

VENICE LEGACIES

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DIRK 50's, grizzled veteran floor director.
MARIA Early 40's, cosmetologist
LORI late 50's, author and playwright
EDITH 80, artist and retired professor of art
CAMERA CREW (optional)

AT RISE

[SMALL TABLE WITH 3 OVERSTUFFED
CHAIRS SURROUNDED BY LIGHTING AND
CAMERA EQUIPMENT]

[DIRK WHISPERS IN MARIA'S EAR]

MARIA

Why should I feel guilty? It wasn't my fault. It was one of the worst things that ever happened to me. I never felt so—.

DIRK'S VOICE

It's what brought you to Venice, Maria. Venice.

MARIA

You're an asshole.

EDITH

Don't you antagonize my granddaughter if you want to include my story in this little project of yours. I can still pull the plug, Dirk.

DIRK'S VOICE

Read the prompter, Maria. [USES CLAPBOARD] Venice Legacies, today is November 2, 2008. [EXITS]

MARIA

I didn't feel safe at UCSB, so I left during my freshman year to stay with my grandparents in Venice. I was so so lost, but their lives were so so different. I wanted to stay at their studio, but they insisted I stay with them at the condo. During the day while they worked at the studio, I'd wander the boardwalk, usually meet them for lunch and return to wandering the boardwalk until dinner. Lost and hurting, I kinda followed Harry Perry around. He played an amplified electric guitar with a target design while on roller skates. He was a regular and I needed some kind of touchstone. He didn't seem to mind as long as I gave him his space which was fine by me. I was barely in my body. One day, I was about to eat some left over pasta from C&O whose portions could feed a family. I sat on a bench at muscle beach. Such beautiful bodies, so strong, I thought, but what if they want to hurt me? Fear brought me back into my body. Just when I thought I was getting better at just moving on with my life. I couldn't stop shaking. I saw Harry Perry sitting on a bench. Hardly anyone was around so I sat with him, handed him my leftovers and while he filled his mouth with food he told me about how some Hollywood guy felt sorry for him having to swap out a ridiculous number of batteries for his speakers and engineered a powerpack with lightweight nicad batteries that lasted ridiculously longer. He liked telling that story. I'd overheard him tell it many times. Not particularly warm and fuzzy but a good guy. Another day, I was out of my body as per usual, a drug dealer guy offered me free samples of his wares and told me about his night job as a bouncer downtown. I'm pretty sure he'd been following me while I followed Harry Perry. I didn't know what to do with myself and I needed – so so needed escape. Safta tried to get me talking about what happened to me, but I couldn't. So I took a bus downtown, swallowed my free goodies and found peace dancing to house music. I was in my body without fear and I felt like myself again. I thought I found my new home, a niche in an abandoned mansion not far from the music venue. I had enough money to eat as long as I was careful. What a strange life that was. I even

visited my grandparents and talked on my cell to my dad who lived up north. Other than that, the world didn't matter.

EDITH

I was so worried about you, Maria. We all were.

MARIA

I know. I'm sorry.

EDITH

I pushed you too hard—

MARIA

You didn't. I was too lost.

EDITH

Yes. I know that place oh too well.

MARIA

You do?

[DIRK ENTERS AND WHISPERS TO LORI
AND EXITS]

LORI

This is supposed to be a documentary, not a reality show. Trolling for emotion may have worked on Maria but it won't work on me.

DIRK'S VOICE

Venice?

LORI

This is one reason I moved to the Pacific Northwest. I failed at Hollywood. Too much senseless drama.

EDITH

Lori—

LORI

Fine, I'll be a good dog. My lovely niece Maria spent more time in the studio than I ever did. You did. I may have left Los Angeles decades ago, but my mother's studio has held a special place in the hearts of my family and anyone who'd ever seen it. It had once been a furniture store on West Washington Blvd. Left behind were pieces of pieces of furniture and a mountain of headboards. My mother, her second husband and her cousin transformed the space into two loft apartments and a versatile open area that could be partitioned to make art. It was what most people imagine the ultimate artist's studio looks like. It had every type of paint, fabric, dye and yarn you could imagine. There were looms and the equipment she used during her creepy crawler period. She

made large sculptures of colored drips of PVC you could walk through. They weren't especially creepy but they were stunning. In her studio loft, the white walls were 20 feet high with extraordinary art, mostly done by students and friends. My mother's second husband transformed the headboards into kitchen cabinets. Her cousin lived in the other loft which turned into a similar environment but uniquely her own. My mother was an artist but her art wasn't as well-known as she was. She was also a college professor who took artists under her wing. Sometimes they'd work in the studio. Judy Chicago even used the studio to help complete the Dinner Party. I suspect the arts organizations she joined especially liked meeting in the studio. The studio. That's what we all called the entire building. For years the family gathered for Passover. My brother and his family stayed there because it was the easiest way to manage Maria and her three busy siblings. By then my mother had married again, and they split their time between the studio and his condo in the marina. This husband was a successful architectural photographer who wasn't also a drunk. My mother may have helped him develop better thinking skills, but he'd never be an intellectual. Drove me nuts. Maria wasn't either, but she also wasn't such a snob.

