

Canned Rebellion in Cold Supermarkets

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Act I

Overture:

In the darkness, a switch is heard being turned on. A single till, facing the audience, stands under a harsh white LED light. The light flickers several times before settling. Following it, another switch is turned on and a second till, located on the first one's right, appears. Similarly, two other tills appear on stage. The play takes place in the middle of a grocery store. Four empty tills are now spread on stage, facing the audience. Then and again, the lights above them flicker. There is a constant buzzing sound coming from the LED lights. Suddenly, a loud crash is heard backstage. From the left-wing, four little tomato cans roll out onto the stage, followed by a woman who also comes crashing out.

Scene I:

WOMAN 1 (*in a strong Russian accent*): "Shit, shit, shit."

She gets up with great difficulty. She is a woman of about forty with dyed blond hair and a full face of makeup. She is wearing unflattering leggings, along with the grocery store's red employee vest and leopard flats. However, she is charming, endearing and charismatic. The audience must feel compassion and sympathy for her. Having immigrated from Russia, she speaks good English but with a strong accent. Once she manages to get up, she checks to see if anyone has seen her fall. She is breathing heavily and sounds like a dying whale. She adjusts her leggings ungracefully and takes out a small mirror from her pocket. She checks her makeup.

WOMAN 1: "More lipstick."

She already has an unreasonable amount of lipstick on, but still she goes towards the first till from the left and produces a tiny handbag from underneath the counter. She fishes in it for some time, looking for her lipstick, which she then applies generously to her lips. She contemplates herself in the small mirror before engaging in a playful and flirty conversation with her reflection.

WOMAN 1: "Who me? Oh! Thank you. (*forced giggle*) Yes, I am single. Oh... oh! Really? No one ever told me that! How nice of-"

Suddenly, someone comes out of the stage's right-wing.

Scene II:

Another woman appears on stage. She is around thirty years old, wearing jeans and a t-shirt with "Paris" written on it. Her black hair is in a high ponytail and her face is devoid of makeup. She is naturally beautiful.

WOMAN 2: "Hey Blondie."

BLONDIE puts her mirror back in her handbag and looks at her, embarrassed.

BLONDIE (*trying to act casual*): "What's up Kim?"

KIM: "Everything is shit. (*she notices the cans spread on the floor*) Honey, what have you been up to again?"

BLONDIE (*sarcastically*): "Oh yeah I thought I'd redecorate. Looks nicer on the floor."

BLONDIE laughs at her own joke, but KIM does not. She goes very slowly towards her till, the second one from the right, sighing and dragging her feet.

BLONDIE: "Wow *милая* by the time you get there I'll be in the ground."

BLONDIE laughs wholeheartedly at her own joke.

KIM: "Not feeling great Blondie, no time for jokes."

BLONDIE goes silent. She looks at her tenderly.

BLONDIE (*whispering*): "Sorry."

KIM gets to her till and collapses in her seat, holding her face in her hands. BLONDIE looks at her with compassion and empathy. KIM sighs loudly, a sad and painful sigh.

KIM (*very softly, to herself*): "It'll be fine, it's fine, it'll be fine."

BLONDIE looks down as she gently nods her head.

BLONDIE (*timidly looking at KIM*): "Something happened with the kid?"

KIM does not answer. She keeps her face in her palms, elbows on the counter.

Scene III:

From the right-wing, footsteps are heard. The footsteps are fast, confident, loud. A joyful voice booms out of the right-wing. A young woman appears on stage.

WOMAN 3 (*happily*): "Hellooo!"

SHANIYA is a young black woman of around twenty years old. She is wearing white sneakers, black pants and a white crop top. Despite her young and cool outfit, she has the demeanor of a future business woman. She is very ambitious, confident and is working at the grocery store to save up for law school.

BLONDIE: "How are you Shaniya?"

SHANIYA (*sighing happily*): "Ahh I'm alright, only 2 more shifts to go and off to uni. Wuhu!"

The two other women remain silent. BLONDIE, after a short pause, attempts to laugh lightly but fails. KIM has not moved since she sat down and still has her face in her palms. SHANIYA notices that KIM is oddly silent. SHANIYA heads to her till without speaking, puts on her red employee vest before silently gesturing to BLONDIE to know what is wrong with KIM. BLONDIE just raises her shoulders and shakes her head, indicating she doesn't know.

SHANIYA (*changing the subject*): “Oh Blondie! You’ll never guess what I just heard. Ben is engaged to that shy girl from the farm up north?”

BLONDIE (*shocked*): “Really?!”

SHANIYA (*with a sly smile*): “Yes! I heard it from my friend who knows the girlfriend of a farmer, whose father used to work with the girl’s godfather.”

BLONDIE (*confused*): “What? Oh, I thought he was gay!”

SHANIYA (*leaning in, very excited*): “Rumor has it he is marrying her to please his father and because, you know, she won that baking contest. But it’s a mixed-orientation marriage, a lavender marriage.”

BLONDIE (*snickering*): “I’m sorry, her pie was disgusting. The smell of that pie... I first thought it was a dog’s corpse rotting somewhere.”

SHANIYA (*snickering*): “She obviously had her dad bribe the jury. You can buy anything with money in this country. It disgusts me. (*short pause*) I swear, the moment I become a lawyer, I’ll look into the baking contest’s corruption.”

BLONDIE (*proudly*): “милая, you will make a great lawyer.”

Scene IV:

From the right-wing, slow footsteps are heard. A woman of around 60 appears. Her name is MARY and although she walks slowly, due to a hip surgery she underwent a couple of weeks ago, she is still healthy. She is the mother of the group, very loving, caring and wise.

MARY: “Shaniya, don’t forget us when you become a successful lawyer. I’ll need you to sue the NHS.”

SHANIYA: “Already on it.”

MARY: “How are you all?”

There is a small pause. Suddenly, BLONDIE breaks the silence and attempts to respond gleefully. But her exaggerated attempt to lighten the mood and raise everyone’s spirits just seems fake and out of place.

BLONDIE (*with a fake laugh*): “I almost broke my hip when I tried to re-arrange the tomato cans, but at least my body fat softened the fall. I did lose all my dignity in the eyes of ‘Big Brother’ (*she points to an invisible security camera located in the audience*). (*almost to herself*) Although God knows I lost my dignity when I lost my vi-”

She goes silent, suddenly self-conscious and aware that no one is laughing apart from SHANIYA.

SHANIYA: “Visa?”

MARY (*seriously*): “Careful Blondie. Don’t want you to end up a cripple like me. Hip surgery is no fun.”

They all go silent and look at KIM.

MARY: "How about you Kim?"

KIM just shakes her head.

MARY (*softer*): "Kim..."

KIM (*almost inaudibly*): "I can't find another job."

BLONDIE: "What?"

KIM shakes her head again.

MARY: "Kim, what's the matter?"

BLONDIE: "You can't find another job? Do you want another job, is that what you said?"

KIM (*exhausted, her voice breaking*): "I can't... not again."

MARY: "Kim, speak up sweetie."

KIM does not speak for a couple of seconds. She breathes loudly, her face still in her palms.

KIM (*very slowly, as though it were extremely painful for her to say*): "Self-checkouts."

MARY (*loudly*): "Self what? What is that?"

BLONDIE (*very confused, to Mary*): "I have no idea what she is talking about."

SHANIYA remains silent. She stares at KIM then at the others. MARY and BLONDIE discuss something inaudibly between themselves.

SHANIYA (*after a pause, whispering to Kim*): "Did the manager tell you?"

