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24 Page Excerpt
of
A Wife in the Shadows
by
Julius Galacki

SETTING

Los Angeles (San Fernando Valley, Downtown, etc.)

Late 1946 / early 1947

ROLE BREAKDOWN

Bold face indicates the **first character** an actor will portray. The complete list of roles for each cast member are as follows and are listed in order of appearance for that actor:

Sian O’Hara née **Kara** a.k.a.

The Detective

(played by a Caucasian woman in her early to mid-20s)

Joe O’Hara

Father (Walter Kara) in memory
Yacob Finkelstein

(played by a Caucasian man in his early to mid-20s)

Katrina Ridley née **Ivanovna**

Magdalena “Maddie” Gonzalez

(played by woman of indeterminate ethnicity in her early to mid-20s)

Betty Jones

Barb (Butch Woman #2)
Rosie the Riveter #1

(played by a Caucasian woman in her mid to late 20s)

Dan Ridley

Radio Announcer # 1
Radio Announcer # 2
Radio Announcer # 3 (M.B. Cosby)
FBI Agent

(played by a Caucasian man in his mid to late 20s)

Alexandra “Alex” Kara

Edythe Eyde

(played by a Caucasian woman about 20)

Female Ensemble Actor #1:

Mother (Mary Kara) in memory
Ghost of Mary Kara
Bartender (Bev)

(played by a Caucasian woman early 40s)

Female Ensemble Actor #2:

Cigarette Girl

Neko (Butch Woman # 1) - note however: Neko is the primary role for this actor
Rosie the Riveter #2

(played by an African American woman mid to late 20s)

CAST in Order of Appearance

Played by 6 Women and 2 Men:

Note: **Bold** face denotes primary characters. All other subsidiary characters are played by the same actors.

Sian (*pronounced Shan*) **O’Hara** *née* **Kara**: a housewife with a secret – in fantasy, **The Detective**, a private eye, named Sian Kara, and in memory scenes as a teenage Sian.

Joe O’Hara: Sian’s husband, a veteran of WW 2 with PTSD, later in a memory scenes, Sian’s father, as well as Yacob.

Katrina Ridley *née* **Ivanovna**: Sian’s neighbor, friend and object of desire; later, in fantasy a femme fatale named Katrina Ivanovna, as well as an important character named Maddie.

Betty Jones: a nosy, conformist neighbor of similar age to Sian and Katrina; later, other subsidiary characters like Barb.

Dan Ridley: Katrina’s abusive husband, and a vice cop; later in fantasy/memory scenes other minor characters.

Alexandra (Alex) Kara: Sian’s younger sister, and a novice recently asked to leave the abbey; in memory scenes as a teenage Alex, and later, a historical character named Edythe Eyde.

Ensemble Woman # 1: a middle-aged white woman playing Sian’s **Mother**, Mary Kara, in memory and in fantasy as a ghost, as well as other characters.

Father (Walter Kara): Sian’s father, an invalid suffering from a fatal lung disease, but also harboring his own secrets. Played by the actor portraying Joe.

Radio Announcer # 1: voiced by the actor playing Dan Ridley

Radio Announcer # 2: voiced by the actor playing Dan Ridley

Ensemble Woman # 2: an African American actor initially playing a fantasy character, The Cigarette Girl, as well as later characters like **Neko**, etc.

Radio Announcer # 3 (M.B. Cosby): voiced by the actor playing Dan Ridley

Magdalena Gonzalez, a.k.a. Maddie: a butch Taxi Driver with a soft side, played by the actor portraying Katrina.

Neko: a sharp dressing African-American butch woman, a.k.a. “a hard dresser”, played by actor who is Ensemble Woman #2

Barb: a butch white woman, played by the actor portraying Betty.

Bartender, a.k.a. Bev: the maternal but tough female bartender at the If Club played by Ensemble Woman # 1.

Edythe Eyde: a historical figure in LA lesbian history. Eyde was a secretary at Republic Studios who wrote and personally distributed America’s first lesbian magazine; played by the actor portraying Alexandra.