MARIA

I'm not stupid.

LORI

Far from it, Maria. But you're also not a compulsive researcher like Safta and me.

EDITH

Your dad isn't either, Maria.

MARIA

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

[DIRK ENTERS, WHISPERS TO EDITH AND SHE LAUGHS]

DIRK

What?

EDITH

You assume I'm here for the attention. I don't need it, especially now. Once upon a time I insisted my work would speak for itself. I'm sorry you inherited this belief, Lori.

LORI

I never thought of it that way. . Enough of an artist's ego to create but not enough to gain notoriety.

EDITH

To be honest, I didn't know I thought that way until the words fell out of my mouth.

LORI

Another behavior I learned from you.

MARIA

Is that why I blurt things without thinking? Most of the time it's no big deal, but not always.

DIRK

Can we get back to Venice?

EDITH

We can, we will, so leave already, Dirk. [DIRK EXITS] We were so young when my cousin and I bought the studio. We had settlements from our first husbands and saved enough from our paychecks to go for it. When we bought the building, it was a mess and Venice was a slum. It was the 1970's and gang violence made the neighborhood dangerous, especially at night. We never needed to call upon Boston Dawna, but at least we knew our local Batman was on the job. Even law enforcement was happy to have her in the neighborhood. Fortunately, once parked inside the fence of the garage, no one could bother us. When we weren't teaching, my husband, cousin and I created art and shared our lives with other artists living in the neighborhood. Feminism was on the rise in Los Angeles. I loved rallying around what became the feminist artist movement. I needed a kind of validation I never got from my family – except my cousin. We joined the Women's Caucus for Art which was gaining steam. We were a force to be reckoned with. I wasn't much of a leader, but I was a good supporter. If my university life didn't take precedence I might have done even more. But I must admit – we had a hell of a time during those years, especially weekends and summers. All kinds of artists rented a space at the studio. Until they couldn't afford it. Venice was gentrifying, and the boardwalk was a must see location for Los Angeles tourists. Each year we opened the studio for the Venice Art Walk that supported the Venice Family Clinic. Participation was a learning curve over the decades as the neighborhood changed. Not that we participated every single year. One of my tenants and forever friend helped us prepare. Her beautiful Italian leather-bound journals were periodically bestsellers. I was so sad when she moved, but at least she lives close to my son so I'll have a friend when I move north.

DIRK'S VOICE

Thank you Edith. Short break.

MARIA

I never knew much of that, Safta.

EDITH

You never asked. By the way, you did good, Maria. Your willingness to do this means a lot to me.

MARIA

You know all I want to do is support you and I can't wait to see the final product.

LORI

You mean the potential final product. This is a fickle business.

MARIA

Whatever. I admit, doing this is way out of my comfort zone.

EDITH

Mine too.

DIRK

Sorry to interrupt but are you ready to move on, ladies?

MARIA, LORI, EDITH

Ready. [THE THREE LAUGH]

DIRK

Begin when you're ready, Maria.

MARIA

Smart of you not to troll me this time, Dirk. [DIRK EXITS I only lived in downtown LA for six months before returning to my mother's house, just north of San Francisco. That was 20 years ago, a lifetime ago and yet not. Especially now. Anyway, both my parents had remarried but lived close to one another. Growing up, my brother and I went from one house to the other. My stepbrother and stepsister had a similar set up. Since we were little we called my grandmother Safta and my step grandfather by his first name, Michael. Michael was also an asshole, but we loved him. Except for maybe my stepsister. His photography was amazing. I wished the pics I took with my cheap digital camera looked as good. He gave me an incredible camera and wanted to teach me how to shoot and develop film. I just wanted to help others feel beautiful, which is what I do now. Just looking at the striking women who walk or skate the boardwalk is so so intimidating. I could never look that good – no one I know could. I remember one year my family put on skates and we cruised the boardwalk and even the canals. They'd finished cleaning them up but the water was still dark and murky. My brother didn't skate – he was into skateboarding. He told me that skateboarding originated in Venice. It was called sidewalk surfing. Not my thing, but to this day, if my brother is visiting LA, his first stop is the Venice Skatepark – not that he still rides a board, thankfully. But he so cool. He and Lori are weirdly alike. They're both creative and a little out there.

LORI

Hey, I resemble that remark.

EDITH

A black sheep's gotta black sheep, even when followed around by another black sheep.