KIM (*slowly*): "I heard him on the phone and I saw the papers when I went to his office. He's signing the contracts to get three self-checkout machines."

SHANIYA (*to herself*): "Shit."

MARY (*still confused*): "What are those?"

KIM (*loudly, anger rising*): "Machines!"

SHANIYA (*softly, trying to explain it to Mary*): "Automatic machines for customers to do our job. They scan items and pay themselves. They already have them in most of the city's supermarkets."

BLONDIE (*doubtfully*): "Isn't that science-fiction? Are you sure it's a real thing?"

SHANIYA: "I'm afraid in cities it now is... Like I said, you find them in most supermarkets nowadays."

KIM (*angrily, lifting her face from her palms*): "But this isn't a supermarket! This is a provincial piece of shit! We don't need machines, we don't need the future here! There are more cows and sheep living here than actual human beings!"

MARY (*hurriedly but with a calm tone*): "Kim, no need to panic. We can talk to the manager. Maybe he hasn't signed the contracts."

KIM (*resigned*): "He won't back out."

BLONDIE: "Four beautiful women asking him not to sign some contracts... surely he'll back out."

MARY nods but KIM and SHANIYA keep their heads down.

BLONDIE: "When is he in?"

SHANIYA: "I think he'll be here in a couple of minutes."

BLONDIE: "Mary and I could go talk to him, we've been working here the longest. I'm sure he'll show some sympathy."

KIM (*her head still down*): "I'll lose it if he signs the contract, I'll lose it."

MARY (*very calmly*): "Kim don't panic."

BLONDIE (*to Mary*): "How do I look?"

MARY: "Honestly sweetie?"

BLONDIE: "Honestly."

MARY: "Like a whore. Wipe some of that lipstick off."

BLONDIE is clearly hurt, although she tries to hide it by proudly taking her mirror from her bag and going to the left side of the stage. She turns her back to the others while MARY and SHANIYA inaudibly discuss something between themselves. BLONDIE contemplates herself in front of the mirror, wiping her lipstick off. However, instead of wiping it off, she smudges it across her face, by mistake. BLONDIE begins to panic as she realizes she has ruined her makeup and looks even more like a prostitute. The smudge on her face turns redder, the more she tries to rub it off. She soon looks like the Joker, a fake red grin extending from the corners of her mouth. She emits a soft cry and seems on the verge of sobbing. Suddenly, loud footsteps are heard coming from the back of the stage. BLONDIE has no time to rearrange her makeup. She closes her mirror and heads back to her till.

Scene V:

Panic grows amongst the women as they hear the footsteps approaching. First, the footsteps seem to be coming from the left-wing, then they are heard coming from the right-wing. One moment they sound very close, the next they sound distant. Suspense builds up. The girls are tense and begin to whisper loudly amongst themselves.

KIM (*her voice breaking*): "He's going to fire us!"

MARY (*angrily*): “Kim, behave!”

BLONDIE (*panicking*): “Stop panicking for nothing!”

SHANIYA: “What if Kim is right! (*to herself*) I really need those two days’ worth of pay.”

MARY (*angrily*): “Stop your nonsense!”

KIM (*silently to herself*): “He’s going to fire us.”

The manager comes in from the audience. He climbs on stage and stands in front of the four tills, his back turned to the audience. His hands on his hips, he scans the girls as they silently and fearfully stare at him. He is dressed in a suit and is holding some paperwork in his left hand.

MANAGER (*slowly*): “Wow. Have I suddenly earned your respect? I have never seen such fear.”

BLONDIE (*quietly*): “Sir... could Mary and I speak to you?”

MANAGER (*suddenly turning his attention to the paperwork*): “Is it serious? Is it urgent?”

BLONDIE (*looking at the other women*): “I... I think so?”

They all nod in approval, KIM looks down. MANAGER signals to BLONDIE and MARY to follow him. They get up with difficulty, the manager notices BLONDIE ‘s makeup.

MANAGER: “Wow Vladlena, that’s not what I meant when I said “smile more at work”. Give me a feminine smile don’t give me a nightmare.”

BLONDIE/VLADLENA blushes in embarrassment, she grabs a tissue and violently tries to rub off the lipstick but that only makes it worse. She tries to laugh lightly but chokes. MARY and BLONDIE follow the manager and exit from the back of the stage.

Scene VI:

KIM (*whispering to SHANIYA*): “If he tries to replace us with machines, Shaniya, mark my words, I will start a rebellion.”

SHANIYA: “If he is looking to replace anyone it’s me, I’m leaving in two days. It won’t be you.”

KIM: “Oh, soon enough it’ll be me. It always starts slowly. They take an egg from the hen, to avoid her growing suspicious. But next thing she knows: she’s nesting fake plastic eggs that never hatch while the owner enjoys his omelets.”

KIM is slowly growing paranoid. She is breathing rapidly and loudly, clearly on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

SHANIYA (*confused and worried*): “What?”

KIM: “I’ve got a kid to feed Shaniya, I can’t afford to lose my job. Unlike you, I don’t have a new future ahead of me. Or any way out.”

SHANIYA (*reassuringly*): “Don’t worry Kim. We’ll figure this out. Breathe.”

MARY and BLONDIE come back in from the back. They are holding each other's hand, looking solemn and grave.

SHANIYA: "So?"

MARY (*quietly*): "They're installing one self-checkout machine today."

KIM starts to laugh insanely. She is clearly losing it.

BLONDIE (*trying to be cheerful and positive*): "But there is still hope! He said that if he is not satisfied with the machine, he won't buy anymore."

KIM stops laughing.

KIM (*menacingly*): "He won't be, trust me. I will destroy it! No one comes here and steals my eggs!"

BLONDIE and MARY (*quite frightened*): "What?"

SHANIYA just shakes her head, indicating that it is pointless to question KIM.

KIM (*silently*): "I will destroy it."

BLONDIE (*quite lightly, trying to calm her*): "Honey, [*she tries to laugh lightly*] no need to be violent! I'm sure the machine will break on its own. After all it is made in China... [*suddenly worried*] Not Japan, right?"

Scene VII:

The four women freeze. Change of light. From the audience two delivery men come in, carrying a self-checkout machine. They install the machine on the right, next to SHANIYA's till. A blue light, cold and harsh illuminates the self-checkout machine. The light must remain over the machine throughout the play. There must be a menacing aspect to the machine. It must be more imposing than the tills, and the light over it must be harsher. The music playing when the machine is installed must be a high-pitched violin. It will be the machine's recurring theme: a high-pitched violin, which is eerie and soft at the same time. It must emphasize the slowly growing paranoia amongst the women. Throughout the play, the machine's theme must grow louder as it becomes more powerful. The four tills slowly rotate to face the self-checkout machine.

Scene VIII:

The two delivery men exit on the right. The women unfreeze, and the lights go back to normal, apart from the self-checkout machine's blue light.

KIM (*to the self-checkout machine*): "Bitch."

They all stare in horror at it. KIM gets up and walks towards it. She circles it, menacingly, like an animal before pouncing on its prey.

KIM: "You ugly, disgusting thing."

BLONDIE (*trying to laugh lightly*): “Kim, Kim stop this now.”

KIM suddenly jumps on the machine. The others scream in horror.

KIM: “Girls! Look, this is what we are reduced to! Fearful of an object, fearful of losing our jobs because of an object! I will not let this happen, we must rebel!”

MARY (*whispering to SHANIYA*): “She is losing it.”

SHANIYA (*calmly, to KIM*): “Kim, please come down.”