Yacob Finkelstein: the kindly, partially disabled, foreman at the Hughes plant

Rosie the Riveter # 1: played by the actress who plays Barb and Betty

Rosie the Riveter # 2: played by the actress who plays Neko and the Cigarette Girl

FBI Agent: an antagonist character in Sian’s fantasy played by the actor portraying Dan Ridley

ACT I

(The stage is dark except for an overhead light forming chiaroscuro shadows on The Detective, a woman dressed like a classic film noir private eye. She lights a cigarette. Puffs.)

DETECTIVE (SIAN KARA)

True Detective. Popular Detective. Phantom Detective.¹ Dime stories as overheated as a Buick stuck in Death Valley at noon. But it was the covers of those pulp magazines that were the best thing. Always there was a beautiful dame on the cover.

(The silhouette of a Femme Fatale – Katrina Ivanovna – comes into view behind The Detective. She changes poses with each sentence.)

A dame in peril.... A dame causing peril....

(The lights slowly rise as we can see the outlines of a kitchen come into view. The Detective takes off her jacket. As the monologue continues, she continues to undress, and then she slips on a simple house.²)

A dame busting out of her blouse.... A smoking dame lifting her dress to the top of her stockings....

(The lights fade out on the Femme Fatale.)

But when my teenage self stared at those covers, I didn't want to be those women, I wanted to be the detective. Solving the crimes. Saving the weak.

(Lights up full as she steps into the kitchen.)

SIAN KARA *(cont'd)*

But then I grew up, and once the War was over, I played the role I was supposed to be. The best wife I could be. Still anytime I walked into a new place, I would pretend I was still that detective, trying to discover the stranger's secrets.

(A husband, Joe O'Hara, enters and sits at the table. He is holding a newspaper, but it is unread as he is just staring forward. An elaborate breakfast is in front of him – untouched.)

¹ Actual pulp magazine titles. If projections are used as part of the stage design, then these covers should be projected as she lists off the titles, or at the very least, examples included in the program notes.

² Note: while I think an onstage transformation is the strongest choice, the actress may be uncomfortable with undressing on stage. Therefore, a low dressing screen where her head and shoulders can still be seen could be an alternative solution.

Note: that this kitchen is odd. Yes, it is filled with the latest appliances, but the kitchen is over-filled with these "miracles of convenience". The walls angle inward, maybe even to the point of a forced perspective to accentuate the feeling of claustrophobia.

At the back of this room is a door which is open but the screen door is closed. Note, if the forced perspective is used, then this door would be smaller than a normal door and someone would have to duck to exit or enter the room. Likewise, the furniture would become increasingly smaller too.

But on the other side of that screen door is green grass and blue sky. There is freedom out there, even if it is just a suburban lawn

Sian O'Hara is now a seemingly dutiful paragon of the devoted wife: she busies herself at the counter, then stops and looks back at Joe.)

SIAN O'HARA

Your breakfast is getting cold.... I tried to make you something special –

(He puts the newspaper down.)

SIAN O'HARA *(cont'd)*

Your favorite –

JOE O'HARA

You didn't have to – *(Regretting it.)* Thank you. But, I'm not... hungry. That's all.

SIAN O'HARA

Oh. But... You will be... So, you should have something – at least a little something?

JOE O'HARA

Yes. I... uh... I'm not ignoring you. It's just – I didn't sleep much last night.

SIAN O'HARA

Oh?

JOE O'HARA

I kept waking up. It must have been an animal trying to get into the trash.

SIAN O'HARA

You should have woken me. I could have -

JOE O'HARA

What kind of husband does that? ... At least, I can let you sleep.

SIAN O'HARA

(A beat, takes his hand.) That was good of you, Joe. *(A beat – an idea!)* Why don't you read to me, Joe. Something from the paper. Let my smart man teach me about the world.

JOE O'HARA

You're making fun.

SIAN O'HARA

No. I'm not.... I'm not.

JOE O'HARA

(A beat.) Uh... okay. Let's... uh... look at the front page, okay? Um... Here: President Truman promises to sign a new price control bill -

SIAN O'HARA

Thank God for that. I'd hate to thin down the soup any more than I already do.

JOE O'HARA

Uh, huh. *(He nods, then reading again)* Oh, no. The Atomic bomb tests are continuing on the Bikini Atoll. There was a five thousand... foot water spout...

(Joe's voice trails off and he seems to zone out into the past.)

SIAN O'HARA

Joe?

