

AMERICAN GIRL

by

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CHARCTERS:

NIKKI – *a transgender girl, 16; she’s thin and extroverted with a crackling current of emotion running through her.*

LISA - *Nikki’s mom, 45, a cisgender woman; caring and co-dependent, she’s beautiful, but somewhat weathered from years of hard living.*

KANE - *Nikki’s dad, 50, a cisgender man; he has a practiced, intimidating air of danger, but his vitality’s been sapped by his heart condition.*

CONRAD - *Nikki’s brother, 23, a cisgender man; he’s hotheaded, and worn down despite his youth.*

NICOLE - *Kane’s girlfriend, 22, a cisgender woman; young and thin, she’s finds life and those around her consistently disappointing.*

TIFFANY - *trap house operator, 27, a cisgender woman; she’s detached and easy going, gratified by the sense of control her position offers.*

Parts that can be doubled by actors playing Conrad and Kane:

MAN 1

MAN 2

MAN 3

SETTING:

Vancouver, WA and Portland, OR. There are three main settings: Lisa’s section 8 apartment, the home of Nicole’s boyfriend Derrick, and Tiffany’s trap house, where she sells meth. Additionally, there are two scenes in the cars of Nikki’s sex work clients, and a final scene in front of a funeral home. The three spaces are disheveled, their floors and surfaces cluttered with refuse and debris. In the home and trap house, the surfaces are caked, as well, with food and drink, and we sense the dank mix in the air of rotting garbage and the chemical bite of meth smoke.

TIME:

Present day over the course of 12-16 months.

PUNCTUATION NOTES:

A stroke (/) marks the point of interruption in overlapping dialogue.

A dash (-) marks the halting of a thought.

Note: This play depicts real events, and is based on extensive interviews with the people depicted and those around them.

Scene 1

Lisa's apartment. NIKKI and her mom LISA talk as the latter gets ready for work. Nikki puts on makeup and snaps selfies. Lisa has an anxious, needy energy. Nikki is buoyant and has the manic energy of a meth user.

NIKKI

Mommy, I'm your favorite, right?

LISA

I'm not really supposed to / say that

NIKKI

But I am, aren't I?

LISA

Well . . . I mean, don't tell / your brother

NIKKI

I knew it. I'm sure Conrad knows already,
so don't worry.

LISA

I try to not make it obvious.

(worried suddenly)

Nikki darling / there's something

Nikki looks up, frightened, noticing Lisa's change in tone.

NIKKI

What is it?

LISA

You know how we / talked about

NIKKI

Are you mad, mommy? Don't be / mad at me

LISA

Sweetie, please just let / finish what I'm

NIKKI

Okay.

LISA

Vince said you left your pipe and a bag of / meth

NIKKI

Mommy, I didn't mean to, / I swear

LISA

I know, sweetie, but Vince / made it really clear

NIKKI

I'm sorry! Don't be mad, / please

LISA

I'm not mad, darling, but / I'm trying to

NIKKI

I won't do it again.

LISA

You took my van, too, and / kept it out

NIKKI

Are you angry at me, mommy? Please don't / be angry

LISA

I'm not angry. I did miss a shift at work, though, but that's not what / I wanted to talk about

NIKKI

I just lost track of time, I swear. It / was a mistake

LISA

Nikki.

NIKKI

Yes?

LISA

Sweetie, you know I don't like being, um, strict, or / mean, right?

NIKKI

Are you angry?

LISA

No, honey. But Vince is in recovery, and when

you leave drugs and a pipe out like that it's dangerous for him. That's why / I brought it up before

NIKKI

I understand.

LISA

I don't mind, personally, but / Vince is really serious

NIKKI

I was out with dada, and I just / forgot

LISA

You dad kept you out using meth again? That dumbass shouldn't / be doing that

NIKKI

Mommy!

LISA

What? He's the reason we're having to talk about all of / this

NIKKI

I don't let dada talk bad about you, and you don't get to talk bad about him, remember?

LISA

I know . . . This is serious, though. Vince said if you leave drugs or your pipe around again, you won't be able to stay here anymore.

NIKKI

Okay, mommy.

LISA

He seemed really serious about it, too. I tried to tell him it wasn't a big deal, but / he wouldn't listen

NIKKI

It's okay. I won't do it again.

LISA

Alright . . . you know, you could go to inpatient treatment, if you want. We could get you a / spot

NIKKI

I know.

LISA

If you were clean, you . . . wouldn't steal, and / there wouldn't be problems

NIKKI

Dada's not clean, though, and he needs my help.

LISA

But when you stay out for three days, and you take money from me or Vince, it upsets him, and / now he's given you this warning

NIKKI

I'm sorry, mommy.

