

THISTLEPATCH

By Catherine Frid

Synopsis:

A child psychologist and an investigative reporter struggle to piece together the tragic puzzle of a 14-year-old girl's suicide in a juvenile prison.

Thistlepatch is based on the true story that catalyzed the complete overhaul of Ontario's child welfare services in the 1970s.

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THISTLEPATCH

CHARACTERS:

Flora Danziger– 40 to 46 over the course of the play, South African

Christine – 15, South African

James – about 50, South African

Norma Dean – 10 to 14 over the course of the play

Victor Malarek – about 28

Penny – 10 to 14 over the course of the play

Ann Dyson – 30s

Shawn – 14

Jean Brighton – 20s

Shirley Dean – 30s

Coroner – 40s

Police Officer 1

Police Officer 2

Warden

With doubling, this play can be performed by five actors, e.g.:

F1 – Flora

F2 – Norma, Christine, Mrs. Dean

F3 – Jean, Penny, Coroner

F4 – Ann, OPP officer, Warden

M1 – James, Victor, Shawn, OPP officer

TIME: 1969 to 1976

***Thistlepatch* was developed through a generous Artist in Residency at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto.**

This play is an embellished history that has been approved by Dr. Flora Stohr-Danziger and Victor Malarek. It's also informed by the book *Gut Instinct* by Victor Malarek (1996), and quotations from *Gut Instinct* are used with the author's permission.

THISTLEPATCH

Scene 1

(1972. FLORA and NORMA sit at a child's table at the York Child Guidance Clinic. FLORA sits cramped on a small chair, watching NORMA draw. NORMA picks up a black crayon and finishes the drawing.)

FLORA

May I see?

(NORMA passes the drawing over.)

Where's your mother?

(NORMA points.)

Why did you pick that colour to draw her?

(pause)

NORMA

I don't know.

(beat)

FLORA

Where's your father?

(long pause)

I can see this is difficult for you to talk about.

Scene 2

(September 1976. JEAN waits in the lobby of The Globe and Mail building. Newsroom sounds can be heard in the background. VICTOR storms in.)

VICTOR

I'm on a deadline. Who the hell's paging me?

JEAN

Hello, are you Victor Malarek?

VICTOR

The same.

JEAN

I'm Jean Brighton. I've been reading your articles in the Globe about drugging of youths in provincial facilities and I really wanted to talk to you.

VICTOR

Those bastards kept a poor kid doped out of his mind and wandering around in a geriatric ward for a month!

JEAN

Nobody would have known about it without your articles.

VICTOR

And I'm going to keep writing about it until something bloody well changes.

JEAN

Mr. Malarek, I'm a youth worker and I interned at juvenile court.

VICTOR

Where kids get shoved back and forth between the bullies and the predators.

JEAN

Pardon?

VICTOR

What possessed you to work at juvenile court?

JEAN

Youth protection.

VICTOR

What the child welfare system does in the name of helping kids would be considered too cruel to be a punishment.

JEAN

That's a broad statement.

VICTOR

It's all about power-tripping. Hell, if you don't know that by now you're either blind or stupid.

JEAN

You're sounding a lot like a cynical journalist.

VICTOR

No. I'm a guy who's

JEAN

What?

VICTOR

Busy. Busy being a cynical journalist.

(He exits. JEAN shouts through the door to the newsroom.)

JEAN

I know about a big scandal.

(VICTOR reappears at the door.)

VICTOR

If you got something to say, lay it on me.

JEAN

A 14-year-old girl being treated at Thistlepatch was in and out of juvenile court and was transferred to a training school, which is basically a jail for kids, and –

VICTOR

I know what a training school is.

JEAN

And three weeks later she hanged herself.

VICTOR

When's the inquest?

JEAN

I don't know if there's going to be one.

VICTOR

There's supposed to be an inquest when there's a death in a Ministry of Corrections facility. How did you find out about the suicide?

JEAN

I'd rather not....

VICTOR

At juvenile court.

JEAN

Yes. No! I didn't say that.

VICTOR

Why should I believe you?

JEAN

Because I'm telling the truth. And because you stand up for kids who get swallowed by the system.

VICTOR

Why was the girl –

JEAN

Her name is ... was, Norma Dean.

VICTOR

Why was Norma Dean in juvenile court?

JEAN

The time I met her she'd missed curfew --

VICTOR

You get dragged in front of a judge for coming home late. That's child protection? Tell me everything you know.

JEAN

I don't know much else. I called the training school, pretending I was Norma's aunt, but they say she's not there and they won't say what happened to her.

VICTOR

Who can tell me more? I need facts for a story.

JEAN

You could call Thistleton or the training school or juvenile court, but I don't know....

VICTOR

I expect their openness will blow my mind. Where did you say you work now?

JEAN

I didn't. Umm, could you not identify me?

VICTOR

I use anonymous sources all the time.

JEAN

I'm in a new job. It might....

(pause)

VICTOR

(dryly) It might. What's your phone number?

JEAN

I'll call you.

VICTOR

I'll work my contacts this afternoon. I can't publish a story with just anonymous sources. Call me.

(VICTOR exits to the newsroom.)

Scene 3

(1972. FLORA and NORMA meet at the York Child Guidance Clinic.)

NORMA

And I hate that she smokes.

FLORA

She makes you angry?

NORMA

She's going to get cancer.

FLORA

Norma, do you worry about your mother a lot?

NORMA

All the time! I'm afraid to leave her because I don't know what will happen to her.

FLORA

That sounds very scary. Has anything bad ever happened to your mother?

NORMA

No, but she's all I have, since my dad left.

FLORA

Is that why you can't go to school?

NORMA

I can't go to school because I can't breathe, thinking she's getting cancer or something while I'm away.

FLORA

And does that make you angry, Norma?

NORMA

Yes! I keep telling her but she won't quit. She's going to die and leave me alone.

FLORA

Does your need to stay with your mother make you angry at yourself, too?

NORMA

I can't do anything 'cuz I'm scared all the time.

FLORA

Do you think that might be why you sometimes break things?

NORMA

I don't know. Sometimes I get so mad I don't know what else to do. Doctor Danziger, am I a retard?

FLORA

Not at all, Norma. You're very bright.

NORMA

I'm not like other kids.

FLORA

Norma, you have a phobia. A phobia is a huge fear that's very hard to get over by yourself. It's like being locked in a room you can't get out of.

NORMA

All the other grade fours aren't afraid. I want to be like them. The principal thinks I don't want to go to school, but I can't go.

FLORA

So figuring how you can go to school is like finding the key to get out of a room you're stuck in.

NORMA

Where am I going to find the key?

FLORA

You don't have to do it alone, Norma, I'm here to help you. I have another patient here at the clinic who's also 10 years old, and she has a phobia of cats in the same way you have a phobia of school.

NORMA

Who could be afraid of a cat? I love cats!

FLORA

Phobias are fears that don't make sense. Maybe you could help her understand how lovable cats are, and she could help you understand that leaving your mom to be with other kids at school can be fun. It's called group therapy. Would you like to try it?

NORMA

Will you be there too?

FLORA

Yes. We meet every week. Can you join us tomorrow?

(NORMA nods.)

It will be lovely to have you in our group. Do you have any other questions for today?

NORMA

No. (pause) Do you really think I can change?

FLORA

Yes, I do.

(She looks in her purse.)

I'll walk out with you, I'm going to a training session.

NORMA

Training for what?

