heusen.

HALO

Don't do that.

BRINN

I can't go back to work now. Not with things like this with Elle.

HALO

Mom worked and we were fine. Mostly.

BRINN

Yeah, and she didn't know half the things we got up to.

Damn it. We already did the credit card math.

I'd kill for just one night away. Just one where I didn't have to think about the house or the bills or my family. That sounds terrible, doesn't it?

HALO looks at her phone. She has another incoming call.

HALO

No, of course not. Look--I have another call. Can you hang on / a minute?

BRINN

No, no, no. Go. Do your job. I shouldn't be bothering you at work anyway.

BRINN hangs up.

HALO switches to another call.

HALO

Hey.

No, it's okay. How are you doing?

Yeah.

Yeah, I was just talking to her.

Yeah, she's pretty upset, but you know. She'll get over it. I did a lot worse and Mom-Mom still talks to me.

No, no. I think it looks fine.

I'm serious. You have a good skull for it. I mean, I liked the Atomic Turquoise, too.

(MORE)

HALO (CONT'D)

No.

No, she does not talk about you that way. They love you.

Both your parents love you.

Your Mom's just worried, that's all. She really wants you to, you know, do well in school. Go to college.

I know. I didn't like school much. But you're a lot smarter than me, okay? And things are...things are a lot harder if...if you don't go to college. It's just...It's hard, okay?

And don't worry about your Mom. She's just a little stressed right now. Adults get overwhelmed, too. She just needs a solid night off. Maybe I can help.

NANCY enters, though HALO doesn't see her.

HALO (CONT'D)

Yeah, sure. A night out, a little distance. She won't care if you're bald or--

NANCY

Halo?

HALO

I have to go, okay? But call me later. Or text me or...I gotta run.

She hangs up.

HALO (CONT'D)

Sorry. My niece.

NANCY

In general, personal calls should be made on your break. I think we went over that your first day. That's what those 15 minutes are for. Unless it's an emergency. Exceptions are made for emergencies.

HALO

Yes, ma'am.

NANCY

Do you still have your copy of the handbook? I can get you another one.

HALO

No, ma'am.

NANCY

There are rules for a reason.

HALO

I know. It won't happen again.

NANCY

You know, you've almost been here a little while now. Are you liking it? The work?

HALO

Yes.

NANCY

Good.

I was looking at your numbers the other day. Your hang up rate's a little high, but your retention numbers are right up there. And you have a wonderful phone voice when you try.

I did notice that you haven't stepped up when we've had weekend overtime opportunities. Those shifts pay time and a quarter, you know? And the bosses upstairs--they notice when employees lean in.

I know this might feel like a thankless job. But good work gets noticed. If you choose to, I think you could have a real future here.

HALO nods.

NANCY (CONT'D)

There's another reason I encourage employees to smile. The thing about smiling: if you do it long enough, eventually you don't have to pretend. That's how you actually feel. They've done studies.

I'll let you get back to work.

**SCENE SEVEN: ONE NIGHT OUT**

HALO at BRINN's house. Both are getting dressed for an evening out.

BRINN

How's this top?

HALO

It's good.

BRINN

You're not even looking. For real--does this make me look chunky?

HALO

You look great.

BRINN

Thank you. You're a rockstar, have I told you that? This is all I wanted. Warren's watching Elle and I have no curfew.

HALO

I have training at 7AM.

BRINN

On a Saturday? That's ridiculous.

HALO

I just can't do a super late night.

BRINN

Blow it off.

HALO

I don't want to.

BRINN

What if you get lucky?

HALO

Yeah, no.

BRINN

Come on. You've got to start again sometime.

HALO

I really don't.

BRINN

How long's it been since...

HALO

It's been none of your damn business.

BRINN

Better watch out. That shit closes up if you don't use it.

HALO

Thanks to the wonders of modern technology, I don't need a man for that.

BRINN

There's the line.

HALO

Progress.

BRINN

Crossed it without even looking.

Hey--remember how we used to sneak out to the Bluebird? Take over the jukebox until closing time? You loved dancing so much, I had to drag you out the door.

HALO

Got your fake ID?

BRINN

First round of shots are on you.

The cage transforms into a crowded dance night at a bar. Pounding music fills the space. There's the sense of claustrophobia--of other bodies pressing close.

The sisters dance: HALO with out-of-practice grace, BRINN with a certain give-no-shits energy.

Both are happy to be there. Happy to forget about everything except the music, the moving.

HALO dances with a BAR DUDE. She's grateful to have somebody to move with. He gets a little too grindy and she casually slips away.

BAR DUDE approaches BRINN and begins to dance with her. She responds immediately. By the time HALO notices, the two are pressed together, moving fast, trying to strike a spark.

The song changes and HALO uses the opportunity to pull BRINN away.

BRINN smiles and laughs as if to say "It's nothing. He's nothing. We're just dancing."

The club and the music and the BAR DUDE recede.

**SCENE EIGHT: REGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR**

Later that night (or to be more accurate, early the next morning). HALO is leading BRINN into her kitchen.

HALO

Don't forget. Advil and lots of water.

BRINN

I got it, I got it. I gotta fill the thing. The thing? The Brita.

HALO

Do you want me / to get it.

BRINN

No, no, no, I got it.  
Hey, did you have fun?

HALO

Yeah.

BRINN

We should make it a thing. A regular thing.

WARREN appears in the doorway.

BRINN (CONT'D)

Hey. Did we wake you up?

WARREN

It's 3:30.

BRINN

Oh no. Not 3:30. Gonna turn into a pillar of salt.  
I told you we'd be out late.

WARREN

I know.

BRINN

Okay.  
Then why are you giving me that look?

WARREN

What look?



BRINN

That one.  
I had a few drinks. We went dancing.

WARREN

For six hours?

BRINN

It was fun; you remember fun?

WARREN

I'm just thinking about what the counselor said about regressive behavior.

BRINN

That's not fair.

WARREN

Going to her wasn't my idea.

BRINN

...I'm going upstairs. It's late and I'm tired and we can talk about this in the morning. (to HALO) I'll call you tomorrow.

HALO

Goodnight.

BRINN leaves.

WARREN and HALO are left awkwardly alone.

HALO (CONT'D)

You guys are in counseling?

WARREN

It's no big deal. Working through some things. A lot of people do it.

HALO

I know.

WARREN

Everything's fine.  
But don't tell Terry, okay? Brinn doesn't want people to know.

HALO

I won't.

WARREN exits.