KIM (*as if having a revelation*): “Oh... oh I bet this is one of the manager’s little tricks to force us into working more. Of course! Fear, competition, rivalry are key elements to turning workers into machines. This, this thing will contaminate us all! We will become slaves and machines in a couple of days. I can already feel my body changing... I... I feel robotic.”

BLONDIE (*worriedly*): “Dear God. Kim, chill.”

SHANIYA (*approaching Kim as though she were approaching a dangerous animal*): “Ok. Kim, I don’t totally agree with you... but I agree enough to say, we can’t let him replace us with self-checkout machines.”

KIM: “YES! Let us not give up without a fight!”

SHANIYA (*to MARY and BLONDIE*): “You have to admit that she is partly right. No matter how insane she’s acting right now. We are in a provincial town. People come here because they like us, they come here to socialize, to talk to us. We are not in a city where people are in a hurry and have too many social interactions.”

MARY: “Ah girls... I’m not sure... I’m too old for this revolutionary crap.”

KIM jumps off the machine and grabs MARY by the shoulders. KIM leads her to the machine with a can of tomato that she picks up from the floor.

KIM: “Here Mary. Try using it.”

MARY hesitates. KIM backs away and joins BLONDIE and SHANIYA who have moved to the left side of the stage. They look fearfully at Mary and the machine, both on the opposite side, as if the machine might explode. MARY is left facing the machine with the can of tomato in her hand. She breathes loudly, staring at it as if it were a duel.

KIM (*softly, to MARY*): “Go on. Use it.”

MARY starts to sweat. Slowly she lifts one hand.

BLONDIE (*whispering to MARY*): “Careful. Careful, don’t go electrocuting yourself.”

Blondie starts muttering prayers in Russian. After a few seconds of hesitation and panting MARY touches the screen and immediately withdraws her finger, as though the screen had burned her. A female voice is heard booming from the machine.

FEMALE VOICE: “Scan your first item.”

MARY screams in horror, frightened by the voice. Her scream frightens the others who all scream.

MARY (*still screaming*): "I don't understand this!"

KIM runs towards MARY and draws her away from the machine. The women are now all on the left side of the stage.

KIM (*to MARY*): "You see Mary, these machines are too complicated for people of your generation. It isn't fair to you. They are slowly excluding you from their "future"."

KIM looks at the other women. Then she looks back at the machine and points to it.

KIM: "It's us against it. War. Who's in?"

SHANIYA nods vividly. MARY and BLONDIE nod their head hesitantly. Lights out.

Scene IX:

The women are all seated at their tills. The shop is about to open. The MANAGER's footsteps are heard arriving, once more, from different places. He finally emerges from the back of the stage. He strides amongst the tills.

MANAGER: "Girls, how are you all?"

They nod slowly.

MANAGER: "I want you to know that I have installed this self-checkout machine to test it out. If I think the machine is useful I might choose to install more. But, for the moment, no need to panic, no one is getting fired."

KIM (*snickering and muttering to herself*): "I've heard that one before."

MANAGER: "I hope you all have a good day and I will see you this afternoon."

He is about to depart when he sees the four tomato cans lying on the floor.

BLONDIE (*stammering*): "Oh yes... I was about to pick these up, Sir."

MANAGER picks up one of the tomato cans and heads to the self-checkout machine. He looks at the women.

MANAGER: "Let's see how this thing works."

MANAGER, unlike MARY, skillfully taps on the screen.

FEMALE VOICE: "Scan your first item."

MANAGER (*pleased*): "Oh what a nice voice."

KIM sighs loudly in annoyance.

FEMALE VOICE: "Select your payment method."

MANAGER (*laughing lightly*): "Oh sweetie, I don't pay."

He takes out a supermarket card and scans it.

FEMALE VOICE: "Would you like a receipt?"

MANAGER taps rapidly on the screen.

FEMALE VOICE: "Thank you."

MANAGER (*turning to the women*): "Ah! There. You see? Easy!"

KIM looks at him with disgust.

MANAGER: "Okay good day ladies. See you later."

He leaves the tomato can on SHANIYA's till, as if it were a threat, and exits.

SHANIYA (*confused as she picks up the tomato can*): "What is that supposed to mean?"

KIM (*mimicking the machine's seductive voice*): "Scan your first item! Thank you! Urgh! Never thought I could hate another woman's voice so much."

BLONDIE (*amazed*): "I hate to say this, but I'm starting to think he's a genius. Did you see how he tapped away on that machine?"

MARY: "Oh! Mr. Onnozel is coming."

BLONDIE: "What a cutie that man."

SHANIYA: "Who's till do you think he's going to pay at?"

BLONDIE: "Pff mine obviously."

SHANIYA: "Wanna bet on it?"

BLONDIE (*with a sly smile*): "Game on."

MARY: "Shh, quiet."

Scene X:

A customer comes in from the right-wing and passes the four women. Mr. ONNOZEL is a tall man of about 50 years old. He waves at them as he heads towards the left-wing. They all wave back in fake glee and stare after him, tensely waiting for him to come back. He emerges again, a few seconds later, his arms full of groceries. The women all try leading him to their till.

BLONDIE: "How are you today Mr. Onnozel?"

MARY: "Is your wife feeling better?"

SHANIYA: "How about your daughter? Is she still considering university?"

KIM (*decisively*): "This way Mr. Onnozel. I need to speak to you."

MR. ONNOZEL, after kindly smiling to the others and replying with a few words to each, heads towards KIM's till. MARY, BLONDIE and SHANIYA snicker discreetly and exchange looks.

MR. ONNOZEL: "I'm doing well, thank you Blondie. My wife is still a bit sick, but on her way to recovery, thank you Mary. Well you know Shaniya, my daughter is in her teenage phase, but heh, you know what they say "there's light at the end of the tunnel" [*He laughs a bit and coughs*] What is it Kim?"

KIM starts scanning his articles. She is standing up and looking him dead in the eye, without ever glancing at the products she is scanning. The beeping of the machine which follows her words, creates intensity, suspense and musical rhythm.

KIM: "See that [*beep, she points to the machine*]. That [*beep*] is the enemy [*beep*]."

MR. ONNOZEL (*intrigued and with a sort of childish excitement, as he looks over his shoulder at the machine*): "Ooh what is that thing?"

KIM (*whispering menacingly*): "Don't look at it. [*beep*]"

MR. ONNOZEL (*whispering back anxiously*): "I'm scared. Why is it here?"

KIM (*still whispering*): "They are replacing us. Machines [*beep*] taking over [*beep*] the world [*beep*]."

MR. ONNOZEL (*whispering dramatically*): "Oh no! Are they firing you?"

MARY (*very calmly and in a normal voice*): "No they are not. Kim is just exaggerating."

KIM (*laughing wildly and suddenly talking very fast and loud*): "Me?! [*beep*] Mary, you and I both know that this piece of [*beep*], this son of a [*beep*], this nasty [*beep*] hole is posing a threat!"

KIM types madly on her keyboard.

KIM: "Mr. Onnozel, that will be 6.66."

MR. ONNOZEL, looking around at the other women as he hands her the money.

MR. ONNOZEL (*curiously*): "What are you planning on doing about it?"

He points at the machine, his hand shaking.

KIM: "You know me Mr. Onnozel. I never give up without a fight."

MR. ONNOZEL nods. He looks at her with wide eyes, a look of admiration and respect on his face. He grabs his groceries, contemplates the other women, bows quickly before them.

MR. ONNOZEL: "Good luck girls. May your rebellion be successful."

They all bow their heads. MR. ONNOZEL proudly exits on the right but before doing so, he stops in front of the checkout machine and spits on it disdainfully. The women cheer. He exits and comes back a few seconds later. He goes to the machine and cleans the spit away shamefully.