(A photo falls out of FLORA's purse. NORMA picks it up and looks questioningly at FLORA.)

FLORA

Those are my children.

NORMA

How old are they?

FLORA

Christine is 18 and Jimmy's 16 now.

NORMA

(pointing to the picture) She's pretty.

FLORA

You remind me of Christine, when she was your age.

NORMA

Really? Did she have a phobia?

FLORA

No. But she was frightened then, like you are now.

(NORMA gives the picture back.)

NORMA

Why do you need training? I thought you knew everything.

FLORA

I certainly don't know everything, Norma.

NORMA

But you know I can get better?

FLORA

Yes. (beat) I'm going to a course about information-sharing. Sometimes children are treated in different places and we want to make sure all the people who work with them understand their backgrounds.

NORMA

I don't want to go anywhere else.

FLORA

Don't worry, Norma, I won't send you anywhere else. But Thistlepatch Centre has a new system we're all being trained in.

NORMA

Thistlepatch? It sounds horrible.

FLORA

It does, but that's just the name of the area where it's located. Thistlepatch is the most modern treatment centre for children, but I won't get there if I can't find my car keys.

NORMA

You can't find the keys, Doctor Danziger?

FLORA

I must have left them in my office.

NORMA

You can't find the key to unlock the door?

FLORA

(does a double-take and laughs) What do you think it means?

NORMA

If you can't find the key, you won't get into the Thistlepatch.

(NORMA waves good-bye and exits. FLORA stares at the photo she's left holding.)

Scene 4

(1969. FLORA and CHRISTINE walk along a Cape Town street at dusk.)

CHRISTINE

I missed you.

FLORA

I missed you too, Christine. And not just because I had nothing else to do!

(They laugh.)

How was your math test?

CHRISTINE

I got 76 percent.

FLORA

That's very good.

CHRISTINE

It's not very good. I should have done better. Dad says I'm lazy.

FLORA

It's a very good mark and I'm proud of you.

CHRISTINE

How was your experiment?

FLORA

Interesting. (beat) It's Thursday, did you tell your father you'd be late for dinner?

CHRISTINE

Don't try to change the subject. Come on Mom, I'm not a baby. Spill.

FLORA

It was worse than I imagined. I couldn't think and I began to lose my sense of identity. And I was only there four days. Political prisoners are held that way for 90 days.

CHRISTINE

They must go crazy.

FLORA

I don't know how anyone survives it. Solitary confinement is a form of torture, it's been proven. And confessions made under torture are not reliable. The results of our experiment will be evidence at the trial of a coloured man who made a false confession after 90 days in solitary.

CHRISTINE

If solitary is proven to be torture, why did you have to do the experiment?

FLORA

Our government likes to think we South Africans are different.

(CHRISTINE stops and blocks FLORA's way.)

CHRISTINE

I have a surprise for you.

FLORA

Christine, please don't stop. It was lovely of you to meet me but you know Cape Town isn't safe at night. Give me your surprise when we get home.

(CHRISTINE pulls a thick envelope from her satchel.)

CHRISTINE

It's from --

FLORA

Shhh.

(FLORA takes the envelope, opens it and scans the contents.)

I won the scholarship.

CHRISTINE

I knew it!

FLORA

I'll talk to your father. I won't go to Canada without you and Jimmy.

(Bright headlights come on and a car engine idles behind them. They freeze.)

CHRISTINE
It's the security forces, isn't it?

FLORA
Maybe not.

CHRISTINE
Who else would it be?

FLORA
Christine, walk in front of me.

(CHRISTINE moves in front of FLORA and they keep walking.)

CHRISTINE
(crying) Salome's aunt was killed in a hit and run last week. Mom, I don't want to lose you.

FLORA
I'm much more worried about you. If that car speeds up, run behind a tree. Have you the key to the flat?

CHRISTINE
Has this happened to you before? (pause) It has! You're going to be killed!

(Another set of headlights flashes on, in front of them, and that car engine starts up. CHRISTINE clutches at FLORA.)

FLORA
Sweetheart, please stay calm. We're nearly home.

(They turn out of the light to go up the walkway. A figure emerges from the shadows and they jump. CHRISTINE starts to run away. JAMES grabs her.)

JAMES
Christine.

CHRISTINE
You scared me, Dad.

(The cars turn off their engines and headlights. Silence.)

JAMES
What sort of mother lets her child be tailed by thugs from security forces?

FLORA

We lost track of time, James.

CHRISTINE

It's my fault. Mom told me not to, but I met her after experiment at the university --

JAMES

More political work. Flora, do you have any maternal instinct?

CHRISTINE

Dad!

FLORA

What legacy do I leave my children if I don't fight apartheid?

JAMES

I keep my head down to keep my kids safe.

FLORA

Let's go inside.

JAMES

I will not enter the hovel you choose to live in. I already picked up Jimmy from soccer, and dinner is getting cold. Let's go, Christine. (beat, gesturing to the envelope FLORA holds) What's that?

FLORA

Nothing.

(JAMES takes the envelope and pulls out the papers.)

JAMES

University of Toronto. Your Ph.D.? It's a good thing a father has rights in this country.

FLORA

James, the children would be safer in Canada.

JAMES

The only thing that makes them unsafe here is you.

FLORA

That's not true. South Africa's practically in civil war. I won't go without the children.

JAMES

Then you stay. (beat) Let's go, Christine.

CHRISTINE

Mom, I don't want you to end up like Salome's aunt. They followed her around everywhere in a car, too! You should go.

FLORA

I can't leave you and Jimmy.

CHRISTINE

Get away before something awful happens. Jimmy and I already talked about it. Please go.

(CHRISTINE hugs FLORA.)

FLORA

I can't.

CHRISTINE

(quietly to FLORA) Once we're 21, Dad can't stop us from doing what we please. That's only six years for me, 8 for Jimmy.

FLORA

Six years?!

CHRISTINE

It's better than being in jail, like other professors. Or....

(FLORA shakes her head. pause)

Then I'm going to live with Dad. Jimmy will too. We'll come back tomorrow to pack up our things.

FLORA

No!

JAMES

(to FLORA) You see how you've frightened her?

CHRISTINE

(to FLORA) This is the only way you'll leave.

(CHRISTINE waves good-bye, much like NORMA did in the previous scene.
JAMES and CHRISTINE exit.)

Scene 5

(1972. NORMA and PENNY walk outside the York Child Guidance Clinic.)

PENNY
Do you like group?

NORMA
I like it. I like Doctor Danziger.

PENNY
Me too. (beat) I can't believe you'd want to be with your mom all the time. I can't stand mine.

NORMA
It's not that I want to be with her. It's a phobia. Other kids have them too.

PENNY
Does your mom have a boyfriend?

NORMA
No.

PENNY
You're lucky, Norma.

NORMA
Why? Does yours?

PENNY
Oh ya. And he thinks he's my dad. "Penny, your room's a pigsty" and "I think Penny should do the dishes for a change." I hate him.

NORMA
What does your mom say?

PENNY
Nothing. And his feet stink. As soon as he takes off his shoes the whole apartment reeks and I wanna barf. I'm gonna get rid of him.

NORMA
You can't change grown-ups.

PENNY

Sure you can. I'm gonna tell them at the clinic that he made a pass at me. And I think he wants to, too. I see him looking at me sometimes.

NORMA

You'd get him in big trouble.

PENNY

That's how I got rid of her last boyfriend. It really works. They're all creeps. (beat) Hey, look at that guy.