**SCENE NINE: SPARRING**

The gym. GINA is there, waiting for HALO.

HALO comes in--tired, slow, hungover.

GINA

You're late.

HALO

Didn't hear my alarm.

GINA

Stretch out. Then we're going to go back and drill some of those simple combinations. Come on. Session's already half over. Get your ass in gear.

HALO

Sorry.

GINA

Hey.

HALO

What?

GINA

A hundred crunches.

HALO

Not today.

GINA

Come on, you know the rules.

HALO

Let's skip the bullshit today.

GINA

Bullshit?

HALO

I just want to train. That's all.

GINA

...Okay. Glove up.  
I said get your gloves.

HALO and GINA glove up.

HALO

We're not warming up?

GINA

Nah. We'll just skip the bullshit.  
We're gonna spar.

HALO

Wait, what? Seriously.

GINA

Hey, you're the one that's always "When do we spar?  
When do I get to try this stuff out for real." You backing  
out.

HALO

No. No, let's go.

GINA

All right. Kyle!

KYLE

(from off)

Yo!

GINA

Come here!

KYLE enters.

GINA (CONT'D)

We're gonna spar. Time us? Watch her form?

KYLE

Yeah, sure. Hey...It's a little early. She ready?

GINA

Absolutely.  
She is definitely ready for this.

KYLE

Okay.

HALO

(to GINA)

Any advice. Strategy. Something to remember.

GINA

One hit. Get in one good hit.

KYLE

Ready?

A nod from both women.

KYLE (CONT'D)

Go.

HALO throws some junk at GINA then gets in one shot. It's nice, it's solid, GINA blocks it easily then tears into HALO. She dismantles HALO with ease. She takes HALO to the ground, mounts her, locks her arms, raises a fist to drive it into HALO's face...then relaxes.

KYLE (CONT'D)

That's tap.

GINA gets up and shucks her gloves. HALO stays on the mat.

KYLE (CONT'D)

You okay?

HALO nods.

KYLE (CONT'D)

(to GINA)

Ready, huh?

GINA

She asked to spar.

KYLE

My son asked for a boa constrictor for his birthday. Wanted to name it Voldmort.

GINA

She needed it.

KYLE

That's what he said about the snake.  
But, hey--your student, your call.  
You need me, just accio Kyle.

KYLE leaves.

GINA walks over, holds out a hand, pulls HALO up.

HALO, dizzy and breathless, stumbles to a stool.

GINA

You really okay?

HALO

I might throw up.

GINA

You do, you're mopping it up.

HALO

Thanks. So glad you care.

GINA looks at HALO the way you would a cat that's just pissed on your couch.

GINA

What are you doing here?

HALO

Getting my ass kicked, obviously.

GINA

I mean here. With me. In this room.

HALO

Come on. I'm late once.

GINA

You're late and hung over / and--

HALO

I was out until four in the morning taking care of / my  
sister.

GINA

And whiny.  
You had me twiddling my thumbs for half an hour then  
you come walking in like an asshole.

HALO

I'm sorry I was late for my 7AM pummeling. And I'm sorry  
for saying I'm sorry. Can we move on?

GINA

No.  
Not until I know you need to be here.

HALO

Nobody *needs* to be here.

GINA

I do.  
Four years ago, I was living in a group home.  
Figuring out how to beat the piss test.  
Rehab didn't take. Twice.  
One day Kyle comes in, runs a workshop.  
That took.

I'm not saying if I quit fighting I'd end up at my dealer's  
trailer the very next day but...  
I need to be here.

HALO

Well...shit. I guess I can't compete.

GINA

It's not a competition. / I just want to train somebody who  
needs this, too.

HALO

What I'm saying is, if I wanted somebody to make me feel  
like shit, I've got a lot of places I can go.  
I don't need you.

HALO turns her back and walks away.

**SCENE TEN: CUTTING HOURS**

HALO sitting at home, drinking a beer. TERRY is on Halo's cell.

TERRY

Yes.

Yes.

Of course.

I do. I understand you have to balance the schedule, but I have five fewer hours this period.

No, No, I know it varies a little. But it was three fewer a month ago and it never went back up, so when you add that up, I'm working eight hours less a period? That seems like a lot. And I know Dianne was seeing the same...well, the same trend and—

Yes. I just think that, you know, with seniority, if it comes down to one person's preferences over another's, that um...What was that?

Well, yes.

Yes, I understand and I appreciate it, but...

No, no I don't want to do that.

No, I...I'm sure.

Yes, we can do that. Thank you. Goodbye.

TERRY stares at the phone like it's a lump of shit.

HALO

No luck?

TERRY

We're gonna revisit it next month. Which is management for get the fuck off the phone, darlin', you're wasting my time.

HALO

But it's a thing, right? Like it's a real pattern.



TERRY

Oh no. It's a coincidence the people nearing pension time are the ones losing hours. But I brought that up and she explained they're just thinking about our health. Poor old souls on our feet all day. Conscientious fucks.

HALO

What about the union?

TERRY

Please, they caved fighting for a buck-fifty raise. You think they're gonna give a shit about this?  
How do I get back to the phone?

HALO

Just swipe and it's at the bottom.

TERRY

I've got to get Warren to fix my phone again.  
Okay, I did something. There's a—Is this a text? "Still ok if I come. Going to ask Mom."

HALO

Elle messaging me.

HALO takes back the phone.

HALO (CONT'D)

She asked if she could stop by the gym during training.

TERRY

That's a brilliant idea. Teach a thirteen year old how to pile drive somebody.

HALO

She just wanted to watch.

TERRY

Uh-huh. Monkey see, monkey do. You gonna tell her you're not doing that anymore?

HALO continues staring at the message.

TERRY (CONT'D)

Come on, hurry up. I gotta call Dianne.

HALO hands her the phone back.

TERRY (CONT'D)

You gonna answer her?

HALO

Later.

TERRY

Shit. What's Dianne's number? All my numbers are in my  
goddamn dead-ass phone.

TERRY exits.

**SCENE ELEVEN: WHERE DO YOU GET THE NERVE**

HALO at work, headset affixed, the middle of a long evening overtime shift.

Autodial. Pick up. MRS. WILSON's lines cannot be heard.

HALO

(smiling)

Good evening, is Mrs. Wilson there?

MRS. WILSON

*Speaking.*

HALO

Mrs. Wilson, hello! This is Amanda from Compuserve. How are you this evening?

MRS. WILSON

*I'm all right.*

HALO

I understand that you're currently registered with Comcast for Internet service, is that true?