MR. ONNOZEL (*fearfully*): "Just in case the manager comes in. He scares me a little bit."

He looks at the women with a tender smile but only Blondie and Mary attempt to smile back. He exits.

Scene XI:

KIM (*angrily*): “Coward!”

BLONDIE: “He has got too much to lose, it’s understandable. We can’t expect too much from him.”

KIM: “We’ve all got too much to lose Blondie. Cowards fear loss, heroes face loss.”

SHANIYA: “I can’t believe he’s scared of the manager. The manager is literally a big joke.”

MARY (*to SHANIYA*): “Hey, with this attitude no wonder he’s replacing us with machines.”

A group of four young adults (18-25 years old) come in. They are clearly on a road trip, they have windswept hair and are all carrying rucksacks. They walk towards the left-wing.

BLONDIE (*intrigued, whispering to the others*): “Oh I have never seen them around!”

SHANIYA: “I bet they’ll go for the self-checkout, they’re probably from the city. [*after a short pause*] Cute guys am I right?”

BLONDIE (*with a small grimace*): “Mm, not really my type.”

SHANIYA: “You mean not really your age.”

BLONDIE: “Hey, I’m still young at heart.”

MARY: “I think you still look very young Blondie.”

BLONDIE (*happily to MARY*): “Oh, thank you! I bought this new anti-ageing face cream. You can tell right?”

MARY (*clearly lying*): “Yes...”

A woman comes in with a stroller.

MARY (*very happily and loudly as she tries to avoid any further questions from Blondie*): “How are you Dana?”

DANA: “Ah I’m alright, how are you all?”

MARY: “Good!”

KIM: “Not well.”

MARY (*whispering to Dana*): “It’s the new self-checkout machine that has got them all feeling a bit down. No worries.”

KIM: “Dana, what would you do if you didn’t have a husband and were about to lose the only job that is keeping your child and yourself from starving?”

There is an awkward pause.

DANA: "Oh. I'm so sorry--"

KIM: "What would you suggest we do?"

DANA: "I... I don't know Kim. I would have to think about it. I only came to buy some eggs--"

KIM (*excitedly*): "Eggs! Precisely! You would keep your eggs and refuse to give them away to the farmer, right?"

DANA (*very confused*): "I'm sorry... I don't understand."

KIM: "Go buy your eggs Dana. And guard them with your life."

DANA (*glancing at the others worriedly*): "Alright..."

DANA exits on the left and bumps into the group of young adults who are coming out of the left-wing, a pack of chips, a couple of sodas and some cookies under their arms. As expected, they go towards the self-checkout machines.

Scene XII:

SHANIYA (*to the others*): "What did I say."

KIM (*turning to SHANIYA*): "Honey, I need you to go and make conversation with them. Draw them here, don't let them pay with that evil machine."

SHANIYA hesitates and then turns towards the group, which is now next to her, about to pay at the self-checkout machine.

SHANIYA (*with a fake grin*): "Are you guys on a road trip? You're certainly not from here!"

The group turns around and looks at her. There are two GUYS and two GIRLS. One of the GUYS answers.

GUY 1: "Yeah. We've been on the road for three days now."

SHANAYA (*faking excitement*): "How fascinating! Let me help you with that [*she points at their groceries*]. Tell me more about your trip!"

The two guys head to SHANIYA's till but the two GIRLS stay at the self-checkout. KIM growls when she sees that. She gets up, exits through the left wing, comes back with a bottle of soda that she shakes, opens and spills all over them, after pretending to trip. The GIRLS scream. They are drenched in soda and are blinded by the mascara running down their cheeks.

KIM (*with a fake high-pitched voice*): "Oh no! I am terribly sorry! Oh no, and I got some in your hair too... Oh how stupid of me! I am *mortified!* (*dryly as she pushes them away from the machine*) I am afraid this machine is now out of order. Please pay at one of the tills."

The GIRLS, still blinded by their runny mascara, hesitantly feel around the floor, looking for their fallen groceries. KIM is now blocking the GIRLS' access to the machine. But after a few seconds, the growing pity she feels for the GIRLS, pushes her to abandon the machine and help them out. She realizes that she has gone a bit too far.

KIM (*softly*): "I'm sorry. Here you go."

KIM gives them their groceries. MARY goes to them and guides the girls offstage, through the left wing.

MARY (*apologetically*): "I'll show you to the restroom, so you can wash your faces. We're very sorry."

They exit. The GUYS, who have witnessed everything and have finished paying, appear frightened by the entire situation.

GUY 2 (*slightly frightened*): "Can you just tell them we're waiting in the car?"

SHANIYA (*still faking happiness*): "Yes of course! Have a safe trip!"

They exit hurriedly.

Scene XII:

BLONDIE: "Kim. That was unnecessary."

SHANIYA: "I'm on your side Kim but she's right, we can't stop people from paying at the self-checkout machine."

KIM does not answer. She seems ashamed of her behavior. She silently heads back to her till and sits down. MARY comes back from the left-wing with the GIRLS and brings them over to her till. She silently beeps their products. They give her the money before she even asks for it and leave in utter silence.

MARY (*sighing once the customers have left*): "Girls, this isn't right. I'll have to report this incident to the manager."

KIM (*snapping*): "Mary, you will do no such thing."

MARY: "Kim, you are poisoning everyone's mind with your paranoia!"

KIM: "You don't understand my situation!"

MARY: "Oh please... stop acting like a martyr. Single mother, ok, fair enough--"

KIM: "Fair enough?! Do you know what it's li--"

MARY (*cutting her off*): "We all have our problems here! I've been forced to work here ever since my husband passed away [*Blondie whispers some prayers in Russian and crosses herself*]. I have no money for retirement. Can't afford it."

KIM: "I know--"

MARY: "Blondie is high on anti-depressants! But no one knows how depressed she really is because no one has seen her sober! [*they all turn to her, BLONDIE still has lipstick all over her face like the Joker, Mary with rising anger*] Blondie, for the love of God wipe that lipstick off! [*BLONDIE wipes it away sheepishly, slight pause*] Shaniya has been working here, and in

various other places, since her early teenage years to afford her first year of university. None of our lives have been easy Kim. So, stop acting like a martyr.”

KIM (*quietly, her voice breaking*): “How am I acting like a martyr when I am the only one here refusing to be a victim? How am I acting like a martyr when I choose to fight back and destroy this “future” [*she points to the machine*] to preserve my child’s future? When I’m the only one here who has never complained about long work hours. When, some nights when no one is around, I secretly bring my kid to sleep in here, so I can start early the next day. Of course, that’s also because I can’t afford a nanny. But have I ever asked any of you for help or money? No. So no, Mary, I’m not a martyr. I aspire to be a warrior, but like every warrior, there are some battles I just can’t win by myself.”

MARY (*after a short pause, half-jokingly*): “God, stop talking like Braveheart.”

DANA emerges again from the left-wing. The tension between MARY and KIM, both the only ones standing up, makes DANA uncomfortable. MARY and KIM slowly sit at their tills, staring at each other. DANA walks towards MARY’s till but then changes her mind and slowly goes to BLONDIE’s till who welcomes her with a smile plastered on her face.

DANA (*hesitantly, looking at the women*): “Um... if you need anything, I can help.”

There is an awkward silence.

KIM: “With all due respect, it took you a long time to grab three eggs Dana. A revolution requires faster people.”

MARY and SHANAYA sigh and frown at KIM. DANA chuckles awkwardly. After a short hesitation, BLONDIE chuckles too.