(They both look offstage.)

Hey Mister Truckdriver! What's he doing?

NORMA

I think he's waiting for the other truck to leave so he can unload his stuff at Zeller's.

PENNY

Hi! (she waves, pauses) He won't wave. What a snob. (yells) You're just a truck driver!

NORMA

He's busy, Penny.

PENNY

Don't think you're better than me, you moron.

(PENNY flashes the truck driver.)

See? He looked. You looked! You looked! Pervert!

NORMA

Now he's mad, let's go.

PENNY

Don't give me the finger, you creep!

NORMA

Let's get back to group. Our break must be over.

PENNY

He can't treat me like that. Who does he think he is? I'm going to tell the store manager. Come on.

(NORMA hesitates.)

What's the matter? Are you chicken?

(PENNY runs off. NORMA follows reluctantly.)

Scene 6

(September 1976. FLORA sits in her office at the York Child Guidance Clinic, staring listlessly into space. She catches herself and tries to focus on the papers in front of her, but again becomes lost in thought. There's a light tap on the door but FLORA doesn't respond. Jean enters.)

JEAN

Flora, I'm very sorry....

FLORA

Thank you, Jean.

JEAN

I am so, so sorry. Flora. You must be devastated.

FLORA

I hope my work will focus me.

JEAN

Do you think it would help you to... talk?

FLORA

No. (pause) How has your caseload been this last month?

JEAN

Fine. The York Clinic is light years away from juvenile court.

FLORA

I'm sure.

JEAN

All right then....

(JEAN lingers in the office.)

FLORA
Is there something else?

JEAN
Not really....

FLORA
None of our patients has given you skin cream lately?

JEAN
It was lovely of Sammy to give me a gift and I didn't even mind that it was Oil of Olay.
But did it have to be Oil of Olay for Dry, Aging Skin? I'm only 28!

(JEAN laughs and even FLORA smiles. JEAN starts to cry.)

FLORA
What's wrong, Jean?

JEAN
I'm sorry. You're the last person I should be talking to about this....

FLORA
Sit down Jean, and take your time.

JEAN
I don't want to burden you....

FLORA
I'm your clinical supervisor. Please let me do my job.

JEAN
It's not about my caseload. (beat) There's nobody I can tell!

FLORA
Tell me.

JEAN
Something really bad happened. Not here but I heard about it from my last job. A 14-year-old girl ... died, and I just can't....

FLORA
A girl died at juvenile court?

JEAN

No. She was at Thistle town and they kept sending her to juvenile court and then she ended up at a training school, and hanged herself there.

FLORA

Oh my God.

JEAN

I shouldn't have told you.

FLORA

That is tragic.

JEAN

And nobody talks about it but there were rumours and I couldn't let it go because she was such a nice kid. How did Norma Dean ever get sent to a training school?

FLORA

Who?

JEAN

Norma Dean. She's the girl who died.

FLORA

It can't be. Was she a tall blonde girl with freckles?

JEAN

Yes. You know her?

(FLORA goes to her filing cabinet and pulls a file. She takes a photo from the file and shows it to JEAN.)

FLORA

Is this her?

(JEAN nods.)

We treated her here, she was a lovely child. Norma responded very well to therapy. Two years ago, she was back in school.

JEAN

You have a good memory.

FLORA

She was an exceptional child.

JEAN

She must have relapsed. (beat) I told Victor Malarek at The Globe and Mail what happened.

(pause. No reaction from FLORA)

And I think the Director knows.

FLORA

How would he?

JEAN

I don't know, but he's been looking at me strangely all morning. And have you seen today's staff meeting agenda?

FLORA

Is there a staff meeting today?

(JEAN finds a paper in FLORA's inbox and hands it to her.)

JEAN

Item number five: "Patient Confidentiality."

FLORA

We often discuss patient confidentiality.

JEAN

I know this is about me. Mr. Malarek says he can't rely only on an anonymous source, so this story will die – I'm sorry, I didn't mean to use that word! Why am I so gauche?! I mean: the paper won't print the story.

FLORA

Nothing will bring her back.

JEAN

I know. I'm sorry. (beat) Mr. Malarek's at a dead -- ... he can't find out anything more. I only found out because I overheard a conversation between two judges, but if I tell him their names the judges might realize I was the source. Then what would happen to me?

FLORA

I don't know.

JEAN

I didn't know Norma was a patient here. Should I tell the Director I talked to a reporter?

FLORA

Maybe not.

JEAN

What should I do?

FLORA

You do what you believe is best to protect children, but it's never enough.

JEAN

We do the best we can, when they're our patients....

FLORA

It's all quite futile, if you can't protect them.

JEAN

I guess it doesn't help to dig this up now.

FLORA

It takes all the energy I have just to get out of bed in the morning. I'm sorry.

JEAN

I'm sorry. I totally understand. It's best to forget.

(JEAN exits. FLORA remembers the following scene.)

Scene 7

(1973. FLORA and NORMA meet at the York Child Guidance Clinic.)

FLORA

We missed you at group last week, Norma.

NORMA

So?

FLORA

That's the first session you've missed in a year.

NORMA

I don't want to go to group.

FLORA

Oh.

NORMA

It's retarded.

FLORA

Why is that?

NORMA

The people are stupid and everything about it's stupid.

FLORA

Did you have a fight with one of the other girls?

NORMA

No.

FLORA

What makes it stupid?

NORMA

The people! I told you! Open your ears!

(NORMA throws something.)

FLORA

Norma, what's made you angry? Was somebody mean to you?

NORMA

Not to me.

FLORA

To another girl in the group?

NORMA

No.

FLORA

But you're angry.

NORMA

Yes!

FLORA

At who?

NORMA

At Penny!

FLORA

Why?

NORMA

Because she's a liar.

(pause)

FLORA

Did she lie about the truck driver at Zeller's?

NORMA

He didn't show us his thingy. He was sitting in his truck, so how could he? The police are so stupid.

FLORA

What did the truck driver do?

NORMA

Nothing. Penny flashed him and then he gave her the finger and then she got mad and went to the store manager and started to cry and made up this story.

FLORA

And you felt you couldn't say anything different from her story? (pause) The truck driver is a lot of trouble now, with the police.

NORMA

I know. It's not right!

FLORA

What can we do to fix things?

NORMA

Nothing, that's why I'm so mad. It's done already.

FLORA

I could invite the police officer who arrested the truck driver to come and talk to our group, and explain that this man will go to jail. Then I could ask you both to think again about what really happened.

NORMA

Penny will still lie.

FLORA

But you don't have to. What do you think of that plan?

NORMA

I don't want him to go to jail for no reason.

FLORA

Neither do I.

(pause)

NORMA

Okay, bring the police officer.

FLORA

Thank you, Norma, I admire you. You're very brave.

(NORMA wraps FLORA in a big hug. FLORA awkwardly pats her on the back.)

Scene 8

(October 1976. ANN enters a cloakroom with a wet umbrella. She sets down her briefcase as she removes her coat. FLORA enters behind her with a newspaper under her arm, and absent-mindedly shakes her umbrella over Ann's case.)

I'm terribly sorry.

FLORA

No harm done, it's only water.

ANN

Let me dry it off for you.

FLORA

It's fine, really. I don't think we met at the last symposium. I'm Ann Dyson.

ANN

Flora Danziger.

FLORA

(They shake hands.)

I've been away and I'm still not all back.

A great vacation?

ANN

No. A death in the family.

FLORA

I'm sorry. Someone close?