MRS. WILSON

*Um, yes / but --*

HALO

And that plan currently costs you \$89 a month, is that correct?

MRS. WILSON

*I'm not sure. I don't think it's that much. / And now--*

HALO

Actually, with Comcast's hidden fees, that is what you're paying monthly. And I think you're right, that is too high for Internet service. Especially unreliable service. With Compuserve, not only will you have faster Internet speeds, but you'll be paying less on a monthly basis. And if you switch now--

MRS. WILSON

*I'm really not...*

*I'm sorry, but--*

*I'm not interested. Excuse me.*

MRS. WILSON (CONT'D)

*Excuse me! Young lady, I am not interested. Also, I don't know what time zone you're in, but it is seven p.m. here.*

HALO

Yes, I--

MRS. WILSON

*I'm supposed to be on a list, but every damn night...*

HALO

I'm sorry / if--

MRS. WILSON

*I should report you. I should call your manager and report you. We are on a list. Where do you people get the nerve?*

HALO

I apologize if I've inconvenienced you, Mrs. Wilson. / I certainly didn't mean to--

MRS. WILSON

*Do you enjoy this? Is this really how you want to make a living? Because I think there are better ways.*

HALO really wants to say something. Really, really wants to.

MRS. WILSON (CONT'D)

*Hello? Hello?*

HALO

Mrs. Wilson, I sincerely apologize for / any--

MRS. WILSON

*Oh, go to Hell.*

MRS. WILSON hangs up.

HALO takes a breath, then dials.

HALO

Hello, this is....

She chokes up. Then hangs up.

**SCENE TWELVE: I NEED IT**

HALO enters the gym. GINA is working on take-downs with KYLE. She's so focused, she doesn't notice HALO at first. When she does see her, she stops.

HALO

Got a minute?

GINA nods.

KYLE

We have to work more on your take-downs. Gotta find a way past her reach.

GINA

I know.

KYLE exits.

HALO

Past whose reach?

GINA

Finally got me a fight.

HALO

Good match-up?

GINA

Not really.

About the other week. I was out of line. The take-down. Sparring too early. That was unprofessional and I apologize.

HALO

Kyle tell you to say that?

GINA

Yes.

I'm not apologizing for the rest of it, though.

HALO

I'm not asking you to.

GINA

I just need to know this means something to whoever I'm training. That it's not just, I don't know, a hobby. I don't want to put in these kind of hours if they don't need it. And that's on me, you know? Other trainers--this isn't a problem. I asked Kyle, and he'll work with you. He's great. I can't recommend Kyle / enough.

HALO

Do you know how long I was watching you before I got the guts to come in?

Once a week for two months; sitting in my car, staring through the window. Watching you work through routines.

And every week I'd get out of my car, walk down to the unemployment office. Explain that I didn't give my notice because I couldn't deal with two more weeks of my manager asking if I was ready to date again; how I deserved someone to take care of me; how he was a really nice guy.

I put up with Roy spending every weekend stoned on our couch for five years, but I couldn't take two more weeks of that.

I know people have it worse. I know that, but these things - they accumulate, you know?

Then one day I got out of the car and I came in here instead. No idea why. Just that when I watched you something inside me...

All I know is, I feel good here. Even when you're making me do a hundred crunches and I want to die I feel good. I feel like this is something I can do.

I don't feel like that anywhere else. Which is pretty awful when I say it out loud.

But I need this. I need it.

GINA

...Okay.

HALO  
Okay?

GINA  
Okay.

HALO  
You'll keep training me?

GINA  
Yes, I will absolutely keep training you. You didn't have to bare your soul and all.

Besides, you've got potential. I'm not gonna hand that over to Kyle so he can get all the credit.

HALO  
Really?

GINA  
I'm territorial.

HALO  
You think I've got enough potential to walk into a cage and fight?

GINA  
Yeah. But you don't have to do that. Most people train and never walk / into a cage.

HALO  
Yes, I do.  
I need to prove I can do this.

A moment of GINA considering, as in her head she already begins planning out what it will take to get HALO ready to step into the cage.

GINA  
Okay.  
You know it only gets harder here on it, right?

HALO  
I know.

GINA

Good.  
Warm up. I'm gonna get the gear.

GINA walks away.

A moment as HALO stands in the space. Then she looks back at her corner.

She walks over, sits down, slips on the headset. She's back in the office.

HALO

Hi, Mrs. Wilson, it's Amanda again. Amanda from Compuserve?

I know. You're supposed to be on a list. I know it's late, but it's when people are home. And it's time and a quarter.

Last time we talked, you asked me a question. You remember?

How do I have the nerve?

I've been thinking about that.

I tried to picture you. I do that with everyone I call. It's a visualization exercise. It's in the handbook.

I imagine you as pretty. Not model-pretty, but put together. You get your hair done more than twice a year is what I'm saying.

I picture you sitting in a dining room: white linen, one of those pretty little chandeliers you see in houses on TV.

The kind that hang right over the table and make the wood glow. You've got a good job, your mortgage is paid off, you've got a basement that doesn't flood every spring. Nothing in your house smells like rot. You're smiling and no one's making you.

Do you imagine me?

Sitting under these godawful fluorescent lights listening to one person after another and their "no thank yous" and "fuck offs." You're right. Who would want this job?

But it's not a matter of want, is it, Mrs. Wilson?

Do you imagine me when you ask me how I have the nerve to phone you up and ask you, very politely, if you're happy with your high speed Internet?

I thought you should know, if you really want to know, that I have the nerve, because if I didn't then I don't get paid. If I don't get paid, I can't save up for an apartment which won't have a dining room or a chandelier or Internet, high speed or otherwise.

(MORE)



## HALO (CONT'D)

I can't pay to get the muffler fixed on my shitty little Toyota that I'm terrified I'm going to get a ticket on. Can't pay to get this back tooth capped, which my insurance considers an elective procedure, so it just kind of aches all the time. Like someone's squeezing my jaw. Can't even think of looking into treatment for my Mom, who is getting worse and who I think is depressed and instead of dealing with that is getting the house repainted in a mint green that looks like the walls on a hospital waiting room.

That is how I have the nerve.

\*

Now that I've answered your question--I mean, I think I've answered it anyway--do you mind if I ask you something? Could you kindly tell me...

Where you get the nerve to sit in your nice house...  
glowing under your tiny chandelier...

Where you have the time and the money to get your hair done regular and don't have to work evening shifts and can be home by 7 o'clock and have more than fifteen minutes to eat a meal that never saw the inside of a microwave...