BLONDIE (*lightly*): “She’s only joking! Don’t mind her.”

MARY: “It’s very nice of you Dana... we’ll let you know if we need anything.”

DANA (*grabbing her groceries and her trolley*): “Good luck ladies.”

She exits on the right wing.

Scene XIII:

The lights grow dim, we hear seconds ticking away. The eerie light above the self-checkout machine must stay on. The high-pitched violin, plus a chorus of soft eerie female voices, plays in the background. Some indistinguishable customers come in, dark shadows in the growing obscurity. Only the tills and the women are still in the spotlight. They are all staring at the self-checkout machine as they scan items. However, a few black shadows head to the self-checkout machine. The music softly fades in at the beginning but becomes louder as the seconds tick by faster and as the beeping of the scanned items accelerates progressively. This acceleration is joined by the crescendo of the self-checkout’s automatic voice repeating “Thank you!”. There is a form of harmony and choreographic beauty despite the growing chaos, panic and fleeting of time. Slowly, the lights above each till go off. The first to go is SHANIYA’s till. Then MARY’s, followed by BLONDIE’s. However, KIM’s till remains lit. KIM

appears exhausted, but she does not stop scanning the items. After a couple of seconds, the beeping of the items begins to slow down. KIM is too exhausted to continue, she starts to give in. The beeping must now resemble one of a life support machine. There is a final long beep before KIM's till is absorbed by the surrounding darkness and the stage is plunged in total silence.

Act II

Scene I:

The blue light above the self-checkout machine is on. Everything else is plunged in darkness. However, when the lights of the supermarket are turned on, KIM is at her till, staring at the self-checkout. She has spent the night in the supermarket. Her hair is a mess, she has bags under her eyes and her mascara is running down her cheeks. We hear BLONDIE's footsteps coming from the right-wing. BLONDIE appears on stage but stops dead when she sees KIM staring at the machine, with a crazy expression on her face.

BLONDIE (*sarcastically*): "Well! You look... [*she searches for the right word*] refreshed!"

KIM (*her voice sounding like a machine's automatic voice*): "Hello! Thank you!"

BLONDIE (*walks towards KIM fearfully*): "Kim... Kim?"

KIM (*as if regaining consciousness*): "A petition!"

BLONDIE: "What?"

KIM: "We'll start a petition! Ask our customers to sign it, if the manager sees that his customers are unhappy he'll back out."

BLONDIE (*nodding*): "Alright, alright. But sweetie... did you sleep here? Where is Adam?"

KIM (*day-dreaming*): "Adam?"

BLONDIE (*with urgency*): "Your son Kim!"

KIM looks at her blankly. After a few seconds, she screams and runs out of the store. BLONDIE sighs and shakes her head.

BLONDIE (*to herself*): "Poor woman."

Scene II:

BLONDIE heads for her till, but halfway there she realizes that she is alone with the machine. She turns around, fearfully looking back at it. She freezes in that position, looking at it for a few seconds, before fully turning around and walking towards it. She walks confidently at first but is quickly overwhelmed by fear and stops a few meters away from it. She observes it with a mix of terror and curiosity.

BLONDIE (*putting on her glasses that she takes out of her bag*): “Curious specimen. Ugly little thing.”

She starts to circle it as she observes it. She looks around to make sure she is alone. Once she is facing it, she takes a deep breath. With a shaky hand, she slowly presses a button on the screen. She looks at the screen by tilting her head upwards, similarly to elderly people looking at screens with glasses.

FEMALE VOICE: “Scan your first item.”

BLONDIE looks around and grabs the tomato can from under SHANIYA’s till. She heads back to the machine but has some trouble scanning it because of her shaky hands.

FEMALE VOICE: “Scan your first item.”

BLONDIE (*getting angry*): “блядь, woman, I know my job thank you!”

She successfully scans the item.

FEMALE VOICE: “Please place your item in the bagging area.”

BLONDIE (*confused*): “Bagging area? Where...”

She puts the tomato can in different places but cannot find the bagging area.

FEMALE VOICE: “Please place your item in the bagging area.”

BLONDIE (*angrily*): “черт возьми, woman, where is your bagging area?!”

FEMALE VOICE: “Please wait for assistance.”

A red light goes off at the top of the machine and the screen freezes. BLONDIE raises her hands as if it were a hold-up. She looks around desperately. Then she grabs her hair in panic and stares at the screen horrified.

BLONDIE: “Oh no no no no... I broke it! I broke it!”

She presses urgently on the screen but nothing happens.

BLONDIE (*her voice breaking*): “I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

FEMALE VOICE: “Please wait for assistance.”

BLONDIE: “But I am the assistance! I work here!”

She starts repeating slowly and articulately to the machine that she works here, hoping the system will pick up her words.

BLONDIE (*into different parts of the machine*): “I work here. I’m the assistance. I’m the assistance!”

The MANAGER appears silently from the back of the stage.

Scene III:

MANAGER: "Vladlena."

BLONDIE suddenly straightens up and raises her hands in the air.

BLONDIE (*stuttering*): "I'm so sorry, I just wanted to try it..."

MANAGER (*snickering*): "You need a special assistance card to stop it. No point screaming [*he mimicks her*] I'm the assistance!"

He goes to the machine and turns the machine's red light off after scanning his card and entering a password.

BLONDIE (*embarrassed and trying to laugh it off*): "Sorry. [*she chuckles awkwardly*] I'm ahead of the game! I thought voice recognition was also a thing now."

MANAGER looks at her with pity and laughs teasingly.

MANAGER (*ironically*): "Yes Blondie, you are very ahead of the game."

Suddenly, the MANAGER turns towards the audience and squints his eyes as he looks at the public. He walks to the front of the stage, faces the audience and whistles loudly, using his fingers.

MANAGER (*waving to someone in the audience*): "This way!"

BLONDIE looks at the audience confused. Two men come in from the audience carrying another self-checkout machine.

Scene IV:

MANAGER: "Can you put it here next to the other one? Thank you."

BLONDIE (*horrified*): "But... but..."

MANAGER (*to the men*): "Yes, perfect. Thank you so much! [*turning to Blondie*] Ah, you have got to admit that these machines are beautiful."

BLONDIE (*devastated*): "No... Oh, no..."

MANAGER (*to the men, ignoring her*): "Thank you and see you tomorrow!"

BLONDIE: "To-tomorrow? Are you bringing more of these [*she pronounces that last word with disgust*] monsters? But sir... sir... I thought that if you were unsatisfied-"

MANAGER (*softly*): "Blondie. This is the future. Trust me, I don't necessarily prefer these machines to you. But I must keep up with the rest of the world. Look around, they're everywhere now: self-service canteens, self-service laundries, self-checking machines, self-checkout machines..."

BLONDIE: "No, no but... you! You don't need to keep up with the rest of the world! You are your own boss!"

MANAGER (*softly*): “No, my big boss is money. I have to make a living, have a big family you know.”

He then turns his back to her and begins to check the new machine.

BLONDIE: “But what about us? What about our living?”

MANAGER: “I just can’t fall behind. The other supermarkets have them. I can’t let the competition get ahead of me. And I’ve already told you... I want to turn this grocery store into a world-wide chain. So I can finally leave this shithole. I just can’t fall behind.”

BLONDIE (*trying to laugh lightly and putting on a flirtatious voice*): “Oh. You would never fall! As strong as you are...”

MANAGER (*surprised, he turns quickly around to look at Blondie*): “I beg your pardon?”

BLONDIE (*she tries to sit sexily on SHANIYA’s till but does not succeed*): “You keep in shape, is what I mean.”