ANN

Yes.

FLORA

My mother died two years ago and I was devastated, just devastated. Was it your mother?

ANN

No.

FLORA

(An expectant pause from Ann.)

I'd rather not talk about it.

FLORA

Of course.

ANN

Are you presenting today?

FLORA

Yes, on peer disciplinary committees. The children decide each others' punishments.

ANN

I look forward to your presentation. I've always been concerned that children might be too punitive and lacking in empathy for that to be fair.

FLORA

That's a common misconception. We should never underestimate our patients, even if they are children. There are so many innovative treatments in child therapy these days, it's such an exciting time in our field. (beat) Are you presenting?

ANN

Yes, on art therapy.

FLORA

The session I'm most looking forward to is on isolation therapy. One of my colleagues is leading that.

ANN

I haven't heard of it.

FLORA

It gives children the space they need to relax and reflect alone; some time away from the other patients.

ANN

How do you achieve that?

FLORA

With a quiet, contained space.

ANN

How long does a child stay in the space?

FLORA

ANN

Anywhere from a day to a week or more.

FLORA

A week? (beat) Can they leave?

ANN

No, it's therapy not recreation.

FLORA

That's not therapy, it's solitary confinement.

ANN

It's new and it's very effective. We use it a lot.

FLORA

Do you know anything about solitary confinement?

ANN

It's called "isolation therapy." No, I haven't tried it. I work at Thistle town, (by rote) Ontario's most innovative treatment program for disturbed children and adolescents. We pride ourselves on treating the difficult cases and providing continuity in treatment. (beat) We're expanding so quickly, we're always hiring. Right now we have a posting for a psychologist. Maybe you'd be interested.

FLORA

Thistle town treated a girl named Norma Dean.

ANN

I knew her.

FLORA

"Knew" her? So it's true that she died.

ANN

Was she in therapy with you --?

FLORA

Yes.

ANN

Obviously you didn't make much headway, either. Norma Dean was one of the few cases where we just couldn't make progress. We worked so hard and tried everything, but some kids are so resistant to treatment. Though nobody's committed suicide at Thistle town, thank heavens.

(FLORA starts to walk away, then turns back to ANN.)

FLORA

Tell me more about Norma's time at Thistle town.

ANN

Why? You seem skeptical about new treatments. This is the 70s, we're not afraid to push the boundaries.

FLORA

Maybe I just don't understand these new treatments.

ANN

That's what this symposium is for.

(ANN exits.)

Scene 9

(October 1976. FLORA sits in a café drinking coffee. VICTOR barges in, notebook in hand. He looks around and then approaches her.)

VICTOR

Doctor Danziger? I'm Victor.

(They shake hands.)

FLORA

Please call me Flora. It's a pleasure to meet you, Victor. Would you like a cup of coffee?

VICTOR

No. Your message said you knew Norma Dean.

FLORA

I was shattered when Jean told me Norma died.

VICTOR

Jean?

FLORA

Jean Brighton. We work together.

VICTOR

Name doesn't ring a bell.

FLORA

She's your anonymous source.

VICTOR

I never reveal my sources. And I don't think I know that person.

FLORA

All right.

VICTOR

Do you have anything I can use? I've been chasing this story for weeks. I don't need another Secret Santa telling me they can't understand why nice Norma Dean was sent to a training school where the only thing she'd get trained in is how to become a criminal.

FLORA

That sounds callous.

VICTOR

Lady, I grew up in a boy's home. I know about the world of so-called Child Protection. Nothing's going to change unless the public hears this story. And my editor won't print a story based on anonymous sources, no matter how many I find.

FLORA

Okay....

VICTOR

I could have given you this journalism primer over the phone.

(He starts to exit.)

FLORA

Okay, I'll speak on the record.

VICTOR

At last. So, do you have anything to say?

FLORA

I was Norma's therapist before she went to Thistle town.

VICTOR

Really?

FLORA

I knew her very well.

VICTOR

Great. (beat) Do you have a job?

FLORA

Yes, I'm still a child therapist at the York Clinic.

VICTOR

You know what this story might do.

FLORA

I'll tell you everything I know except confidential patient information. On the record.

VICTOR

Shoot.

FLORA

And I want you to help me piece together exactly what happened to Norma.

VICTOR

I know the drill in institutions, believe me. (beat) There's always a bully.

FLORA

Who strikes when the staff aren't around.

VICTOR

Who can feed the institutional babble-speak back to them.

FLORA

And who manipulates situations....

VICTOR

You're not as naïve as you look, Flora. So Norma's the new kid....

(They walk into the next scene as VICTOR transforms into SHAWN.)

Scene 10

(Early May, 1976. NORMA and SHAWN are in the common room at Thistle town. There's a shelf of books in the room. Perhaps FLORA, as herself, 'directs' some of the action.)

SHAWN
Whatcha in here for?

NORMA
Nothing.

SHAWN
Judge have ya committed?

NORMA
No, the school told my mom this place could help me.

SHAWN
A voluntary! A softie!

NORMA
A what?

SHAWN
What are ya? Stupid?

NORMA
No. I don't like to go to school.

SHAWN
Who does? Wanna know why I'm here?

NORMA
Why?

SHAWN
I tortured a cat. Ripped its tail right off.

NORMA
You're sick.

SHAWN
Fuckin' right.

(He takes a Bible from the bookcase and throws it at her. NORMA punches SHAWN in the head. He runs to the door.)

SHAWN

OUCH! She punched me! Ann! Help! She punched me!

(ANN runs in.)

ANN

What is it?

SHAWN

That new kid punched me in the head.

ANN

What did you do to her?

SHAWN

Nothing.

NORMA

He threw the Bible at me.

SHAWN

Did not! She touched it last.

(He smirks behind ANN's back.)

ANN

This is not the respectful atmosphere we strive for at Thistle town, is it? Norma, you've barely arrived and you're not getting off on the right foot. Thistle town is a place where we care about each other and support each other. We care about you Norma, and that needs to be reciprocated. That's how you're going to get better. Do you see how you left a mark on Shawn's face? That is not caring.

SHAWN

It really hurts.

ANN

It really hurts. That's an assault, Norma. Since this is your first offence, we will give you a warning. Please pick up the book and put it away, and apologize to Shawn.

NORMA

It's a Bible. And he threw it at me!

SHAWN

Did not.

ANN

You punched Shawn. Punching is a hurtful action that has consequences. Don't let it happen again. You must control yourself. Now apologize, both of you, and shake hands.

(NORMA and SHAWN stare sullenly at each other, then shake hands reluctantly.)

NORMA

I'm sorry.

SHAWN

Sorry.

ANN

Norma, you need someone to show you around here. A buddy to get your oriented.

(She looks out into the hall.)

Penny? Penny, come here please.

(PENNY enters.)

Penny, I'd like you to meet Norma. She's new.

PENNY

I know her already. From the York Clinic.

ANN

That's wonderful. I want you to be Norma's orientation buddy, and show her the ropes.

PENNY

Do I have to?

ANN

Yes. At Thistle town we care about each other.

(ANN exits.)

NORMA

Penny, what are you here for?

PENNY

What do you think, snitch? Are you here to snitch too?

SHAWN

She snitched on me!

PENNY

Shut up Shawn, you moron.

SHAWN

Get off my case.

PENNY

Come on Norma, I'll show you the crafts room.

NORMA

What crafts do you do?

PENNY

I don't do any crafts but they have glue there.