Where do you get the nerve to pass judgement on me...  
You stuck-up...  
sanctimonious...  
bitch?

**END OF ROUND ONE**

## ACT TWO

### SCENE ONE: I'M NOT AFRAID OF GETTING HURT

Everyone is in their corners, HALO included. That same dim light as we opened with.

HALO

It's funny...I'm not afraid of getting hurt.

I'm not looking forward to it, but I'm not afraid. Since I started this, not a day's gone by something hasn't hurt. Every day, a new bruise.

Pain is just a fact.

What I'm really afraid of is that I'm going to go in there and forget everything. Everything I learned.

You see it. A fighter starts taking hits, they get backed into a corner.. You can see them not know what to do. Cover up; try to wait out the bell. Can't think, can't act.

It happens to me sparring. I get backed up. My whole world shrinks, and all I can think is why does she keep hitting me. I'm begging for a little space, for a little bit of daylight.

I don't care how bad I get hurt. But if I don't leave everything in that ring, I don't know if I can forgive myself.

Lights snap up on Brinn and Warren's house. Elle's music is louder than usual.

WARREN

I cannot. I just...

Who does that?

What kind of person calls up a customer and...and...I don't even know what?

HALO

Potential customer.

She was with Comcast, so she was a potential customer.

WARREN

Is she trying to be funny? I honestly can't tell if she's / being funny.

BRINN

Warren went to a lot of trouble. And it was a good job.

HALO

It was a shit job.

BRINN

Can she apologize? Say it was a mistake?

WARREN

She didn't make a typo. She called a customer and told her to ef off.

HALO

Use the word. We know you mean fuck, say fuck. Also, I'm pretty sure I never told her to fuck off.

WARREN

No, no. You're right, I'm sorry. You just called her a "stuck-up, sanctimonious bitch." Happy?

BRINN

You did what?

HALO

I don't think I've ever actually used "sanctimonious" in a sentence before.

In case you're wondering, that was me being funny.

WARREN rubs his temples like he's trying to banish a headache.

WARREN

I just--Elle! Music!

No change in volume.

BRINN

I'll get it.

BRINN leaves the scene.

WARREN

If you hated it so much, why didn't you just stop going. Why did you have to call this woman up and abuse her?

HALO

Abuse her?

WARREN

Her words. In the complaint she filed.

HALO

That's bullshit.

WARREN

I heard the tape. My manager was waiting for me in my office this morning. "Hey, Warren. This Halo person Nancy says you brought in--where did you find her?"

HALO

Did they play the first phone call? Did you listen to what she said / to me?

WARREN

I did, actually.  
She got snippy, so what? You can't go around being so sensitive.

HALO

Sensitive?

WARREN

Hey, I started in direct sales. I know what people say.

HALO

Yeah, like when they ask what you're wearing? Or if your pussy is wet?

WARREN

That's disgusting.

HALO

Yeah, it is.

WARREN

I know this wasn't your dream job. You think this is what I wanted to do? Middle management Internet salesman. I'm the one guy at my level without an MBA. I've got to work twice as hard as everyone else in my department. I get a black mark on my record, it doesn't get glossed over.

HALO

So I'm a black mark on your record?

WARREN

If they find out I went into your file and clicked vetted. Which they shouldn't. I told Dan that I was submitting you as a favor for my wife and that Nancy was supposed to do the vetting.

HALO

What? You're throwing Nancy under the bus

WARREN

Nancy's been there forever, she'll be fine.

HALO

Tell them it wasn't her fault. Tell them, or I will. The woman has a smile like sandpaper, but I'm not letting her take the fall for me.

WARREN

You've already lost your job. I'm just trying to save mine.

BRINN reenters. The volume of the music has dropped.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Could you talk some sense into your sister?

WARREN storms off.

HALO

You know he told his boss that this was somebody else's fault? A woman from HR.

BRINN

I know. And if it's a choice between this random woman's and my husband, guess who I'm picking.

God. Ever since the divorce you've been so...

HALO

What? Bullheaded? Difficult?

BRINN

Selfish.

HALO

Selfish?

BRINN

Yes. I'm sorry. You're my sister, but somebody has to tell you.

HALO

Maybe I'm just less tolerant of bullshit these days.

BRINN

Good for you. Stand up for yourself. Girl power. Just remember that other people have to live on this planet with you.

**SCENE TWO: GIRLS DON'T FIGHT**

GINA and HALO at the gym. GINA's got the mitts on and is leading HALO through a combination of punches. For the first time, we really see how far HALO has come.

GINA

Jab.  
 Jab.  
 Jab.  
 Jab, cross.  
 Jab, cross.  
 Jab, cross.  
 Jab, cross.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Really slam the door with that hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Jab, cross, hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Hook.  
 Come on.  
 Hit like you've got some cast iron ovaries.

HALO gives her a look like "Are you serious?"

GINA (CONT'D)

Sounded better in my head.

They take a minute. Catch their breathe, grab some water.

GINA (CONT'D)

Did she say anything else?

HALO

Nope. That was it.

GINA

Siblings blow.

HALO

I wouldn't trade her for anything.

GINA

She called you selfish.

HALO

Not as bad as "You can't be so sensitive."

GINA

Gonna put that on a poster. With a little kitten on it. Tape it to the heavy bag.

They move back to the center. GINA raises the mitts.

GINA (CONT'D)

Why are you so sensitive?

Hit.

HALO

Don't be so sensitive.

Hit, hit.

GINA

Don't be so motherfucking sensitive.

Hit, hit, hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Be nice.

Hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Be polite.



Hit, hit, hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Such a good listener.

Hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Don't be selfish.

Hit, hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Why do you have to be so selfish?

Hit, hit, hit.

Break. Circle Engage.

HALO

Be good.

Hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Follow the rules.

Hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Lean in.

Hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Apply yourself.

Hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Stick it out

Hit, hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Grow up.

Hit, hit.

GINA gets through her guard and taps her with the mitt.

GINA

You upset?  
You sound upset.

Break. Circle Engage.

GINA (CONT'D)

Why are you yelling?

Hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

No reason to yell.

Hit, hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Calm down.

Hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

You're being emotional.

Hit, hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

That time of the month?

Hit, hit, hit.

HALO

So cute.

Hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

So sweet.

Hit, hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Like an angel.

Hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Little angel.

Hit, hit, hit.

GINA

Resting bitch face.

Hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Be a good girl.

Hit, hit.