MANAGER (*dead-pan, turning his back again to BLONDIE and contemplating the new self-checkout machine*): “I really don’t. I never go to the gym. I should, maybe. I keep on getting fatter and fatter everyday but, oh well, don’t have time really.”

BLONDIE’s fake laugh resonates loudly. There is an awkward silence.

BLONDIE: “I... never go to the gym either.”

MANAGER looks at her and laughs a bit.

MANAGER (*ironically*): “Really?”

BLONDIE blushes quickly, laughs softly and gives up, finally heading back to her till.

BLONDIE (more casually): “Beautiful day today isn’t it?”

MANAGER: “No it’s raining.”

BLONDIE: “Oh. (*short pause*) Well I wouldn’t know, I work inside all day. I can’t even remember what the sun looks like.”

BLONDIE chuckles but the MANAGER looks at her without smiling.

MANAGER (*gravely*): “Are you complaining of your job?”

BLONDIE (*slightly panicked*): “What? No...no!”

MANAGER: “Because if you are, there are other jobs outside in the rain.”

BLONDIE (*with a nervous laughter*): “That’s not what I meant. I love it here!”

There is an awkward silence. Then the MANAGER turns back towards the new self-checkout machine. BLONDIE begins to hum “*Singin’ in the Rain*”, she tap dances softly in her heels. She continues to tap dance as she heads to her till but she suddenly slips, grabs her till and breaks the payment terminal as she crashes to the ground with a high-pitched scream.

MANAGER: "Oh God! Are you okay?"

MANAGER heads towards BLONDIE but only to retrieve the payment terminal from her hand. He does not offer to help her up. After a few seconds, BLONDIE manages to get up.

MANAGER: "Oh god, the payment terminal..."

BLONDIE (*sincerely*): "Oh sir, I'm so sorry."

MANAGER (*angrily as he throws the payment terminal under her till*): "Well it's ruined. Great. And then you ask me why I'm buying these *efficient* machines."

He points to the self-checkouts and walks back towards them.

MANAGER (*coldly to BLONDIE without looking at her*): "Put up the "cash only" sign on your till."

As soon as he is front of the self-checkout machines, MARY comes on stage from the right-wing. BLONDIE is now silently crying.

Scene V:

MARY (*without seeing the manager nor the new machine*): "I just saw Kim running to the school. Did she forget to pick up Adam again?"

BLONDIE sniffs loudly and wipes away her tears.

MARY (*heading towards BLONDIE and hugging her*): "Sweetie, what's wrong?"

MANAGER (*without turning towards MARY*): "Hi Mary. How are you?"

MARY stops dead, her arms around BLONDIE. She slowly turns around and looks at the MANAGER.

MARY: "Hello sir, I'm [*she falls silent when she sees the second self-checkout machine*] oh... so you've installed another."

MANAGER (*sighing and turning around to face them*): "I know this isn't easy, especially for both of you because you've been working here the longest. Changes are always hard to get used to at first, I know--"

MARY: "Sir. It's not us you should be worried about. It's Kim..."

MANAGER (*surprised*): "Kim?"

BLONDIE (*whispering to Mary*): "Oh Mary, shh, stop!"

MANAGER: "What about Kim?"

MARY (*ignoring BLONDIE*): "She's acting a bit weird. Worried sick of losing her job!"

MANAGER: "Kim? Really? Oh. I thought Blondie would be... *[he pauses and mutters]* Never thought Kim would fear losing her job. Anyway, I'll talk to her. Good day ladies."

MANAGER exits by the back of the stage.

Scene VI:

MARY (*proudly*): "There, you see! All we needed was to talk to the manager. Communication solves all the problems."

BLONDIE (*suddenly anxious and biting her nails*): "What did he mean by "I thought Blondie would be..." Is he intending on firing me first? Was this his way of telling me he is unsatisfied with my job? Oh god Mary, I fucked up."

MARY: "Oh no! No! Blondie...Vlatvena, stop. That's probably not what he meant."

BLONDIE (*breathing fast*): "Probably... probably... but maybe not. I can't lose this job!"

KIM comes in at that point. She is sweating and has not changed her outfit since the beginning of the play. The women fall silent and stare at her, clearly dreading her reaction when she sees the second machine.

Scene VII:

KIM (*relieved but clearly exhausted and out of breath*): "It's alright, it's fine. Dana, God bless Dana, took Adam home from school yesterday. He slept at her place. You know... her son and mine are best friends. Oh, yeah I know I was mean to her yesterday, so I was worried... But it's all good, it's all... *[she is standing next to her till, about to sit in her chair when she sees the second self-checkout machine]* SHIT!"

MARY: "Kim..."

KIM turns to the women and starts laughing nervously.

KIM: "That sleep deprivation has got me seeing double! I'm seeing two of these monsters!"

She laughs and sits at her till, without giving it a second thought, then she rubs her eyes with her fists and yawns. BLONDIE is breathing loudly, clearly having a panic attack.

KIM (*very excitedly*): "Oh yes! A petition! That's what I was telling Blondie about this morning. So, Mary, I think we should ask our customers to sign a petition before the manager installs a second machine."

BLONDIE starts sweating and breathing even louder. MARY just nods frenetically. KIM seems suddenly jovial and excited.

KIM: "I figured, it's all about customers really. The manager wants to make profit, but if he loses his clients, then suddenly *[she violently slams her fist on her till]* he'll break."

BLONDIE gasps for air. MARY who is holding BLONDIE in her arms and who is trying to help her, glares at KIM. SHANIYA comes in at that point, from the right-wing, with her usual glee and optimism.

SHANIYA: “Hellooo ladies! *[she heads to her till but notices the second self-checkout machine]* Oh shit! Oh shit!”

KIM looks at her and freezes for a few seconds before understanding the situation. She gets up, starts gasping for breath as she begins to have a panic attack. Her panic makes BLONDIE panic even more. They both desperately gasp for air. SHANIYA runs to help KIM while MARY remains with BLONDIE. The scene must be comical despite their distress. After a few seconds, the stage is suddenly plunged in darkness. Suddenly, a blue light illuminates the first self-checkout, followed by another above the second self-checkout machine. Two high-pitched violins are heard playing in harmony with the women’s gasps.

Scene VIII:

When the lights flicker back on, KIM and BLONDIE are lying horizontally on their respective tills. The tills have been rotated so that the profiles of KIM and BLONDIE are facing the audience. SHANIYA is sitting in KIM’s chair, and MARY is sitting in BLONDIE’s chair. Both KIM and BLONDIE are calm now as they dry their tears with white tissues. Their position and the following dialogue must resemble the exchange between a therapist and a patient.

KIM (*to SHANIYA*): “First, he brought one woman. And although I was not fine with it, I allowed it. But now that he brings in this second woman *[she points at the machines]* and positions her right in front of my eyes, it’s impossible for me to cope. Four cashiers should be enough for one man. And you know, *[slight pause]* the worst part is that all of this reminds me of my father. He would sneak his “girl friends” into the house when my mom wasn’t around. My mother wasn’t stupid, she figured it out. So, she left and he replaced her with another woman. But you see me, I’m not going anywhere.”

BLONDIE (*crying to MARY*): “I thought I was his favorite! We had a special bond. Every day, I would come in early, because I knew the manager would be walking to his office and I could get a glimpse of him then. We always had deep conversations about the daily weather. I loved it, I felt like I knew him inside and out! And today, I was expecting a love confession but all I got was a threat of dismissal!”

KIM (*to SHANIYA*): “Daddy issues? No, I just don’t like men.”