NORMA

So?

PENNY

I'll show you. Or do you want me to leave you here with Shawn?

Scene 11

(Newspaper headlines appear: "Girl, 14, kills herself in juvenile jail," with the sub-heading: "Did she belong there?" Then: "Ontario's Youth Minister unaware of Norma Dean's suicide," "Health Minister unsure why girl removed from treatment," "No inquest planned," "Norma Dean a convicted criminal.")

(October 1976. FLORA is in her office at the York Child Guidance Clinic. JEAN appears at FLORA's office door, carrying a newspaper.)

FLORA

Jean! Come in.

(JEAN enters, closing the door behind her.)

JEAN

Flora, what have you done?

FLORA

What I should have done weeks ago.

JEAN

I got you all distraught, in your vulnerable state. It's my fault.

FLORA

If there's anyone to blame, or thank, it's not you.

JEAN

You've flipped out, Flora. Not that I totally fault you. You aren't thinking straight.

FLORA

Pardon me?

FLORA

Why are you calling Thistle town incompetent?

FLORA

I didn't say that.

JEAN

(opens the newspaper and reads) "Doctor Danziger said she was 'shattered' by the news, and that Thistle town should have consulted her on Norma's treatment." You're saying they're incompetent. Why did you talk to Victor Malarek? You told me it was futile.

FLORA

No I didn't. Somebody had to speak on the record to get this story out to the public.

JEAN

You only know about Norma's past. The distant past. (She reads from the paper.) "Norma was not the sort of child who should have been in detention or training school. She had so many good points, so much potential." How do you know that's true, now?

FLORA

It's not true now. Now, Norma has no potential. It's our job to protect our patients.

JEAN

She was no longer your patient.

FLORA

I left South Africa because I couldn't change things. I'm not going to keep running.

JEAN

Flora, Norma Dean's is the first suicide in an Ontario training school in 22 years. It's a tragedy, but it is an isolated event.

FLORA

I read that in the paper, too. There needs to be an investigation.

JEAN

There has been. If you're reading the paper, you know all the new information that's come out about Norma! I made a mistake. I didn't see the big picture when I talked to Mr. Malarek. I didn't realize she'd turned to a life of crime at Thistleton. Assaults. Theft. Breaking and entering.

FLORA

That's not an investigation, it's a cover-up.

JEAN

Face the facts! She became a hardened criminal.

FLORA

You said you knew Norma at juvenile court. You told me what a nice girl she was.

JEAN

And I was wrong. I guess you never really know. (beat) Flora, I think this is a case of projection.

FLORA

Pardon me?

JEAN

Projection of your feelings for your own daughter, onto a former patient.

FLORA

No!

JEAN

We're all professionals here, Flora --

FLORA

Professionals don't make assumptions, Jean.

JEAN

-- and we need to be honest with ourselves.

FLORA

My job is to protect children.

JEAN

Of course you're "shattered", but it's because of –

FLORA

Jean, that is beneath you.

JEAN

Flora, stop talking to Victor Malarek! (beat) The Director's going to freak out.

FLORA

He's called me to meet with him at 11.

JEAN

What are you going to tell him? Are you going to say I told you...?

FLORA

I found out about Norma's death from another therapist, at a child treatment symposium.

JEAN

Thank you. (pause) Don't stir up trouble. Aren't you worried about your job?

FLORA

I assure you that if I lose my position, I will not lose it quietly. I will certainly tell Victor Malarek why I got fired. And I suspect that would put him back on the front page of the paper.

JEAN

What's happened to you?

FLORA

I am not going to abandon this child.

JEAN

Don't push us, Flora.

FLORA

Who is 'Us'? (beat) I'm not pushing. I'm standing my ground.

(There's a knock at the door. Two POLICE OFFICERS appear.)

JEAN
(panicked) It wasn't me.

POLICE 1
(to JEAN) Doctor Danziger?

FLORA
I'm Doctor Danziger.

(JEAN bolts from the room.)

POLICE 1
The Medical Officer of Health contacted us about confidential patient information released by you to the press, concerning (searches notes)

FLORA
Concerning Norma Dean.

POLICE 1
That's correct.

FLORA
I haven't released any confidential information.

POLICE 2
Are you sure?

POLICE 1
You've made comments to The Globe and Mail that have undermined the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Corrections. There is a process in place for investigating this matter, and your inflammatory accusations don't help.

FLORA
What is the process?

POLICE 1
The Ministries are preparing reports –

FLORA
Which nobody will see. If the government won't properly investigate what happened, we need is a public inquest.

POLICE 1

It's not for you to take this process into your own hands. Surely you have ethics in your profession.

FLORA

We're not the police but we try.

POLICE 1

I'm sure you don't want to be unprofessional. Or irresponsible.

FLORA

Are you implying that my job is threatened?

POLICE 1

What do you think?

POLICE 2

You could also be charged.

FLORA

With what?

POLICE 2

Obstructing justice?

(POLICE 1 motions POLICE 2 away.)

POLICE 1

Look, you have an immigration application in process, to bring your son over from South Africa. (beat) Is that true?

FLORA

Yes, but ... how is it relevant?

POLICE 1

For that to be successful you need good character references. And a job.

Scene 12

(October 1976. SHIRLEY waits in the lobby of The Globe and Mail building. Newsroom sounds can be heard in the background. VICTOR barges in.)

Who wants to see me?
VICTOR

I do.
SHIRLEY

Well here I am. Whaddaya want?
VICTOR

How could you?
SHIRLEY

Lady, you'll have to be a bit more specific.
VICTOR

How could you do this to my little girl?
SHIRLEY

(pause)

Are you Norma Dean's mother?
VICTOR

Why couldn't you let her rest in peace?
SHIRLEY

Mrs. Dean, I'm sorry about what happened to your daughter.
VICTOR

No you're not. For you this is a front-page story. You couldn't be happier. My heart is broken.
SHIRLEY

(pause)

I am truly sorry. And I think the circumstances of your daughter's suicide are being covered up. That's why I want to get to the bottom of what really happened to her.
VICTOR

SHIRLEY

I have enough guilt over her death! I have to live with it every day.

VICTOR

There were also a lot of child care professionals involved in Norma's life.

SHIRLEY

And surely to God in the four years she was in their care, someone could have helped her. Should I have fought harder to keep them from sending her to a training school?

VICTOR

Given the way the system works, I doubt it would have made a difference. (beat) Why was she sent to a training school?

SHIRLEY

I don't understand what happened. Norma was never in trouble before she went to Thistle town. She got mixed up with delinquents there, drugs. They charged her with crimes: assault, theft.... They told me she needed rules, so I reported her when she was an hour late for her curfew on a Friday night.

VICTOR

Bastards.

SHIRLEY

All those court appearances added up. Then they started to hold her in custody at juvenile court, for a week at a time. I begged them not to send her to a training school. I knew that was a one-way street, and she'd never get help if they did. Now I have to live with that guilt for the rest of my life.

VICTOR

Did you visit her at the training school?

SHIRLEY

Of course, all three weekends she was there. Then they said I could only visit her once a month. They said Norma was unkind to me. She said, "Mom, you're all I have." I felt so weak. There was nothing I could do. She scratched my name into her arm with a safety pin. (pause) They found a note in her room. In the garbage can.

VICTOR

Can I see it?

SHIRLEY

I don't want this in the newspaper!

VICTOR

Of course not.