LISA

It doesn't bother me, baby, but I get worried about what he'll / do

NIKKI

I know. Dada's sick, though, so I have to / help him

LISA

Okay. Just remember about leaving drugs or your pipe around, though. Vince was really firm about / that

NIKKI

Why are you scared of Vince? You're / paying all the bills

LISA

(terrified)

Nikki! . . . He's not here now, but you shouldn't talk about / him like that

NIKKI

You're the one who works. He's just on disability, and he / barely helps with anything

LISA

Please just promise me you won't break his rules, Nikki, okay?

NIKKI

Okay.

LISA

Good . . . Did you design that sweatshirt? With all the tears and paint?

NIKKI

Yep.

LISA

It looks so good, sweetie.

NIKKI

Thanks. I made it today.

LISA

Oh, while you were at school?

NIKKI

I actually / didn't go

CONRAD enters. He crosses and kisses Lisa hello.

CONRAD

Hi mom.

LISA

Hi darling. Look at Nikki's sweatshirt. Doesn't it / look good

Conrad musses Nikki's hair. She turns and tries to punch him, but he eludes her.

NIKKI

You're a fool.

LISA

She designed it. Isn't it cool?

CONRAD

Um, sure?

NIKKI

Conrad doesn't care about fashion, mommy.
He's an oaf.

CONRAD

I'm not – never mind. Shouldn't you be in
school? It's / only one o'clock

NIKKI

I didn't go.

(to Lisa)

I'm sorry. You're not upset, are / you, mommy?

LISA

(worried)

Well, no . . . is there a / reason

NIKKI

I know I should. I just never get myself to
go, you know?

CONRAD

(to Lisa, quietly)

It's because she's out with dad all night, like I /
told you

NIKKI

No, it isn't! Leave dada out / of this

CONRAD

Fine.

LISA

The other kids aren't being mean to you,
are they? Because you're –

(uncertain about language)

You know, transgender?

NIKKI

No!

LISA

Oh.

NIKKI

I'd kick anyone's ass who tried to / bully me

LISA

Okay.

NIKKI

I know I should go.

CONRAD

Yeah, you should. You're smart.

Nikki rolls her eyes. Conrad turns to Lisa.

CONRAD

There's a problem with the sink?

LISA

Yes! It's leaking and / I'm worried to death

CONRAD

The one in / the bathroom

LISA

I can't talk to the manager, because Vince threatened him, / and he hates us

CONRAD

Okay. I can / take a look

LISA

But now every time Vince uses it, he yells. I'm afraid he'll punch the manager if it doesn't / get fixed

CONRAD

Mom, it's fine.

LISA

Okay, good. Thank you.

Lisa hugs Conrad.

CONRAD

It's the sink in the bathroom, right?

LISA

Yes, right down there.

Conrad crosses to the hallway exit.

NIKKI

He knows where the bathroom is, mommy.

Conrad exits. Lisa packs up her things to go.

LISA

(childlike)

Sweetie, I start my shift in a half hour . . .
You'll text or call me before I / start, right?

NIKKI

Of course.

LISA

Oh good . . . I get so anxious.

NIKKI

I know.

LISA

I told Vince, "I think I'd have a panic attack
if Nikki didn't call or text me before I start
my shift."

Nikki hugs Lisa.

NIKKI

I'll text, mommy.

LISA

Thank you, darling.

Lisa crosses to the front door, before turning back nervously.

LISA

You'll remember what we said earlier, right?
About leaving things / around?

NIKKI

Don't worry. I'll / remember

LISA
Okay, good. Bye bye, sweetie.

NIKKI
Bye. I love you.

Lisa exits.

Scene 2

Tiffany's trap house. A few weeks have passed. KANE sits with TIFFANY who counts money and makes notes in a ledger. Kane appears gruff and has imposing look, despite his fragile health. Tiffany is laid back and amiable.

KANE
(seductive, dark)
Why don't you get us some more of that?

TIFFANY
Well . . . I could pay for mine. How will you pay for yours?

KANE
I'll let you treat.

TIFFANY
(playful, frowning)
Oh, sorry. You forgot I'm cheap.

KANE
(laughs)
Well, someone told me you've been talking to Conrad. Just collect from him the next time he visits.

TIFFANY
Ha. He came here looking for you.

KANE
(faux innocent)
I don't know why he'd do that.

TIFFANY
You texted him saying you were here.

KANE

Well, I was tired of him tailing me, so I threw him off my scent. Getting high's not a father son activity, you know?

TIFFANY

He doesn't sound like a reliable source of credit.

KANE

(feigning disappointment)

Shoot . . . I used to do what you do, you know? Deal. Run a house.

TIFFANY

Yeah. Kane Kuhnhausen. You were the shit.

KANE

Yeah . . . It's a hassle, though . . . I just want to tune all of that out now.

TIFFANY

Conrad has a house.

KANE

(rolls eyes)

I know.

TIFFANY

Maybe he'll make a delivery for you.

KANE

Conrad? All he does is talk about what a piece of shit dad I was.

TIFFANY

You just said he wants to spend / time with you

KANE

Yeah, I know . . . let's change the topic, okay?

TIFFANY

Of course. He's moody, too, you know?

KANE

Har har.