BLONDIE (*to MARY*): “I don’t know what he wants from me!”

They start talking faster, the lines must follow each other rapidly without a pause.

KIM: “It’s just obscene. Two of them?! TWO of them?!”

BLONDIE: “Those сучки *(points to the machines)* think they can steal my man?!”

KIM: “And so blatantly cheating on us? In front of our fucking faces?!”

BLONDIE: “They have no soul Mary! They will destroy him! That poor man!”

KIM: "Shaniya promise me, whatever you do, make sure your man wears a condom. Men are trash."

Scene IX:

Suddenly the MANAGER appears from the back of the stage. The tills slowly rotate back to their former position, hence facing the self-checkout machines again.

MANAGER: "Kim?"

They all stand up quickly. BLONDIE and KIM look terrified, their mascara is running and they are both breathing loudly.

KIM (*softly*): "Yes?"

MANAGER: "Could I have a word with you in my office?"

BLONDIE emits a soft cry and runs to MARY's arms. KIM clears her throat, looks at the floor, straightens up her shirt and her hair, before raising her head proudly.

KIM: "Of course."

She tries to walk dignifiedly but trips on her way to his office. She exits with the MANAGER through the back of the stage. BLONDIE sobs loudly once they are gone.

MARY: "So Shaniya, today is your last day?"

SHANIYA nods silently. BLONDIE sobs even louder.

SHANIYA: "Ok. Girls, no point in crying. We could still start a petition. Going on strike would be of no use, stopping customers from paying at the machines doesn't seem to have any influence on the manager's decisions..."

KIM comes in at that point. She looks straight ahead, decidedly.

KIM (*with a decisive tone*): "Shaniya is right. There's no point in crying."

SHANIYA: "So a petition?"

KIM (*calmly*): "Too late for a petition. He has signed the contract for the machines. And this is the only decent grocery store in town, I doubt clients will stop coming because of this."

SHANIYA (*worried*): "How are you so calm Kim? Are you okay?"

KIM (*she looks around checking the manager isn't around*): "If there is anyway we can prove that self-checkouts are easier to rob, then we win."

SHANIYA (*confused*): "What?"

KIM (*her face lighting up*): "If the manager starts losing money because of these machines, no matter how efficient they are, he will retract. So, I was thinking, we could organize a fake hold-up."

MARY (*outraged*): "Kim! We are not thieves!"

KIM (*coldly*): "Mary, a second ago I was in the manager's office and guess who he is firing first... you. That's what he said to "reassure" me. He claimed he was firing you, then Blondie and well Shaniya is leaving for uni, so I would be the only one left."

BLONDIE screams in horror.

MARY: "Blondie, you sound like a bad soap opera. Pull yourself together."

KIM (*calmly*): "Follow my plan and no one gets fired."

Scene X:

The lights grow dim. Kim jumps on her till, her face illuminated by a red light. A clock is heard ticking, the slow and menacing tune of the self-checkout machines is heard faintly in the background.

KIM: "Very simply put: a thief will come in with a metal bar and will smash the machines to pieces. He will then retrieve the money. We, of course, let the robber do this but, just as he is about to leave, we stop him. We get the money back. He manages to escape. And we become heroes. The manager will realize that he is nothing without us."

BLONDIE: "Kim... I'm not sure."

The lights return to normal. KIM jumps down from her till.

KIM: "Or we could stay here and just witness the invasion of the enemy and our future unemployment."

MARY (*after a short pause*): "You know what. I'll let you go through with this. But I don't want any part in it."

KIM: "I don't ask anything of you apart from not telling the manager. But it might also be good if you're on the security cameras. Otherwise, they might hold you as suspects in the attempted robbery."

BLONDIE: "So, so wait... We just need to be here but we don't need to do anything right?"

KIM: "I mean... if you're here and you don't do anything that's not very heroic right?"

MARY: "God...Kim. I'm really not sure about this."

KIM (*angrily*): "Mary! This is our last chance! And think about the money we'll make!"

SHANIYA (*doubtfully*): "Wait, what money?"

KIM: "We could discreetly take some of the cash? A lil' extra cash wouldn't hurt am I right? Think about your retirement Mary. Blondie, your family in Russia would appreciate it very much, I'm sure. And Shaniya, college is *very* expensive."

MARY and BLONDIE both sigh loudly and start talking over each other.

MARY: "Kim this is insane."

BLONDIE: "It won't work!"

MARY: "The manager will figure it out."

BLONDIE: "We'll all go to jail."

SHANIYA (*abruptly*): "It's not that stupid. If it's done well."

There is a silence.

SHANIYA (*softly*): "Today is my last day. I want to help you. I'll find a fake thief. Someone untraceable, unknown to all of you, so they won't be able to link him back to us. Don't worry."

BLONDIE and MARY remain silent, considering it. KIM breathes in deeply, both anxious and relieved.

KIM (*softly*): "Good. Plan it for tomorrow night, closing time."

SHANIYA: "I'll do my best."

The four women slowly sink into their respective chairs. The lights grow dim until the stage is plunged in darkness.

Scene XI:

In the darkness, only KIM's voice and SHANIYA's answer are heard. The women are clearly worried. Their voices are hesitant and nervous when they try to have a normal conversation.

KIM (*trying to lighten up the mood*): "So... uhm... how is it going with that boy Shaniya?"

SHANIYA: "We broke up."

Harsh lights flicker on, first above SHANIYA's till, then over KIM's, MARY's and finally over BLONDIE's.

KIM: "Ah. [*awkward pause*] Well good riddance. Men are trash. And you Blondie? Any men?"

BLONDIE (*with a cheeky smile*): "Quite a few."

KIM and SHANIYA (*surprised*): "Really?"

BLONDIE (*blushing and looking down*): "Oh yes. The garbage collector and I made eye contact this morning, as he was picking up my garbage. [*dreamily*] It was quite a turn on, seeing him lift up that big garbage bin so easily. And well don't tell anyone but this morning the manager and I had a flirtatious episode."

KIM (*trying not to laugh*): "Excuse me?"

BLONDIE: "I think he was flirting with me."

KIM (*ironically*): "Well, that's quite the romantic life you lead, Blondie."

SHANIYA (*puffing*): "Very jealous. How about you Mary?"

MARY (*with a smile*): "I've got two boyfriends."

THE OTHERS (*surprised*): “What?!”

KIM: “Oh! Mary!”

SHANAYA (*laughing*): “Wow!”

BLONDIE (*low-key jealous*): “What? How?”

MARY: “I met these two widowed men. They take me out to dance and to eat. I figured I should have fun again.”

SHANIYA: “You should ask them to take you to the city. There isn’t any decent place to eat here.”

KIM (*very sincerely*): “I’m very happy for you Mary. Glad to see you’re enjoying life again.”

MARY (*lightly*): “Couldn’t cry forever anyway.”

There is a short silence. BLONDIE hastily tries to break the silence.

BLONDIE: “You, Kim?”

KIM: “Me. Ah, I’ve received a couple of threats from my ex-husband. He wants to see the kid. But I’m not falling for it. He’ll kidnap Adam again. That’s also one of the reasons why I can’t lose my job. He’ll use it against me to get the child’s custody.”

BLONDIE: “Mm...I understand.”

MARY: “Aw. That must be hard.”

SHANIYA: “We’re here for you Kim.”

KIM (*softly*): “It’s fine now. Everything will be fixed soon.”