JOE O'HARA

Uh... um.

SIAN O'HARA

Joe?

JOE O'HARA

(Quickly) Let's see... oh, this one is odd.

SIAN O'HARA

What's odd?

JOE O'HARA

A story about curing women's personalities.

SIAN O'HARA

What's wrong with women's personalities?

JOE O'HARA

(Reading quickly) Um... I... It's this doctor... He... uh.... Oh! It's nothing to do with you at all... because we're married!

SIAN O'HARA

What???

JOE O'HARA

The doctor says that... "some women's aversion to marriage" is the result of an over productive adrenal gland.

SIAN O'HARA

How does he know that?

JOE O'HARA

(Scanning the article) It doesn't really say. But the doctor says you just have to remove the gland and their "peculiar condition" ... is cured.

SIAN O'HARA

(Shuddering) It sounds.... awful.

(Getting up and hugging her.)

JOE O'HARA

My sensitive girl. *(A beat.)* I'm so sorry I've been so distant this morning.

SIAN O'HARA

(Breaking away) No, it's m(e - but it comes out like "m-uh") ... Uh, coffee?

(She goes to the stove.)

JOE O'HARA

Yes. That would be swell.

SIAN O'HARA

Here you go. Light and sweet. Just how you like it.

(He nods - takes a sip - relieved to have a neutral activity.)

JOE O'HARA

It's good.... Yep, really good. *(A beat. Trying to make conversation)* Uh... How is your sister doing?

Alex? What about her?
SIAN O'HARA

Uh... Just, you know.
JOE O'HARA

No. I don't.
SIAN O'HARA

Just... We haven't heard from her in a while.
JOE O'HARA

Joe, when you're living in a convent, you're not making phone calls every weekend. I don't even think they have a phone.
SIAN O'HARA

I'm not criticizing you, Sian.
JOE O'HARA

I'm sorry. I don't know why I jumped on you like that. I must be... feeling guilty. I really don't know how she's doing.
SIAN O'HARA

It is odd. How could she choose a life like that? It's just not natural.
JOE O'HARA

A lot of things aren't natural, Joe. But we still gotta love the other person.
SIAN O'HARA

Of course. I didn't mean it like that. I know it's a holy sacrifice. But still, being a nun? Denying her... her... womanhood?
JOE O'HARA

It isn't permanent yet. She's still just a novice. She always seemed so certain about everything. I admire that about her.
SIAN O'HARA

I admire someone who went out in the world and worked in a factory. Like you did. I knew it wasn't just me and the guys on the line. You were making a big sacrifice too.
JOE O'HARA

I love you, Joe.
SIAN O'HARA

JOE O'HARA

I love you too. You know that, right?

SIAN O'HARA

Of course I do.

(He goes to kiss her. But suddenly feeling awkward, he bobs forward for a quick peck.)

SIAN O'HARA

Joe... *(Takes his hand.)* You're really the best man I know.

JOE O'HARA

(Looking away, or even pulling away) Growing up. Being right next door since we were kids. It was always so easy between us....

SIAN O'HARA

We sure did raise a ruckus, running around.

JOE O'HARA

But only if you're mother wasn't around to scold us -

SIAN O'HARA

When we were playing like that, Joe, I could just be me.

JOE O'HARA

It was good when the world was simple. *(A beat.)* I know... I'm different...

SIAN O'HARA

I'm different too.

JOE O'HARA

No, I'm really... Goddamnit! Sorry. I just don't know how to say it. It's like... It's like... the worms.

SIAN O'HARA

Joe, I - what worms?

JOE O'HARA

You know! When we kids. When we went fishing.

SIAN O'HARA

Yeah?

JOE O'HARA

You're supposed to put the hook through the worm's head to keep it alive longer. But the way it would wiggle and squirm - I couldn't do it. So, you always had to do it for me.

(A beat - she doesn't know the best way to respond. In the pause, he calms down.)

JOE O'HARA *(cont'd)*

I'm, I'm just trying to say, about last night, I... I, uh... *(He looks away. Sees a clock)* Oh. The time. I'm going to be late. Uh, sorry. I really do have to go.

(He takes the paper, but as he opens the door, her voice stops him.)

SIAN O'HARA

Joe, I It'll get better. *(A beat. He turns to face her again.)* I promise.