GINA (CONT'D)

Good girls don't fight.

Hit, hit, hit.

HALO

Don't act up.

Hit.

HALO (CONT'D)

Don't act out.

Hit, hit.

GINA

Don't be defensive.

Hit, hit.

HALO

It's just a phase.

Hit, hit, hit.

GINA

You hit like a girl.

Jab.

GINA (CONT'D)

Come on.

Jab, cross.

GINA (CONT'D)

(while HALO is punching)

Hit like a girl. Hit like a fucking girl!

Jab, cross, hook.

Jab, cross, hook.

Jab, cross, hook.

Hook, hook, hook...

HALO

Don't (hook) forget (hook) to fucking (hook) smile (hook).

Break.

GINA

Take five.

GINA goes to a corner and puts in earphones.

A second goes by, she shakes her head, switches songs.

Listening. Another headshake.

HALO

Kyle asked if I wanted to sit in on this judo workshop.

GINA holds up a finger--the one that means "just a minute."

She shakes her head a final time, takes out one earphone.

HALO (CONT'D)

Hey. What are you doing?

GINA  
Picking new entrance music.

HALO  
What have you been using?

GINA  
Welcome To The Jungle.

HALO gives her a look that says "Really?"

GINA (CONT'D)  
I know. That's why I want to change it.

HALO  
Getting nervous?

GINA shrugs. Switches songs.

GINA  
How about this?

She hands HALO an earbud. HALO listens. She's not a fan.

GINA (CONT'D)  
Yeah.

She takes the earbud back.

HALO  
You're gonna kick her ass

GINA  
I know.

Hey, so at the fight? I'm allowed some people with me. In the fighter prep area and between rounds. Kyle'll be there. So um...

HALO  
Are you asking me to be in your corner?

GINA  
Is that weird?  
I didn't even ask if you were for sure coming.

HALO

Of course I'm coming.

GINA

It's no big thing. If you don't want to do it / that's totally cool.

HALO

Shut up. I'll do it.

GINA

Yeah?

HALO

Yeah.

GINA

Okay. Thanks.

HALO

Just had to ask. Didn't have to bare your soul and all.

GINA

I see what you did there. You're very funny.

HALO

So that night. At the fight. What do I do?

GINA

Talk strategy.  
Help me get ready.  
Keep me calm.  
Keep me centered.

Remind me that I've got this.

GINA starts getting ready to fight. HALO assists her.

In her corner, GINA'S OPPONENT begins doing the same.

HALO

Tell me about it.

GINA

Lanky, but a bruiser. Started in boxing. Reach like an ape.  
Trains out of a pretty big gym.

(MORE)

GINA (CONT'D)

Bunch of trainers. Best equipment.  
Never had to sew up a glove in her life.  
Clear favorite.  
But if I beat her...

HALO finishes helping GINA get ready.

HALO

Hey.

You've got this.

GINA and GINA'S OPPONENT meet in the middle.

The fight is choreographed to the monologue. While it hints at the Rousey-Holm match, it doesn't mimic it. It's not full-speed. It's stutter-stop, slow-motion. It's the dream of a fight. The nightmare of a fight.

HALO (CONT'D)

Rousey-Holm. UFC 193. You see it? It's educational.  
Rousey, the champion, undefeated. Holm, the challenger,  
looking to take the head off the queen. Rousey goes for the  
quick take-down. Close the distance, get Holm on the mat,  
match over. Holm won't let her. She's quick. Rousey  
chases, Holm evades. She turns it into a striking match.  
It's the last thing Rousey wants. Second round, Rousey is  
bruised, bleeding. Her face is swollen, purple-raw meat.  
Kick breaks her jaw.

Some people said Holm was hungrier. She wanted it more.  
Anyone ever tell you that? You've just got to want it? The  
look on Rousey's face right before that hit comes home.  
The look on her poor, battered, bruised face.  
She wants it so bad.  
So, so bad.

GINA goes down. And she stays down. GINA'S OPPONENT goes to her corner.  
HALO helps GINA up.

GINA walks to her corner and collapses. HALO tends to her.

HALO (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

GINA points at the mat like "hundred crunches, bitch."

HALO (CONT'D)

I know. I'm still sorry.

GINA

It was my fault.

HALO

No.

GINA

Yeah. Who else am I gonna blame?

It's not her fault. She did her job. I knew she wasn't going to just let me take her down to the mat. I should have found a better way. Instead I let her own me.

GINA shifts and winces.

HALO

There's Tylenol in the kit.

GINA

I'm good.

HALO

It's not the time to be a stubborn bitch.

GINA

I'm not being...Okay, first--there's no wrong time to be a stubborn bitch. And you know I don't do painkillers.

HALO

It's a long way from oxy.

GINA

It's never a long way.

HALO's phone buzzes and she quickly silences it.

GINA (CONT'D)

God, I should have had her. Shouldn't have let her dance around. I should have...

HALO's phone goes off again.

GINA (CONT'D)

Take it.



HALO

It's just my niece.

GINA

Go on. I got a date with a bathtub full of ice.

HALO answers.

HALO

Hey, now's not really a good time.

What? Hey, hey. Slow down. What happened?

Where are they now?

Elle--Elle, if you think someone's going to get hurt, call 9-1-1.

Yes. I know you don't want to get anyone in trouble but...Elle? Hello?

She hangs up.

HALO (CONT'D)

I've got to get back. It's / an emergency.

GINA

Go.

**SCENE THREE: SHE CAN HEAR YOU**

Brinn and Warren's house. Stools are overturned. Elle's music is on. HALO enters, GINA following a little behind.

HALO

Elle!

Elle, are you up there!

BRINN appears.

BRINN

What are you doing here?

HALO

Elle called. She heard you fighting.

BRINN

Jesus. It's fine. Everything's fine.

HALO

She thought you were going to kill each other.

BRINN

Seriously? Elle! Turn that off and get down here!

I can't believe she called you.

HALO

You're lucky she / didn't call 9-1-1.

WARREN enters from outside.

WARREN

Oh good. Just the person we need. Did you call her?

BRINN

No.

WARREN

This is your fault.

HALO

What?

WARREN

Downsizing. That's what they're calling it. Downsizing in middle management. And no one else in my department committed fraud getting their sister-in-law a job. So guess who's gone.

BRINN

You don't know that's why.

WARREN

They didn't say it, but they didn't have to.

BRINN

We're going to be fine. You're getting a month's severance.

WARREN

Then what? What do we do then?

BRINN

I'll get a job.