Scene XII:

Slowly, the lights dim out. Music (similar to *Unfinished Sympathy – Massive Attack*). Customers, in the form of dark shadows, come into the store and go to each till with groceries in their hands. The women beep their items in rhythm with the music while staring straight ahead at the self-checkouts. They look determined as their anger slowly builds up. Finally, the stage is plunged in darkness apart from the self-checkout machines. The high-pitched violins are only heard faintly in the back, representing the machines’ loss of power in the face of the women’s rebellion.

Act III

Scene I:

When the lights flicker on above the tills, there is no one in the supermarket. We notice that a tomato can has been placed on each till. A subtle reference to Andy Warhol's "Campbell's Soup Cans". The music dims out. Once it has fully stopped, only the ticking of a clock can be heard. Suddenly, there is a sound of shattered glass coming from the stage's right wing, just as a tall and strong man comes in. His face is fully covered apart from his eyes. He is wearing a big black hoodie and baggy pants. He comes in holding a metal bar and trips on the broken glass. He checks the soles of his shoes and grunts, displeased by the broken glass. He seems quite uncomfortable and confused, he looks around, does not see the self-checkout machines, so he rushes to the left side of the stage, comes back, even more confused and starts wrecking Blondie's till before spotting the self-checkouts on the other side of the stage.

MAN (running towards the self-checkouts): "Oh shit."

He is hitting one of the self-checkout machine when a loud and hoarse man's voice is heard shouting, offstage, from the right-wing.

MAN 2: "Hey!"

MAN 1 freezes and hides behind the self-checkout. MAN 2 comes in, dressed similarly with a baseball bat in his hands instead of a metal bar. His face is fully covered apart from his eyes. The women having heard the shattered glass emerge from the left-wing.

Scene II:

BLONDIE (*with a very fake voice*): "Oh no. We are being robbed."

MAN 2 starts walking towards Kim.

SHANIYA (*whispering to MAN 2*): "No... no, you still have to break the machines."

MAN 2 (*stops and looks at her confused*): "What?"

SHANIYA (*whispering angrily*): "We can only attack you once you've destroyed the machines. Finish the job I paid you to do!"

MAN 2: "Shut up!"

He violently pushes SHANIYA aside, grabs KIM and slaps her. The women gasp. MAN 1 emerges from his hiding spot and resumes the destruction of the machines. The women jump to KIM's help while looking, in horror, at MAN 1.

BLONDIE: "Who is that??"

MARY (to SHANIYA): "You hired two?!"

SHANIYA: "No!"

KIM (*shouting*): "Let go of me you pig!"

MAN 2: "You bitch! Let me see my son!"

SHANIYA, MARY and BLONDIE gasp and utter a collective "oh".

KIM: "Joe! Stop!"

JOE: "I'll kill you!"

KIM's face is bleeding. BLONDIE runs to the left-wing of the stage and comes back with a bottle that she smashes on top of JOE's head. They all scream. JOE falls unconscious to the floor.

Scene III:

MAN 1 stops destroying the machines and turns around.

SHANIYA (*shouting to MAN 1*): "Keep smashing them!"

MAN 1 carries on with his task. Soon the half-broken machines start frenetically repeating "Thank you".

THREE AUTOMATIC FEMALE VOICES: "Thank you!"

KIM (*to MARY*): "Call the cops quickly before he wakes up. [*to BLONDIE*] Thank you."

BLONDIE does not answer. She stares at the unconscious body and the broken bottle in her hand. MARY rushes to the phone while KIM and SHANIYA lift JOE up with difficulty and begin tying him up to KIM's chair. MAN 1 keeps on destroying the self-checkouts.

THREE AUTOMATIC FEMALE VOICES: "Thank you!"

SHANIYA (*screaming to MAN 1*): "Shut them up!"

KIM (*shouting to MAN 1*): "They're driving me insane!"

MAN 1: "I'm doing my best! They won't stop!"

The machines' voices keep on repeating those two words relentlessly, no matter how hard MAN 1 smashes them. BLONDIE looks at the broken bottle and suddenly cuts her right wrist. She seems at peace.

BLONDIE (*softly as if to the machines*): "Thank you."

MARY screams when she sees the blood and BLONDIE's serene expression. She drops the phone and runs to BLONDIE, despite her painful hip. She grabs a cloth and begins to bandage BLONDIE's wrist.

BLONDIE (*calmly while MARY bandages her*): "It's all fine, all fixed."

MARY (*trying to stay calm but her voice is breaking*): "Sweetie, what are you trying to do! What were you thinking?!"

BLONDIE (*extremely calm*): "He's going to fire me anyway. I've made a mess. [*after a short pause and with a little laugh*] At least the blood blends in with my red vest."

MARY finishes the bandage and holds BLONDIE tightly.

MARY (*softly to BLONDIE*): "Don't do this to yourself Blondie. Please stop."

BLONDIE begins to sob like a child. MAN 1 has finished destroying the machines and is stealing the cash inside, KIM and SHANIYA have tied up JOE. A distorted "Thank you" is still heard then and again from the machines. However, the voice now sound like a deep man's voice.

MARY (*taking the bottle from BLONDIE*): "Now I'll fix it."

Scene IV:

SHANIYA, KIM and MARY head towards MAN 1 in slow motion. MAN 1 turns around, flying pieces of glass around him. The lights are dimmed. In the background, police sirens can be heard growing closer. Music is playing (a tune similar to Tom Misch's song "In the Midst of it All"). JOE slowly regains consciousness, BLONDIE is still sobbing in a corner. However, apart from the music and the police sirens, the entire scene must be completely silent and in slow motion. MAN 1 is holding his metal bar and swaying it in the air to scare the women away. KIM intercepts the metal bar and yanks it from his hands. The women shout something inaudible. MAN 1, pretends to be afraid and drops the cash on the floor before running out of the store. SHANIYA chases him out of the right-wing. Finally, KIM, clearly out of breath, walks back towards BLONDIE, who is still crying, and pulls her up before hugging her tightly. MARY goes to JOE and slaps him so hard that he falls unconscious again. Darkness ensues, apart from a single light over KIM and BLONDIE. As the music fades out, the lights above them dim out completely.

Scene V:

The lights flicker on above the first till on the left. BLONDIE is at her till, her wrist bandaged, but she is smiling. The lights flicker on above the second till, which MARY is occupying. The lights flicker above the third till, which KIM is occupying. The lights flicker on above SHANIYA's till, but it is empty. Six customers come in, they go directly towards the tills and start moving them around just as the music fades in. The tills, rolling on wheels, are exchanged between the three pairs of customers. This must be well choreographed and very fluid. A clock is also heard ticking away, in rhythm with the music. MARY's till is the first to exit on the right. She waves goodbye to the others. As soon as she exits, the customers who wheeled her out, come back wheeling a self-checkout machine and place it where her till was. BLONDIE's is the second to exit on the right. She kisses KIM goodbye as their tills are interchanged. We see BLONDIE, discreetly stuffing some pills in her mouth and swallowing them when KIM is not looking. Another self-checkout machine is installed. KIM is the last one at her till. They are about to wheel her out when she signals for them to stop, she gets up, they wheel her back towards the self-checkout machines and she spits on the two machines that have been installed. They wheel her out as she laughs cynically.

Epilogue:

The stage is empty for a few seconds, then a little boy appears from the right-wing, rolling in the final self-checkout machine and placing it in KIM's place.

KIM (unseen, her voice coming from the right-wing): "Adam, come back!"

The little boy tries to press on the machine's screen, but he is too small and cannot reach it. He struggles, trying desperately to reach it. The machine's female automated voice booms out.

FEMALE VOICE: "Welcome. Scan your club card."

The child runs offstage.

Lights out.

Curtain.