(SHIRLEY carefully pulls out a note. She caresses the paper, which has been taped together from ripped fragments. Then she puts it away, without showing VICTOR. VICTOR comforts SHIRLEY. FLORA appears, reading the Globe and Mail. A newspaper headline appears: “Norma Dean: A Mother’s Story,” followed by the headline: “Norma Dean Inquest Finally Announced.”)

Scene 13

(Late May, 1976. SHAWN is in Thistlepatch’s common room. ANN enters followed closely by NORMA.)

ANN

Why don’t you stay here and talk to Shawn, Norma?

NORMA

No.

ANN

I can’t have you following me around all night.

NORMA

But will you come to my room at light’s out?

SHAWN

(softly) Lesbo!

ANN

What did you say, Shawn?

SHAWN

Nothing. (beat) Why is Norma out? I was on her discipline panel and she was supposed to be in solitary for a week.

ANN

It’s called isolation therapy. Not everyone reacts as well to isolation therapy as you do, Shawn. Norma was having hallucinations, it happens sometimes.

SHAWN

(to NORMA) Faker. (to ANN) I'm concerned that we're not, um ... filter-mating a culture of responsibility here, where patients learn that their actions have consequences. What message does it send to other patients when Norma sniffs glue without consequences?

(PENNY runs in.)

PENNY

Ann, there's a fight in the hall.

ANN

Thank you, Penny.

(She starts to exit.)

NORMA

Promise you'll come back when you're done.

ANN

Norma, you need to work on your independence.

NORMA

Promise!

ANN

All right.

(ANN exits.)

SHAWN

Double lesbo.

PENNY

You're out of the hold.

SHAWN

Hallucinations, eh? What'd you see?

NORMA

The bed started to move around.

SHAWN

Groovy, I'll have to remember that. Hallucinations. "Ahhh! Help me Ann, the bed's moving in solitary, excuse me, in isolation therapy. So let me out and let's get it on!"

PENNY

Shut up, Shawn. Come on Norma, let's go.

NORMA

I'm not talking to you.

PENNY

Get over it. Snitch for snitch. Now we're even.

NORMA

I'm staying here until Ann gets back.

SHAWN

Lesbo....

NORMA

Shut up!

SHAWN

I don't believe you have hallucinations – you're too brain-dead!

(NORMA punches SHAWN. He slumps over.)

Ann!

(ANN enters.)

ANN

What is it now?

SHAWN

She punched me right in the kidney.

ANN

Did you do that, Norma?

NORMA

Yes!

ANN

That's your second aggression, Norma. I was very clear with you last time about what would happen if you had another aggression. Hitting someone is assault. Consequences, remember?

PENNY

She's going to have to go before a discipline panel.

SHAWN

Right on. I'm the one she hurt, I want to be on the panel.

ANN

You realize you might end up juvenile court.

NORMA

What's that?

ANN

It's the court where underage criminals get tried.

SHAWN

And punished.

NORMA

Would I have a lawyer?

PENNY

A lawyer? You're just a kid!

SHAWN

What a moron.

ANN

Quiet, Shawn. You don't need a lawyer, Norma. Thistlepatch represents you as your guardian. It might do you good to go before a judge and see where this path you're on is leading you.

NORMA

What's a judge going to do?

PENNY and SHAWN

(in parody of Flip Wilson) "Here come the judge, here come the judge."

ANN

Stop it, you two. Norma, a judge could hold you in detention, for up to a week.

Scene 14

(November 1976. Inquest Courtroom. The CORONER's table is piled high with file folders. VICTOR offers condolences to SHIRLEY DEAN, who sits in the gallery. He returns to his seat. FLORA enters. Unseen spectators hiss at her.)

VICTOR

Sounds like you have a fan club.

FLORA

These days, I'm in no danger of catching an infectious disease from a colleague.

VICTOR

Norma's mother is here. The Thistle town pack ignored her.

FLORA

This inquest must be agony for Mrs. Dean.

VICTOR

What about you?

FLORA

They called me to testify, I have to be here.

VICTOR

Is this your first inquest?

FLORA

My first and I very much hope my last.

VICTOR

Here's the list of witnesses who are going to appear.

(He hands FLORA a sheet of paper. ANN enters, avoiding SHIRLEY, and approaching VICTOR.)

FLORA

You have to understand, I'm limited in what I can say. (beat) Hello, Ann.

ANN

I told you information in confidence, as one professional to another. And you ran to the press with it.

FLORA

I didn't repeat any of the patient information --

ANN

You directly attacked Thistle town, Ontario's most innovative treatment --

VICTOR

Save it, Mrs. Dyson.

ANN

(to VICTOR) That woman betrayed my trust.

FLORA

Good-bye, Ann.

(FLORA joins SHIRLEY and quietly offers condolences.)

VICTOR

Who betrayed Norma's trust?

ANN

(to VICTOR) You and your paper have done a major disservice to the dedicated people at Thistle town who are devoted to the children they treat.

VICTOR

Tell that to Norma Dean. Better still, her mother is sitting over there. Tell that to her.

ANN

I hate your newspaper! In fact I don't read it any more. I switched to the Toronto Star.

VICTOR

They've also got a reporter here who I'm sure will do a bang-up job of reporting Thistle town's role in this.

ANN

You are a fear-mongering attention-getter.

VICTOR

Well at least I didn't send anyone to their grave.

ANN

Drop dead!

(ANN storms away. CORONER enters.)

CORONER

Let's reconvene please. I call Mrs. Ann Dyson of Thistleton Regional Centre.

(ANN takes the stand.)

Mrs. Dyson, for the record and for the benefit of our jurors, what is Thistleton?

ANN

(by rote) Thistleton is Ontario's most innovative treatment program for disturbed children and adolescents. We pride ourselves on treating the difficult cases and providing continuity in treatment from assessment to follow-up, and gathering all records and relevant information on patients.

CORONER

Thank you Mrs. Dyson. Let's talk about Norma Dean.

(VICTOR writes notes and becomes increasingly agitated as Ann's testimony continues. His notes are conveyed (e.g. projected or spoken) throughout the scene. He writes: "*What about follow-up and records on Norma Dean?*")

CORONER

Norma has been described as school phobic and irrationally fearful for her mother. Is that how you found her at Thistleton?

ANN

We diagnosed her as having a more serious mental illness. Norma feared being alone and unloved, and she had a personality disorder.

CORONER

Is that a mental illness?

ANN

Yes.

CORONER

If Norma was certifiably mental ill, then shouldn't she have stayed in a Ministry of Health facility? Why was she transferred to a training school?

ANN

She wasn't certifiably mentally ill; if she had been, she would have remained at Thistleton.

(VICTOR writes: "*Make up your mind: Was she mentally ill or not?*")

CORONER

I see.

(VICTOR writes: *“She’s not making sense. Are you going to follow up?”*)

ANN

We worked long and hard with Norma at Thistle town but in the end had to conclude that ours was not the right place for her.

CORONER

Why was that?

ANN

She was a violent and aggressive girl who committed numerous assaults on another patient. One incident involved the throwing of a Bible. In another, Norma punched a boy in the kidney. She sniffed glue, missed her curfew, was even charged with breaking and entering. And with theft.

CORONER

And what form did her treatment take?

ANN

Many varied forms. We really tried everything.

(VICTOR writes: *“You put a kid who was afraid to be alone into solitary confinement. That’s treatment?”*)

CORONER

Was Thistle town aware that Norma Dean was suicidal?

ANN

No, we did not believe she was disposed to suicide.