LORI

You made more sense to your cousin than the rest of the family. She may have followed you around, but she wasn't wrong. I bet she dies within days of you.

EDITH

That's not a bet I'd take.

DIRK'S VOICE

Lori, continue.

LORI

I lived in Venice for a year when I transferred to UCLA. My tiny studio apartment over looked what is now a dogpark. The building was practically all women but wasn't the safest place to live, mostly because of how they made their living. I found joy walking down Westminster to the beach where the drummers played. Their instruments vibrated peace throughout my body. My mother gave me a job, although it only lasted a summer. I sat at the large loom, weaving the beautiful shawls she designed. You'd think it would make me feel like an artist, but I knew I knew better than to compete with my mother's talent, so I'd gone into theater but behind the scenes. Like Maria, I knew I wasn't as beautiful as those on the boardwalk and like my mother, I didn't love attracting attention, so I gave up on acting.

DIRK'S VOICE

You said weaving, Lori?

LORI

Right, sorry. Memory space out. Weaving was hard work, too hard. That same summer, I stage-managed a play. The writer/director lived in Venice. Like a few others in Venice, he liked leaving his door open so anyone could walk in, smoke a joint and envision the future. The other actors weren't so inclined to join him, but I did. His warmth, talent and intelligence attracted others like him. I moved in with one of the actors, leaving Venice for Hollywood. Not my best decision. Didn't last long. A few years later after I graduated from UCLA, I stayed with a friend who was apartment sitting on the boardwalk. I had such a crush on him. He was a charmer and fit right into the boardwalk scene. Regulars were usually a bit crazy, but they held their own, whether they were homeless, sold their wares, earned money busking or were just addicted to the boardwalk or something else.

DIRK'S VOICE

You're on, Edith.

EDITH

I made friends with many of my neighbors on Abbott Kinney. Hal had opened his restaurant. Other than one remodel, the biggest changes he made throughout the years were the pieces of art that filled the walls. I consider Hal a friend. He saw me through two marriages, with the reception for the last one held in his restaurant, and the death of my husband. I wasn't thrilled with the idea of renaming our street to Abbott Kinney, but I did have a few years to adjust to it. The change did coincide with better paying tenants which made the neighborhood safer. I bought out my cousin. She had slept with my second husband, but the clincher was her remaining neutral when academic politics turned me into a pariah. Our conversations were civil and brief. She was ready to move on. Around that time, an artist I knew set me up on a blind date with Michael whose reputation preceded him and his photography studio was glorious. What we lacked in passion, we gained in a shared history. We were both Jews who grew up in east Los Angeles. He sold his studio in Venice to one of the tech startups in the area that would become Silicon Beach. The tech boom upped property values even more. No, Venice

wasn't a slum any more. The poor could no longer afford to live in the neighborhood. Times were changing. I bought the building with that future in mind. I also missed the authenticity of the past. Venice was now a little too precious for my tastes.

DIRK

[ENTERING] Well done, ladies. Let's take a short break.

LORI

How are you holding up, Mom?

EDITH

Just fine, dear. I may turn 80 next week, but I still have my brain and I admit, I'm enjoying this exploration – especially with the two of you.

MARIA

I'm learning more than I thought possible. You need to know that you were exactly who I needed when I left Santa Barbara, Safta.

EDITH

Really? But I didn't even trust you.

MARIA

And for good reason. I wasn't trustworthy. I didn't trust me.

EDITH

I wanted to be more helpful.

LORI

Maria was going to do what she was going to do. You raised me that way and my brother raised Maria that way.

MARIA

I hope you also understand that's why I haven't come back to visit.

EDITH

Yes and I'm sorry for that.

DIRK

[ENTERING] Ready for the final chunk?

MARIA, LORI, EDITH

Ready.

DIRK

When you're ready, Maria.

MARIA

I will not go back to L.A. if I can help it. Not only because I'm a busy mom and business owner. It's because trauma is such a cruel bitch. I still feel bad about not being able to help Safta move. I'll have to make up for it after she does. At least I hope I do. She's gotten a little slower, but she's still pretty damn amazing. I so so look forward to my daughter getting to know her. In the meantime, I'll proudly hang one of her scrolls in our apartment. She loves my painted rocks and pics of family and friends. She says Michael would have loved them too. Sometimes I feel guilty for not capitalizing on his willingness to teach me. But he was always so so judgy and I can't forgive what his kids did to Safta. They were cruel – I wasn't there, but my dad told me everything. Michael let his kids – not children, they are Lori's age –believe he was rich. Most of us did. He wasn't. I only learned of this when he died. Was it the changing landscape for photographers that reduced his workload? Maybe, but he wasn't very good at managing money. Safta had basically supported him. Sorry, Safta, but my dad told me. That's another reason why I couldn't be an artist. I remember the few years Lori was incredibly successful even though I've never seen her plays. I know you write other stuff, but as you know I'm more into music than reading.