WARREN

Folding sweaters?

BRINN

I'm really sorry I spent the last thirteen years making a home and raising / our daughter.

WARREN

Don't act like a martyr. Remember--I didn't make you stay at home. You're the one that wanted to do that.

BRINN

Have you been faking it for thirteen years?

WARREN

I did not say that.

BRINN

Because I do remember. I remember before you were a good deacon, when I got pregnant you said I should get rid of it.

HALO

Brinn, you have to stop.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Fuck you.

WARREN and BRINN step toward each other. HALO gets between them and shoves them apart.

HALO

Stop it!  
She can hear you. She can hear you up there.

For a moment, it's just the sound of Elle's music drifting down.

WARREN

Great. Good job.

BRINN

Where are you going?

WARREN

Out.

WARREN exits.

BRINN

This.  
This is what I was talking about.  
But you just had to make a point.

BRINN rubs at her chest where HALO pushed her.

HALO

I'm sorry. Did I hurt / you?

BRINN

Do you even see yourself? You spend all your time out doing this thing; show up with mystery bruises; instead of fixing your own life, you'd rather tell everybody else how to deal with theirs. Sound like somebody we know?

HALO

I am not Mom. I'm going to a gym, not a bar.

BRINN

No. You're worse. Mom just hurts herself.  
I think you should leave now.

**SCENE FOUR: HOW DO I GET OUT?**

GINA is leading HALO through grappling practice. This is all slow, methodical, and down on the mat. The visual opposite of the striking scenes. While the initial holds can vary, it ends with GINA countering and getting HALO into a rear naked choke.

HALO keeps struggling, refusing to tap. Eventually GINA has to ease up.

HALO

How do I get out?

GINA

You don't. You tap.

HALO

Okay, then how would you get out?

GINA

I wouldn't get out. I'd tap.

HALO

What if I got my arm up and...

HALO tries to maneuver, but GINA locks her down again.

GINA

Nope. You tap. You tap or get choked out.

HALO

Come on. There's got to be something.

GINA lets her go. Shakes her head.

GINA

Yeah. Spend the next three months figuring out how you got in that position. Then train so it never happens again.

HALO

Okay.

Okay, let's keep going. How do I keep from / getting in that hold?

GINA

No, no. We've been here six hours. We're done / for today.

HALO

Come on. I'm still / good.

GINA

It's late. I'm beat. I hit all green I can catch the last quarter of the Packers game.

Your fight's not for months. We don't even know who you're up against yet.

HALO

I want to be ready.

GINA

I know.

HALO

For anything. I just...

GINA

I know.

HALO

Can I um...Can I ask you a personal question?

GINA

Now you start asking permission?

HALO

Do you still talk to your family? I mean, are you still close to any of them?

GINA

My Dad died a few years back. Mom's still around. She lives over in Ellery. I've got a brother up in Maine. We see each other at holidays.

HALO

Were you close before...

GINA

Before I got addicted to painkillers and started stealing from them? Not really. There was always a disconnect there, you know?

HALO

Your Mom and brother. They ever come watch you fight.

GINA shakes her head, shrugs.

HALO (CONT'D)

Ever wish it was different?

GINA

I wish a lot of things were different. I wish you'd stop dropping your left every chance you get. Wish Green Bay had a halfway decent passing game this season.

Wish my Dad lived to see me clean.

Look...Piece of advice? You want to prove to yourself that you can do this, that's great. Nobody's going to kick your ass harder than you will.

If you're doing this to prove something to someone else...you're just gonna be disappointed.

Go home, Halo.

**SCENE FIVE: MUTED SUNBEAMS**

HALO at home. TERRY enters like she's just showered and is getting ready for work.

TERRY

I don't know.  
I just don't know.

Maybe I should have gone with avocado. There's something off about the mint. It feels...I don't know. What's the word? Clean, but kind of unpleasant. Do you know what I mean?

HALO

You ready?

TERRY

My shift doesn't start until one now. I want to find those swatches. We can swing by Home Depot on the way. I know, I know-- I'm being fickle.

HALO

Have they told you when your court date will be yet?

TERRY

No. Right to a speedy trial, my ass. It's all bullshit anyway.

HALO

You passed out. In your car.

TERRY

*Fell asleep* in my car. When it was in park.

HALO

Outside a bar.

TERRY

Still in park. Taking my license away for napping. What the hell is wrong with people?

HALO

Did you call Brinn?



TERRY

No. I'll get Dianne to drive me home. I don't need to bother your sister. Don't tell me I threw them out. Did I throw the / swatches out?

HALO

Have you talked to her lately? Brinn? Have you / talked to Brinn?

TERRY

I know who you mean. I talked to her...when? Sunday before last.

HALO

Do you know if they're still seeing a / counselor.

TERRY

Sterile! That's the word. The mint feels sterile.

HALO

Do you know if / they're seeing a--

TERRY

It was a ten minute conversation about who I can get to reseal my driveway. You want more, you talk to her yourself.

HALO is silent.

TERRY (CONT'D)

You apologized yet?

HALO

For what?

TERRY

Anything. Everything. Whatever it is, just let it go and say you're sorry. You can't go around picking a fight with everyone in sight.

A stifled, bitter laugh from HALO.

TERRY (CONT'D)

What? What's funny?

HALO

What happened to you?

TERRY

What are talking about, what happened / to me?

HALO

You can't pick a fight?

Please. This from the woman who walked into the guidance counselor's office and screamed that they were holding me back a year over your dead body.

TERRY

I did not scream.

HALO

I heard you half a school away.  
Or when they stopped the free dance classes at the library. You went to every town hall meeting for a month demanding they bring them back.

TERRY

And they didn't, did they?

HALO

Or that last fight with Dad. He called you a bitch and you said if he ever said that in front of your daughters again you'd tear off his cock and feed it to the crows.  
You never used to walk away from a fight.

A moment when Terry might let it go, then...

TERRY

Well, good on me.  
Where's my prize? Is it the arthritis from punching a register for twenty years? The bullshit hour cuts?  
Where's my prize?  
Know what I've learned? Life ain't fair, and being pissed about it all the time isn't gonna get you a thing.  
Won't stop the bills from piling up. Won't save your marriage. Won't make your back hurt any less.  
Wont get me my license back.

Fighting doesn't help. All it does is make me tired. Like I ain't tired enough as it is. Now, are you ready?

(MORE)

TERRY (CONT'D)

I can't find those fucking swatches and I don't want to be late for work.