(They look at each other for a moment. He wants to believe her, but can't find a word to say, then exits out the door.)

Weary, Sian sits and then puts her head down on the table. Perhaps she even cries. Katrina Ridley appears at the screen door.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

Hey cutie. I need a light for my smokes.

(Sian gets up and turns her back to Katrina as she wipes her eyes and puts on a brave face. Katrina lets herself in, and then closes the main door too, and immediately locks it.)

SIAN O'HARA

(Fishing) Katrina, do you really like me? Or do you just need my kitchen to smoke in?

KATRINA RIDLEY

What do ya' think?

SIAN O'HARA

If I knew, I wouldn't ask.

KATRINA RIDLEY

I like you better than any other woman I know.

(Sian takes out an ashtray from under the sink for Katrina.)

SIAN O'HARA

It's such a dirty habit.

KATRINA RIDLEY

That's exactly why I like it.

SIAN O'HARA

Oh, you're so awful.

(Katrina holds up a magazine advert.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

Four out of five doctors smoke Lucky's.

SIAN O'HARA

Four out of five doctors aren't smoking in my kitchen.

KATRINA RIDLEY

Uh huh. And that's why you bought this ashtray, just for me?

SIAN O'HARA

Yes! I was tired of you getting ashes all over my good dishes.

KATRINA RIDLEY

So, what were you so upset about when I walked in?

(As she says the above, Katrina languidly gets up and leans over the sink, tapping some ash from her cigarette onto the dirty dishes. Sian watches her.)

SIAN O'HARA

Nothing.

KATRINA RIDLEY

Fighting with Joe?

SIAN O'HARA

We don't fight.

KATRINA RIDLEY

Oh, I forgot. You have the perfect marriage.

SIAN O'HARA

I didn't say that. I said, we don't fight. Joe is a good man.

KATRINA RIDLEY

And a bad lay. Don't look so shocked. Just face up to the truth, so you can do something about it.

SIAN O'HARA

Some truths should just stay hidden.

KATRINA RIDLEY

You're just saying that because you're supposed to. I *know* you don't believe it.

SIAN O'HARA

How do you *know* what I believe?

(Katrina uncrosses and re-crosses her legs. Smiles wickedly, playing with the fabric by her cleavage.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

Just a feeling. Something in your eyes.

SIAN O'HARA

Windows to my soul?

KATRINA RIDLEY

I was thinking a little lower. *(A beat.)* I'm teasing you. You're such a good girl.

SIAN O'HARA

Not as good as my sister Alex.

KATRINA RIDLEY

Nuns don't count.

(Katrina playfully touches Sian's arm. Sian sees something on her arm.)

SIAN O'HARA

That from Dan?

KATRINA RIDLEY

No. It was an accident.

SIAN O'HARA

If you're going to use cover-up, don't let any of the black and blue show through. Here, let me fix it for you.

(Sian takes make-up out of her purse and gently fixes the bruise with cover-up. Katrina winces a little.)

SIAN O'HARA

It's still sore?

KATRINA RIDLEY

A little. (*A beat.*) He just gets carried away sometimes. He has too much energy when he gets off work. Sometimes that's real good. Real good. And sometimes, well It was an accident, like I said.

SIAN O'HARA

(*Skeptical.*) Uh huh.... I wish I could do something about it.

BETTY JONES

(*Lightly knocking, then from outside the door*) Yoo hoo. Yoo hoo. Sian? Sian? It's Betty from next door.

KATRINA RIDLEY

Oh God. Don't let her in.

SIAN O'HARA

Stop. (*She opens the door.*) Hi Betty.

BETTY JONES

Sian, I need some sugar, I promise I'll replace it the next - oh, Katrina is here too.

SIAN O'HARA

I can spare a cup.

KATRINA RIDLEY

(*To Betty*) Will you really?

BETTY JONES

Will I really what?

KATRINA RIDLEY

Replace what you borrow.

BETTY JONES

Oh, you're one to speak

KATRINA RIDLEY

I am one to talk. See my lips? They're moving.

SIAN O'HARA

Here's your sugar, Betty.