DIRK'S VOICE

Thank you, Maria.

MARIA

But there's more on the teleprompter—

DIRK'S VOICE

Leave it be, Maria. Lori, go.

LORI

Karma may be a bitch. I'd never known people like Michael's kids, especially when they kicked my mother out of the condo where she'd lived for 20 years. His daughter didn't even want her searching through his address book, physically shoving her away from his computer -- an 80 year old woman. Greedy bastards. During his final years, my mother helped Michael produce two books and pushed him to catalogue his work with hopes of selling his collection to the Getty or some other institution. His kids decided they should do it. When he died, most of his work wasn't uncatalogued because he had been too busy digitally perfecting each photograph. Typical Michael. His kids decided they knew how to turn his legacy into their fortune. They failed. As it was, Michael had ignored a personal injury lawsuit against him for a car accident he caused and ignored. He didn't believe it was his fault. He also had lapsed his car insurance. The case was lost, costing his kids the condo. Karma. For my mother, living in the studio was wonderfully familiar, but at a high cost. The stairs to the loft were too steep. She couldn't shlep anything too heavy so even doing the art she envisioned was challenging. I wanted to be of more help packing to move, but I lived 1,000 miles away with a pack of dogs and cats. Thankfully, her Walter, who had been helping with home projects, came to her rescue. Walter was a typical Venice character – big personality, precarious life skills and a big heart. Not unlike me. Walter was well known in the community, especially the Roosterfish next door to the studio. There were many mayors of Venice, both legit and not. Walter was one of them – a generous soul who asked for less than

people were willing to give him. My brother's wife also pitched in, stayed in Venice for two weeks, doing the final packing. My mother gave me regular updates in the nightly talks we had since Michael died. I'm not worried for my mother – she'll find a way to move forward. But I also can't imagine how hard it must be to leave Venice.

DIRK'S VOICE

Thank you, Lori. Ready for the last stretch, Edith? Go.

EDITH

I know how special my studio was – to me, to family, to other artists, to the community. I also knew that there was no one to inherit it. My kids love where they live and couldn't afford it anyway. Selling it had its obstacles, but they weren't all that hard to overcome. The few months it took to leave were some of the hardest. The studio garage sale removed over half of what was there. The architectural firm was moving out and I felt like I was slowly fading away. If it wasn't for the people I knew in the neighborhood or my work with Beyond Baroque, Venice Arts or SPARC, I would have faded away completely. I'd already done that early in life and I have watched Lori fade from life for years at a time. No, I need to move on without fading. Even Hal was looking to retire. Most of the other artists I knew had either moved on, retired or died. I raged after Michael's kids turned on me. It was all so undignified, although not completely unexpected. But I can't forgive them for what they will do to their father's legacy. Meanwhile, the changes in my body and mind also assure me that this is the right time. Life will look very different. Yes, I'm more than a little scared. My son and his family will probably visit periodically although I don't expect much. Thankfully, my dear friend will help me. Lori and I will continue our nightly phone calls. Yes, I'm ready to move on and Abbott Kinney will move on to its next incarnation.

DIRK

[ENTERING] Great job and thank you. We'll keep you informed as we put this puppy together.

LORI

How are you doing, Mom?

EDITH

I'm weary. When do we fly north?

MARIA

Tomorrow afternoon. My dad will pick us up and take you to your new home.

EDITH

Good, then we'll have time for one last walk on the boardwalk.

LORI

And through the canals.

MARIA

I never understood why people like the canals so much.

EDITH

They're quaint, if you like living in a box.

LORI

Not unlike other parts of Venice. The Fig Tree for dinner?

EDITH

Not my first choice for food, but watching the sun set over the ocean would be lovely.

MARIA

Safta, I need to apologize ahead of time for my daughter. She has good and bad days.

EDITH

Apologize? After what she went through? Trauma does that. Lori and your brother and I also have good and really bad days, but for different reasons.

LORI

The joys of deep dark depression and paranoia. We live better lives through chemistry. You're doing remarkably well, Maria. Your daughter's trauma was bound to trigger your own. Dirk didn't help either.

EDITH

Trauma has its own madness. Time will heal much of it. The rest shapes us into who we become.

LORI

You know what I learned today? We're family but we don't know one another as well as we think we do. [EDITH AND LORI EXCHANGE A SMILE]

MARIA

I know, I'm sorry I don't try to keep in touch—

EDITH

Stop with the apologies, Maria. If I can leave Venice, you can better get to know me – and Lori.

LORI

Maybe. Either way, can we get out of here? I really am so so done with Hollywood.

MARIA

Can't say as I blame you.

END OF PLAY