(VICTOR writes: *“Even the Minister of Corrections knew she was suicidal. How would he know that unless Thistle town told him?”*)

CORONER

She gave you no hint?

ANN

There was an occasional mention of Norma saying “I will kill myself” but that is common among girls.

(VICTOR writes: *“This is too much.”*)

CORONER

What was behind Norma's many court appearances?

ANN

Our plan was to make it clear to Norma that there was a court and laws that deal with destructive behaviour. We thought a court appearance might benefit her.

CORONER

And did she benefit?

ANN

Sadly, this approach was not successful in helping Norma Dean.

(VICTOR writes: *"But you kept doing it anyway. How innovative."*)

CORONER

To what do you attribute Norma's violent behaviour?

ANN

All the children went home on weekends, to keep them from feeling institutionalized. But those weekend visits were very disruptive for Norma and led to negative behaviour for the rest of the week.

(VICTOR writes: *"So why send her home on weekends??"*)

We felt we had done all we could and that Norma required a closed treatment setting.

CORONER

What does that mean, a "closed treatment setting"?

ANN

A setting the Health Ministry could not provide.

(VICTOR writes: *"A jail!"*)

CORONER

Did Thistle town forward Norma Dean's records to the training school, so they knew about her background, including her comments about suicide?

ANN

We did mail them but unfortunately they didn't arrive until the week after her death.

(VICTOR breaks his pencil in frustration.)

CORONER

Thank you Mrs. Dyson. (beat) I now call Doctor Flora Danziger to the stand.

(VICTOR follows ANN to her seat as FLORA takes the stand, and answers a couple of the CORONER's preliminary questions, under the following.)

ANN

I've said all I have to say about this case.

VICTOR

But why exactly was Norma put into a training sch --

ANN

I came here to answer questions for the inquest, not the media.

VICTOR

But the key questions weren't asked!

ANN

What is your problem?

VICTOR

I don't have a problem. You do. Me!

(CORONER turns around.)

CORONER

Quiet in the courtroom, please. Mr. Malarek if you continue to cause a disturbance I will have you ejected from these proceedings.

(VICTOR returns to his seat.)

You were talking about Norma Dean, Dr. Danziger.

FLORA

Norma had so many good points, so much potential. She was a child who needed care and understanding.

CORONER

What does that mean, in clinical terms?

FLORA

I can't speak to the details of her case. That would breach patient confidentiality.

CORONER

You were subpoenaed to testify at this inquest because of your qualifications. General statements aren't much help to us.

FLORA

Norma should have been dealt with sympathetically.

CORONER

No one is suggesting Norma Dean not be treated sympathetically. Don't get emotional Mrs – Doctor -- Danziger. You last saw her three years ago. Let me ask you this: do you think a child can change in three years?

FLORA

Yes, of course. But Norma Dean was an intelligent girl with a sense of humour and a conscience. Once, when another girl accused a

CORONER

Yes?

FLORA

Norma knew the difference between right and wrong, and she defended the truth, in a way that most children her age would not have the courage to do. That is an innate strength in a child.

CORONER

Can you give a specific example of this?

(pause)

FLORA

No.

CORONER

Very well. You agree with me that she could change over the many years since you've seen her, but you continue to advocate for this girl, though everyone else found her very difficult. Do you think your clinical objectivity may have been compromised with Norma Dean?

FLORA

No.

CORONER

The integrity of this inquest requires me to raise a tangential matter. Doctor Danziger, you recently had a tragedy in your own life, didn't you?

FLORA

Pardon me?

CORONER

Your own daughter was killed in a car accident.

FLORA

(FLORA is distraught) How do you know that?

(CORONER places a box of tissues in front of FLORA.)

CORONER

My deepest condolences. Are you ... were you ... close?

FLORA

As close as we can be. My two children live, well, my son does now, in South Africa. I saw them in alternate years, on their school break. The flights are expensive.

CORONER

How long has this arrangement been in place?

FLORA

Six years.

CORONER

So you're divorced.

FLORA

Yes. But I don't see what that has to do with --

CORONER

Could your obsession with Norma Dean's death be a sort of compensation for your abandonment of your own children?

FLORA

This is not a case of projection.

CORONER

I don't know what projection is. I am a Coroner, not a psychologist, yet I can't help but wonder whether there is some guilt complex --

FLORA

I guarantee to you that Norma was not a criminal and should never have been sent to a training school.

CORONER

Based on what evidence?

FLORA

It is out of character, it doesn't make sense, and I don't believe it!

CORONER

Please compose yourself. We need facts, not your conjecture, to make this inquest of value. It's time for our lunch break. I have no further questions. Thank you, Dr. Danziger.

FLORA

I have something else to say.

CORONER

Will it take long?

FLORA

No.

CORONER

Very well. One quick point, then.

FLORA

Actually I have two points. First, it is ironic to me that Thistle town holds annual training on contact between agencies when my agency was not informed that Norma had been admitted to Thistle town, and nobody asked to see our records. Second, at Thistle town Norma was kept in solitary confinement, under the guise of a treatment. Solitary confinement leads to social atrophy, self-mutilation --

(ANN stands up.)

ANN

That is confidential patient information!

FLORA

And suicide.

ANN

It's a breach of professional ethics for her to divulge treatment specifics.

FLORA

And what professional told me --

CORONER

This is not a game show, ladies. Dr. Danziger, your comments will be noted –

FLORA

It seems to me that if a child is docile and quiet, she stays at Thistlepatch. If she becomes hard to handle, like Norma Dean was, they get her out of there as quickly as possible.

ANN

That's a lie!

FLORA

This practice certainly keeps Thistlepatch's success rates up.

CORONER

Enough. Dr. Danziger, an inquest is not the place for a crusade driven by your personal agenda.

FLORA

It's the truth.

CORONER

This is a coroner's inquest into the death of one girl, Madame, not a broad inquiry into the child welfare system. And our purpose here today is certainly not to cast blame.

FLORA

Then what are you trying to achieve? You can't bring Norma back.

CORONER

Jurors, we will reconvene in one hour. (mutters to herself) It's appalling what passes for a Ph.D., these days.

(ANN exits. CORONER goes to her table. VICTOR stomps over.)

VICTOR

What's going on?

(SHIRLEY stands up. FLORA helps her to the door and SHIRLEY exits.)

CORONER

What do you mean?

VICTOR

You fluff Ann Dyson's testimony with a feather duster, and then when Flora Danzinger gets on the stand, you trade it in for a hammer.

CORONER

You do your job and I'll do mine.

(CORONER stalks out. VICTOR and FLORA stand at her table, which is laden with file folders full of paper.)

FLORA

Ann's made Norma sound like such a monster that everybody here wants her dead.

VICTOR

The reporter behind me muttered "What a little bitch!" when Ann was describing her. You're the only one here defending Norma.

FLORA

What's the use of this inquest? We'll never find out why Thistle town sent Norma to the training school.

(They both look down at the files on the CORONER's table, and then at each other. FLORA stations herself at the door, holding it closed. VICTOR starts to look carefully through the folders.)

Scene 15

(June 26, 1976. The common room at Thistle town in the early morning. NORMA is sleeping in the glow of cartoons on a television set. ANN enters, using a key. She wears a jacket and carries a briefcase. ANN crosses the room to turn off the tv and in the gloom sees a sleeping shape. ANN screams and runs for the door. NORMA wakes up, screams and runs in the other direction. ANN turns on the light.)

ANN

Norma?!