BETTY JONES

(Sitting. Betty makes a face at the smoke wafting from the cigarette in the ashtray. She coughs a little) You see Katrina, Sian and I understand, we have a duty to make a nice home. A comfortable home. But you. You act like you're upset the War is over, and you'd rather be back, gallivanting in the WAVES.

(Betty takes the wafting cigarette and puts it out.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

You mean like teaching cadets how to shoot a 50-millimeter machine gun?

SIAN O'HARA

(Stopping Betty from responding.) Now, Betty, I miss working at the Hughes Aircraft plant. So judging Katrina is... like judging me! *(Pushing the cup of sugar in her hand.)* And I'm sure whatever you were baking, needs this sugar right now! *(Sian goes to the kitchen door and holds it open.)*

BETTY JONES

No, I am mortified. I did not mean you, Sian. You have to believe that. We all did our patriotic duty during the war. I'm talking about Now. We understand... just like the papers are saying: our new duty is to support our husbands and start families. *(She finally goes through the door.)* And I WILL replace what I borrowed.

SIAN O'HARA

I believe you. It's fine. Don't worry about it.

BETTY JONES

(She leans in and whispers to Sian.) You have a devil on your left shoulder, but I insist on being the angel perched on your right. *(Louder.)* You can count on me.

SIAN O'HARA

I know I can.

(Betty exits. Sian sits and she and Katrina laugh. Then suddenly, Katrina stops.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

You forgot to lock the door.

SIAN O'HARA

It's fine.

KATRINA RIDLEY

No, it's not.

(Katrina gets up and locks it.)

SIAN O'HARA

You're over reacting. We're not doing anything wrong.

(On the way back to the table, there's suddenly a storm of knocking at the door, and Katrina freezes like a rabbit.)

DAN RIDLEY

Katrina! Katrina! You in there? Katrina?

(More violent knocking.)

SIAN O'HARA

Quick. Out the front door. I'll delay him.

DAN RIDLEY

I know you're in there. Katrina!

(More violent knocking.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

You're a sweetie. I'd kiss you for this.

(Sian looks away, embarrassed, trying to hide she's pleased.)

KATRINA RIDLEY

That's right. You stick to being the good girl.

(She exits through a door downstage. Sian opens the kitchen door upstage. Dan Ridley is standing there.)

SIAN O'HARA

What is your problem?

DAN RIDLEY

Where's my wife?

SIAN O'HARA

How should I know? I'm not your wife's keeper.

DAN RIDLEY

(Suspicious) I was knocking a long time.

SIAN O'HARA

I heard you, but I was doing lady-business. Or, do you got a problem with that too?

DAN RIDLEY

You got a mouth on you.

SIAN O'HARA

And you got a chip on your shoulder the size of Catalina Island. Are we done here?

DAN RIDLEY

That's her cigarettes there.

SIAN O'HARA

That's my loosey.

DAN RIDLEY

Since when.

SIAN O'HARA

None of your business.

(The sound of coughing. Another part of the stage in memory light, the silhouette of man on a couch.)

DAN RIDLEY

Everything is my business....

(Ridley freezes as the lights fade in the kitchen but a path of light leads Sian into the memory scene, where Sian's father, Walter, is on a ratty couch and her mother stands on the other side of the room, flanked by Sian's younger sister Alexandra, a.k.a. Alex. Sian stands opposite her mother, so that there is clearly a triangle on stage. Sian's father coughs again as he probably has emphysema.)

MOTHER

Walter, that's God punishing you for your wicked ways.

FATHER

(Coughing.) Jesus, Joseph and Mary, leave me be woman. *(Then)* Sian!

SIAN

I'm right here, papa.

FATHER

Where you been?

ALEX

Jesus comforted the sick, mother.

MOTHER

Jesus didn't have to endure what I've had to.

(The father coughs again.)

SIAN

What could be so terrible?

MOTHER

Never you mind. Such things aren't for innocent ears. Come girls. *(The mother starts to move but turns since the girls don't move.)* Alexandra!

ALEX

Yes, mother.

MOTHER

Sian.

SIAN

No.

MOTHER

No?

SIAN

No. *(A beat.)* We all deserve love. Jesus says so.

MOTHER

(Clutching her rosary tighter.) You, stubborn, wicked girl. *(To the Father)* See what you've done? See? You're dragging your innocent daughter to hell, right along with you!