I like this color, though. The muted sunbeams. It's nice.

**SCENE SIX: THE FULL NINE MINUTES**

The final fight. Almost.

We begin at the gym. HALO and GINA are both sorting through their gym bags, pulling out everything needed for HALO's final fight.

GINA  
Got what you need?

HALO  
I think so.

GINA  
I'm bringing an extra of everything just in case.

HALO pulls out an old yearbook.

HALO  
Hey. Look what I found.

HALO sits on the mat and begins flipping through the book. GINA positions herself behind HALO, peering over her shoulder, and begins binding her hair in a tight, fight-ready braid.

HALO gets to a particular page.

GINA  
Oh no. The chipmunk cheeks.  
I forgot about the chipmunk cheeks.

HALO  
You were cute.

GINA  
I was...young. This kid thought she was going to grow up to be a veterinarian. Can you believe that?

HALO smiles. She can believe it.

GINA (CONT'D)  
Where are you? Come on, where are you?

HALO flips it open to another page. GINA starts laughing.

GINA (CONT'D)

That is a bold amount of eyeliner. I forgot you had that whole punk princess thing going for a while. You little rebel.

HALO

I was...young.

HALO flips through page after page, moving from the back of the book to the front, shaking her head, like she's peeking into a different world. She closes it and they both look at the cover.

GINA

Aaronsville High 2004: Imagine Your Future.

She and HALO both find this funny. Not laugh out loud. A bitter kind of funny.

GINA (CONT'D)

You imagining your future?

HALO

Just the next three minutes.

GINA

You be ready for the full nine.  
And don't even think about a quick take-down. Remember-  
-it's not the last hit, it's / everything that leads up to it.

HALO

Everything that leads up to it.

I know.

A shared smile.

The braiding is finished. The yearbook is shoved into a gym bag. There's the sense neither will ever look at it again.

HALO stands. GINA begins wrapping HALO's hands. As she does, TERRY, BRINN and WARREN begin wrapping their own. It's a ritual done with careful precision. There is a shift here. Of light and sound and mood. Everyone's getting ready for a fight.

HALO speaks, but not to GINA. She's only talking to us.

## HALO (CONT'D)

There are a lot of rules when you're in the cage. No holds barred is a lie.

I like that. I like that there are rules; and they apply to everyone.

You must be prompt.

You must be at or under weight.

All hands must be taped, all tape must be inspected.

Gloves can only be put on in the presence of an inspector.

You must wear a mouth guard.

You must only wear pre-approved clothing.

No grabbing the cage, no climbing the cage.

No grabbing an opponents's shorts, no grabbing an opponent's gloves.

No small joint manipulations.

No strikes to the spine or the back of the head.

No heel kicks to the kidney.

No throat strikes.

No clawing, pinching, twisting the flesh or grabbing the clavicle.

No kicking the head of a downed opponent; no kneeling the head of a downed opponent; no stomping on a grounded fighter.

No abusive language.

No attacking an opponent during the break.

No throwing an opponent out of the cage.

No spine locks, no neck cranks, no leg twists, no head-butting, no eye-gouging, no biting, no spitting, no hair pulling, no fish-hooking, no timidity.

If you run away from your opponent, you lose.

If HALO ever steps out of the cage, it's here. But she doesn't go far. She's not escaping; she's getting ready for her entrance.

Another shift--the world becomes louder, brighter, bold colors wash across the stage, preparing the space for the spectacle of the fight.

HALO finds her corner. GINA is there waiting.

HALO strips off her sweats, her hoodie--everything except for fight gear. It should be a revelation. She is a lifetime away from the woman who first walked in asking about lessons. She looks like she belongs nowhere else but inside this cage. She is--to put it bluntly--fucking fierce.

GINA helps HALO glove up, smears Vasoline on HALO's nose and brow, pulls out a mouthguard.

GINA  
Ready?

HALO nods.

HALO  
Advice?

GINA  
Get in one good hit.

HALO  
One?

GINA  
Start with that. Go from there.

GINA hands HALO the mouthguard then kisses her on the forehead.

GINA (CONT'D)  
Whatever happens, I'm proud of you.  
Now go in there and make the bitch bleed.

Over the loudspeakers, we hear the ANNOUNCER.

ANNOUNCER  
(booming)  
Ladies and gentlemen.  
Thank you for your patience and your passion as we  
prepare to bring you three, three-minute rounds of MMA  
action. Our final fight of the evening will be in the  
women's Strawweight Division.  
Fighting out of the red corner. With a record of zero wins  
and zero losses. Introducing the challenger, Halo Preston.

HALO's entrance music plays. It is an excellent choice. She leaps into the cage, taking a lap, feeling out its boundaries.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)  
(booming, then trailing away)  
And fighting out of the blue corner, undefeated...

BRINN, WARREN, and TERRY step into the cage. Or a version of them do. A version that knows all the skills HALO does. A version that can hurt her just as effectively on the mat as off it.

The bell rings. The fight begins.

It's a blend of everything we've seen so far--from the highly theatrical to full-on, full-speed choreographed fighting. As before, it follows the rhythm of a fight. Circle, engage, break. Circle, engage, break. Faster and faster. Sometimes it seems that HALO may win. A moment later, it's a miracle she's still on her feet. From her corner, GINA yells encouragement.

The momentum swings against her, the world of the ring shrinks and HALO is defending against attacks she can barely see coming. When she takes control, the world of the ring expands and she can see every hit coming a mile away. Each pendulum swing brings her closer to defeat or closer to victory.

The final momentum swing sees HALO defeat WARREN and TERRY, leaving only BRINN.

Almost immediately one of them takes the other to the mat, and it becomes a grappling game. It's a battle of inches and angles. Half mount becomes full mount, then a broken hold, a reversal. It is slow and vicious and methodical and the closest to actual MMA as anything that happens on this stage.

A half-breath where they realize they're equally matched, where they consider giving up. Then they both throw themselves back into the fight and--

The bell rings.

BRINN and HALO stand, walk to their respective corners and...



**SCENE SEVEN: ONE PUNCH**

HALO at the gym, shucking off her gloves, getting ready to pack up for the day.

BRINN at the door, looking in.

BRINN

So this is your place.

HALO

Hey.

BRINN

Hey.

Am I allowed to...

HALO

Yeah. Come on in. It's an open door policy.

BRINN steps into the cage and onto the mat. She begins slowly circling the space.

BRINN

Smells like feet.

HALO

You get used to it.

BRINN

I was just over at Mom's.