(The Mother exits; Alexandra dutifully but reluctantly follows her mother.)

SIAN

What can I do for you, papa?

FATHER

Get me another cigarette, sweetheart.

SIAN

Where you usually hide them?

FATHER

(Kisses her hand) Yes, princess. *(Coughs.)*

SIAN

Papa, what was mother talking about?

(She gives him a cigarette. He lights it. Inhales. Enjoys it, and coughs.)

FATHER

Your mother is right. I've been a sinful man. But I love you, never doubt that.

SIAN

I don't papa.

FATHER

Enough of all that. It's time for our favorite show, isn't it?

SIAN

It is.

FATHER

Well, turn it on, turn it on.

(She does. The sound of an old radio warming up, blending into...)

RADIO ANNOUNCER #1

(A higher, nasally voice) Chesterfield Cigarettes - cooler, milder, quicker to satisfy- presents:

RADIO ANNOUNCER #2

(music intro followed by a deep basso profundo voice) WHO KNOWS THE DEMONS AND DESIRES IN THE HEARTS OF ALL? THE SPECTRE KNOWS! When we last saw our hero, he was bound and gagged at the bottom of a well...

FATHER

(Smiling, then.) Oh, that's just wonderful just wonderful!

SIAN

(She watches him.) Yes, it is, papa.

(Blackout. In the dark, we hear Ridley again.)

DAN RIDLEY

... I said, everything is my business. That's my job.

(Lights up. Sian is in the kitchen again with Ridley.)

SIAN O'HARA

Yeah, I heard you. I feel safer already.

DAN RIDLEY

(A beat, taken aback.) You're a bad influence on my wife. Every time she comes back from here, she sasses just like you.

SIAN O'HARA

She gets to feel like a human being around me, that's all.

DAN RIDLEY

Bullshit.

SIAN O'HARA

Language, copper. I'm a lady.

DAN RIDLEY

You're somethin'. But you ain't no lady. *(A beat.)* You're almost like one of *those* women.

SIAN O'HARA

Those women?

DAN RIDLEY

Yeah. Dycks. The dycks down at the If Club. They mouth off too.

SIAN O'HARA

You're losing me.

DAN RIDLEY

(Sarcastically) Yeah. Sure.

(He leaves. Sian slams the door shut. Leaning against the door, after a long beat, she strides to the table and looks at the pack of cigarettes. She picks it up. Holds it. Finally, she takes one out. She smells it. She puts it back. She smells her fingers.)

SIAN O'HARA

Not like papa's.

(After a beat, she takes the cigarette again out of the pack. Her hands shake as she awkwardly tries to light it. She finally does. Tries to look cool, imitating Katrina. For a moment, she manages it, then starts to cough uncontrollably...

She vigorously stuffs out the cigarette. Now she goes to a hiding place in her own home that is nearly identical to where her father stashed his cigarettes. But what Sian has hidden here is a book: a slim volume entitled "DIANA: a Strange Autobiography" by Diana Frederics (pen name of Frances Rummell). The cover is illustrated by a line drawing of a woman which has a slight resemblance to Marilyn Monroe.

SIAN O'HARA (cont'd)

(Meaning the cover) She's so beautiful.

She holds the book without reading it for a good while. These are her thoughts which would NOT be said aloud, rather the actor should find some behavior that expresses this:

"If I can't smoke without coughing, at least I can read something dangerous.... C'mon, Sian. C'mon. Open the book. It's only words. You can do it.... Okay, maybe I'll be disgusted. But that's good. It will prove I'm not so different."

She breathes deeply and finally opens the book.)

SIAN O'HARA (cont'd)

(Reading aloud.) "...I belong to the third sex. The history of my emotional development had only these two marks of distinction: first my lesbianism... second, my obstinate refusal to the truth of my own nature to myself..."

(Sian turns the page. This time with less fear. After a beat, she turns the next page, and again, faster, and again till she seems to be speed reading. A sound effect of pages turning even more rapidly like a fan.

Meanwhile the lights change from morning light to afternoon light to early afternoon. Sian yawns and puts her head down. The lights change again to something dream-like with strong diagonal shadows.

Katrina enters the kitchen, wearing a tight, red dress.)

KATRINA IVANOVNA

How long are you going to make a lady wait?