She said you were going to keep staying with her for a while.

HALO nods.

BRINN (CONT'D)

Last I heard, you had a place lined up.

HALO

She's barely working now. I thought I'd stick around a little longer. Help her transition to having so much free time on her hands.

BRINN

Elle's been asking if she can tag along with you one day. Watch you...do whatever you do here.

HALO

I said you had to sign off on it. She'd just observe. She'd never get on the mat.

BRINN

You two talk a lot?

HALO

Texting, messaging.

BRINN

About what?

HALO

She talks school, music, TV. I mostly go on and on about training. She deserves a medal for not nodding off.

She doesn't talk about you and Warren, if that's what you're asking.

BRINN

She can if she wants. She's allowed.

HALO

She did mention that Warren was sleeping in the spare room.

BRINN

It's temporary.

HALO

Temporary in which direction?

BRINN gives an exasperated, aborted shrug.

HALO (CONT'D)

If you want to talk. Or if you need advice about legal stuff, I can / connect you with my lawyer.

BRINN

I don't want to talk about it.

God, you and Mom.

Let's be honest, you're the last two people I want to take marriage advice from.

Break. Circle. Engage.

HALO

Maybe you should. Or at least listen. We both know what you're going through.

BRINN

It's different. Warren and I are trying to make it work. And there's Elle. We have to think about her.

HALO

I know you do.

But what's it teach her if you stay together even though you're both miserable.

BRINN

What's it teach her if we give up the first time things get rough?

HALO

I know you don't want to end up like Mom. Or me. But maybe that's keeping you from seeing things clearly.

BRINN

Maybe you never liked Warren and would really love to see us split up.

HALO

Maybe.  
Doesn't make me wrong.

Break. Circle. Engage.

BRINN

I don't want to fight. That's not why I came here.

HALO

Why did you come here?

BRINN

My daughter wants to--whatever--sit in. I wanted to see the place for myself.

Smaller than I thought.

HALO

Yeah.

BRINN

I don't think I want Elle sitting five feet from people who are trying to beat the shit out of each other.

HALO

That's not what it's like. It's not about hurting other people.

BRINN

No? Because I saw your fight, and it seemed like there was an awful lot of people hurting each other.

HALO

You saw my fight?  
I didn't see you.

BRINN

I was in the back near the door.

HALO

Thanks. Thanks for coming.

What did you think?

BRINN

I thought...it was awful.  
When you came out, I didn't even recognize you. It wasn't until the announcer said your name that I realized it was you.

I kept my head down. Stared at the floor. At one point the crowd cheered and I looked up and you had blood all over your face.

HALO

Dropped my left.

BRINN

Next thing I know, she's on the ground and you're on top of her pounding her face in.

It was just so ugly.  
I don't think I want Elle to see you like that.

HALO

Okay.

Okay.

Break. Circle. Engage.

HALO (CONT'D)

How do you want her to see me?

BRINN

What?

HALO

How do you want her to see me?

How do you see me?

BRINN

I don't know.

HALO

You just said I was awful and ugly. Is that / what you think of me now?

BRINN

No.

Of course not. It's just...You are my baby sister. When I think of you, I picture a little girl whose favorite thing in the world are your Strawberry Shortcake pajamas. And then I see you in a cage beating a woman bloody.

I know this is important to you. But I do not understand.

Break. Circle. Engage.

HALO

You remember when we were kids and they told us we could grow up to be anything? We could do anything if we put our minds to it.

BRINN

Yeah.

HALO

You think they stop telling you that when you get older because it was always a lie? Or because it's just not true anymore? We missed our window.

BRINN looks like, not only does she not know the answer, but she's a little afraid of the question.

HALO (CONT'D)

That's why I do this.

BRINN shakes her head like "I don't understand."

HALO (CONT'D)

Because this is something I can do.  
That I can be.  
It's hard. Sometimes it's *really* hard.  
But in here, if I don't know how to do something, there are people to help. And I know if I work at it, I'll get there.  
I don't need anyone's permission. I don't need anyone's approval. In here, I can actually win.

Break, circle, engage.

BRINN

No wonder Elle likes talking to you better than me.  
That stubborn fighter thing. That is my daughter all over.  
That's not me.

HALO

You're the one fighting to keep your marriage together.

BRINN

She's a teenager. She doesn't get that.  
You? This? This she gets.

Break, circle, engage.

HALO

You are the first person I ever saw hit someone else.  
I mean, really hit them.

BRINN's like "what the fuck are you talking about"?

HALO (CONT'D)

I was four or five and we were playing Barbies in the front yard. And Danny--oh God, what's his name. Danny from three doors down. With all the freckles? He had, like, seven brothers?

BRINN

Right. They were evangelical or something.

HALO

Yes! He came over and he made fun of us because our Barbies were naked.

BRINN

Okay?

HALO

I remember because he said "God says you ain't supposed to show girls' titties." And then he said we couldn't afford Barbie clothes because we were poor because our Dad left.

Then you said he had so many brothers because his Mama couldn't keep it closed. And I had to ask about that later, too. He stomped on one of my Barbies and her head broke off.

Then you punched him.

You punched him so hard he fell right on his freckled, evangelical ass.

He ran home crying.

BRINN

I don't remember that.

HALO

I do.

Because after that, we went inside and you took a bunch of Wonder Bread wrappers that Mom was saving for I don't know what and you made outfits for our Barbies. You made this whole wardrobe: bright blue and yellow ballgowns; little skirts for mine. Because my Barbies liked to have adventures.

Not a fighter?

Fuck you.

BRINN

Okay.

Okay, so now I might cry and that's probably not allowed in here.

HALO

Oh, man, it is so allowed.

Other sisters would hug here. But they're not a hugging family.

BRINN

Are you going to fight again?

HALO nods.

BRINN (CONT'D)

Is it...I don't know...Fun? Do you enjoy it, at least?

HALO

I love it, Brinn.

I can't even...I fucking love it.

I'm doing a little teaching here now. Beginner's Muay Thai for women. A whole bunch of conditioning classes.

BRINN gives her a look like "conditioning?"

HALO (CONT'D)

Basically what Mr. Loche made us do but with more burpees.

BRINN

Jesus.

HALO

You're invited any time.

BRINN

Hell no.

HALO

Seriously. Muay Thai's a blast.

BRINN

Halo, I've thrown one punch and that was--I don't even want to think how long ago.





HALO (CONT'D)

Ready?

BRINN nods. She settles into a fighter's stance.

Blackout.

**THE END**