SIAN KARA

(Waking up.) What?

KATRINA IVANOVNA

You are Sian Kara, are you not?

SIAN KARA

That's my name before I got — *(married)*

KATRINA IVANOVNA

Of the Kara and O'Hara Detective Agency?

SIAN KARA

(More to herself.) That's a game Joe and I played as kids. We'd solve crimes like the Spectre did.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

I assure you, this is no game Miss Kara. I am very much in danger....
My name is Katrina Ivanovna. *(pronounced: Ee-van-oo-na)*

SIAN KARA

And you don't know a cop named Dan Ridley?

KATRINA IVANOVNA

No. Should I?

SIAN KARA

Only to avoid.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

That's why I'm here.

(Sian goes over to the coat tree in the family memory area. Sian puts on the jacket and hat she left there at the top of the play.)

KATRINA IVANOVNA *(cont'd)*

I've been told you take cases from people who can't go to the police. People whom the police might... actually arrest.

SIAN KARA

True, my clients come to me because they have no other place to go.

(Sian has returned to the suburban house set. She takes out a cigarette out of the jacket pocket and puts it in her mouth.)

KATRINA IVANOVNA

Aren't you going to offer one to me?

SIAN KARA

(Bemused) Sure.

(Sian gives her a cigarette. Katrina leans in close for it to be lit. They have a moment being so close. Then Sian lights her own. She smokes with ease.)

KATRINA IVANOVNA

I'm talking about the third sex. That's why I need to hire you.

SIAN KARA

I like the sound of those words.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

I need you to make a man *not* love me.

SIAN KARA

You're asking the impossible.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

I need *you* to love me, Miss Kara.

SIAN KARA

And you're going to pay me for that?

KATRINA IVANOVNA

You won't really be loving me - only the appearance of love.

SIAN KARA

Any point to a love that's not a love?

KATRINA IVANOVNA

You have a reputation for facing danger

SIAN KARA

So, I've been told.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

Loving a woman in public is very risky.

SIAN KARA

It is.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

But if a man were to see his betrothed in the arms not of another man, but rather, another woman?

SIAN KARA

He'd call off the wedding.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

BUT, he would keep it quiet to protect his pride.

SIAN KARA

So, who's the dupe?

KATRINA IVANOVNA

Darwin Joy.

SIAN KARA

Who is?

KATRINA IVANOVNA

A man.

SIAN KARA

Okay. Twenty dollars a day. *Plus* expenses.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

That's steep.

SIAN KARA

I'm worth it.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

You better be.

SIAN KARA

Now my first expense is tonight. Dinner for two. On you. If I'm going to be convincing, I've got to get to know you better.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

You understand we're creating a little drama, that's all. I have... obligations to my family that I must protect.

SIAN KARA

Miss Ivanovna, during the War, I worked in an airplane factory with all women, except for our foreman, a Jewish fella' that couldn't get drafted 'cause he had one leg shorter than the other. There were girls there, from all over the country - a big boned gal from Tennessee. Negroes from Texas. Local Italians from San Pedro. We all came together because we had a cause we all believed in.

But half these women couldn't even read or write. So, Yacob, our foreman, he feels its his duty to teach everybody. He gathers us at lunch everyday, and he doesn't start small, he

starts big. He's reading us Shakespeare! Othello! And then we'd all our put two cents in, dissecting the play. So, don't doubt that I know how to put on a show.

KATRINA IVANOVNA

You're surprising me already, Miss Kara.

(A soft knock on the door.)

KATRINA IVANOVNA *(cont'd)*

I'll see you at dinner. But it sounds like you have another client.

(Sian looks at her quizzically. Then another soft knock.)

KATRINA IVANOVNA *(cont'd)*

Knocking at the door?

(Sian looks at the kitchen door. She gets up and moves toward it. Meanwhile Katrina disappears. When Sian looks back at her, Katrina is gone. The lights change to "normal" late afternoon light. Then more persistent knocking)

SIAN O'HARA

Yes, who's there? Can I help you?

ALEX

Sian, it's me. Your sister...

(Sian takes off the jacket and hat; she opens the door to reveal a woman in a very modest white dress... really more like a kind of uniform, holding a small suitcase.)

ALEX *(cont'd)*

... Alex.

(Sian is too surprised to respond. Blackout.)

(Sounds of cooking: pots and pans on the stove, etc. Lights up. Alex is ladling spaghetti and meatballs onto plates. Meanwhile Joe and Sian are seated at the table, and both of whom are a bit on edge. Note: no wine is at the table as they wouldn't have it in the house, so there are only water glasses on the table.)

JOE O'HARA

(Stage whispering) She hasn't said why —

SIAN O'HARA

(Stage whispering) No, I've told you three times already —

JOE O'HARA

(Stage whispering) Yes. But I... I mean...uh... if she implied... what happened. Why she's here?

SIAN O'HARA

(Stage whispering) She'll tell us when she's ready.

(Sian looks at Alex to make sure she didn't hear, then turns back to Joe.)

JOE O'HARA

(Stage whispering) That could be months.

(Alex glances over at Sian and Joe – yes, she's probably heard most of what they've said.)

SIAN O'HARA

(Stage whispering) I'm sure it won't be.

(Alex brings over two plates.)

JOE O'HARA

(Fake enthusiasm.) Looks good.

SIAN O'HARA

(Standing up.) Can I help now?

(Alex returns to the stove for her plate and then sits.)

ALEX

There's nothing for you to do. Please. I want to show my gratitude. And don't worry, Mr. O'Hara –

JOE O'HARA

Joe.

ALEX

Joe. I won't dawdle about walking on my own two feet. I'll be out of your hair in no time.

SIAN O'HARA

No one's pushing you out, right Joe?

JOE O'HARA

No. I mean, yes – no one's pushing you out.

SIAN O'HARA

Good, then let's eat.

(Joe and Sian are about to eat, but are stopped by Alex making the sign of the cross, and then bowing her head to say grace – note: Sian notices nearly immediately, but Joe has almost put food into mouth.)

ALEX

"Bless us, O Lord, and these, Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty. Through Christ, our Lord."

ALEX

Amen.

SIAN O'HARA

Amen.

JOE O'HARA

(Just after the women) Amen.

(A beat. Alex waits for them to start eating. Awkwardly they do. Joe realizes it's quite good and starts to wolf it down.)

SIAN O'HARA

Joe, slow down. You'll choke. I told you, you should have eaten breakfast.

JOE O'HARA

Sian, it's good. It's really good.

(Sian takes a full bite. It IS good.)

SIAN O'HARA

It is... Wonderful, Alex.

JOE O'HARA

(With his mouth partially full) Where did you learn to cook like this?

ALEX

Well, while Sian was listening to detective shows with Papa, I was trailing behind mother in the kitchen.

SIAN O'HARA

But mother didn't make Italian.

ALEX

Oh, my job in the Abbey was to assist in the kitchen. Sister Angelina was our head cook and I learned from her too. But mother is how I learned the basics.

JOE

Maybe, honey, your sister could share her recipes with you?

ALEX

I'd be happy to. They're not that hard, really.

SIAN O'HARA

That would be... great. I'd like that.

(All the actors freeze in place as an old Italian folk song plays on an accordion, and the lights fade to a blue transition light. A Cigarette Girl – wearing a short skirt, stockings and holding a tray of cigarettes strapped around her neck – enters.)

CIGARETTE GIRL

Cigarettes. Cigarettes. Cigarettes.

(Meanwhile, the actors unfreeze. Sian goes to the clothes tree and puts on a pair of slacks. Alex goes upstage and opens the door; she stands looking out through the screen door.)

CIGARETTE GIRL

Cigarettes. Cigarettes. Cigarettes. "Why be irritated. Light an Old Gold."

(Joe is about to exit with the dinner plates but The Cigarette Girl stops him.)

CIGARETTE GIRL *(cont'd)*

With the veterans in U.S. Hospitals, Chesterfield is by far the favorite cigarette.³

(Joe buys some cigarettes, and then exits. The Cigarette Girl pulls a sign from her tray. It reads: "ONE WEEK LATER" Katrina enters, takes a cigarette from the Cigarette Girl's tray.)

CIGARETTE GIRL

Hey! You gonna pay for that?

(Katrina just snorts.)

CIGARETTE GIRL *(cont'd)*

Well, I never!

³ Slogans from actual cigarette ads.