NORMA

You scared me, Ann!

ANN

What are you doing here?

NORMA

I live here.

ANN

Not on weekends you don't.

NORMA

I had a fight with my mom when I got home on Friday night.

ANN

You can't come back here on the weekend. How did you get in?

NORMA

Through the kitchen window. I didn't want to get mad and smash something at home --

ANN

So you smashed a window here?

NORMA

I didn't have anywhere else to go.

ANN

Have you been here since Friday night?

NORMA

It was scary. I kept the tv on for company.

ANN

You were completely unsupervised. What did you eat?

NORMA

Leftovers from the staff fridge.

ANN

What would the Ministry of Health do if they found out?

NORMA

It was better than sleeping on Yonge Street.

ANN

You've been here the entire weekend. Do you have any idea the trouble you're in? We'll convene a disciplinary panel this morning.

NORMA

But I didn't do anything --

ANN

On top of your other convictions for assault and glue-sniffing. And you've only been here five months! This time the judge is going to throw the book at you.

Scene 16

(August 20, 1976. Norma's room at training school. NORMA runs into the room carrying a half-finished macramé project. She has bits of garbage in her hair and on her face. The word 'MOM' has been crudely scratched into her arm and is scabbing over. NORMA closes the door and leans against it. There's banging on the other side of the door.)

GIRL (voice)

We're not done with you yet, bitch. Come back to crafts.

(Two girls laugh on the other side of the door.)

WARDEN (voice)

Julie and Faye, what are you doing out here? Why did you leave your program?

GIRL (voice)

We came to look for Norma, Warden. She ran out of crafts and we didn't want her to get into trouble.

WARDEN (voice)

I just bet. Get back to your program.

GIRL (voice)

'Bye Norma! See you soon!

(WARDEN partially opens the door and takes a quick look into the room. NORMA hides. WARDEN closes the door.)

WARDEN (voice)

There's nobody in this room. Two demerits against each of you girls for lying.

(They all walk away from the door. NORMA picks up a pencil, tests it for sharpness, and considers different places to hide it in her clothes.)

NORMA

I'll get you, Julie. You got this coming to you. Don't push me around!

(She begins to trash her room.)

What am I doing in here? These girls are criminals! Julie robbed a store. Faye punched her teacher in the face. And they're proud of it. That stupid judge thought I belonged here.

First they say "at Thistle town we care about each other. We support each other." "We care about you, Norma." Sure! That's why they send me in front of a judge and tell him I don't belong at Thistle town. (pause) I'm not treatable.

Why did you let this happen to me, Mom? You're useless. I hate you. (She scratches at the cuts on her arm.) You're supposed to protect me! This is your job, the one thing you're supposed to do. You're so dumb. Now look what's happened. This is all your fault. You let Thistle town take over control of me and they threw me out like garbage.

There's no cure here, no way out. You stay until your sentence is done. Nobody even pretends to care about you.

(She slumps in despair and traces the scabs on her arm.)

At least Mom cares about me. But they won't let her visit for three weeks because of the demerits I got at her last visit. I get so mad. Why am I so stupid? I have to get out of here. I have to. I bet Ann doesn't even know what goes on in here. She did say she cared about me.

(NORMA takes out the pencil, finds a piece of paper and starts to write.)

"Dear Ann: it was a big mistake to put me in here because they are given me a ruff time and I'm not used to it but I won't tell the staff. Sometimes I think of killing myself but I know it would hurt my mom more than it would hurt me. **YOU JUST HAVE TO GET ME OUT OF HERE. SOON. PLEASE!**"

But Ann told the judge Thistle town can't ... won't ... take me back. They won't take me back. Don't want me back. They gave my bed to somebody else.

(NORMA rips up her note and puts the pieces in a garbage pail.)

They gave up on me.

(She starts to unknot the macramé hanging.)

Scene 17

(November 1976. Inquest Courtroom, after lunch. FLORA, VICTOR and SHIRLEY DEAN are again seats. The CORONER enters.)

CORONER

Let's reconvene please. We will now turn to witnesses from the training school.

FLORA

Excuse me. I have something to add.

CORONER

Dr. Danziger, we're already behind schedule because of your outbursts.

FLORA

Over lunch, I thought about what you said, Madame Coroner, and I do have very relevant information. It will take five minutes.

(CORONER motions her up to the stand.)

I believe this inquiry has Norma Dean's juvenile court records.

CORONER

Yes.

FLORA

So you know that Norma was sentenced for breaking into her own treatment centre, Thistle town, when she was sent away for the weekend and had no place else to go.

CORONER

What makes you say that?

FLORA

That was called a "breaking and entering crime." And when she scrounged food to eat, over that same weekend, she was charged with theft. That got Norma banned from Thistle town even after a juvenile court judge said she belonged there. When Thistle town refused to take her back, Norma was sent to a training school.

CORONER

You don't know that. You weren't there.

FLORA

I got it from a reliable source.

CORONER
Hearsay evidence is inadmissible.

FLORA
I read it. In your files.

CORONER
My files?

FLORA
Yes.

CORONER
You stole my files?

FLORA
Please compose yourself. They're right there. And since the witness list says you're done calling witnesses from Thistle town, was that information ever going to be disclosed?

CORONER
The girl was convicted of breaking and entering, and of theft. Those are the facts. This inquest doesn't have time to address every last detail --

FLORA
Norma returned to Thistle town that Friday night because she wanted to avoid a fight with her mother. That was a sign she was making progress in her treatment.

CORONER
What you've done is unethical. It's criminal!

FLORA
I don't know what the crime is. I am a psychologist, not a Coroner, yet I can't help but wonder whether what I did is any less ethical than not hiding the details of what Norma did. Or any less ethical than you asking me about my daughter's death.

CORONER
Leave the stand.

FLORA
(starts to leave the stand) I raised it because this information really is crucial to understanding the death of one girl. Which, as you've said, is the purpose of an inquest.

Scene 18

(Newspaper headlines: “Health Minister forbids facilities from charging their patients with crimes,” “All Ontario training schools to be closed,” “Better services promised for children.”)

November 1976. VICTOR drinks coffee in the café. FLORA enters and joins VICTOR.)

FLORA

Thanks for waiting Victor, I was meeting with the immigration lawyer.

VICTOR

When’s the hearing?

FLORA

Next week. And apparently my good character is not going to be challenged, after all.

VICTOR

So you still have a job?

FLORA

Yes. They don’t dare fire me, with all the publicity you created. Though I do feel like Moses parting the seas when I attend a conference. Have you ever tried holding a round-table forum as the lone person at a table for 10? But I go anyway. (beat) Not that any of this helps Norma.

VICTOR

Those bastards at Thistle town

FLORA

You told her story.

VICTOR

There wouldn’t have been a story without you.

(JEAN enters the café, sees FLORA and VICTOR, turns away, embarrassed, and exits. The ghost of NORMA appears (or is heard).)

Did you hear the news?

(FLORA nods.)

FLORA

Do you think the Ministers will do all they say they're going to?

VICTOR

I'll do my best to keep them on track.

FLORA

That gives me confidence.

(VICTOR exits.)

NORMA'S GHOST

But Ministers change and governments change.

(The following is projected, under the closing dialogue (note: this list is from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth):

*Ontario Youth Who Died by Suicide or Murder While in Protective Custody
(An Incomplete List)*

"JAMES LONNEE, aged 16 Guelph 1996

STEPHANIE JOBIN, aged 13 Brampton 1998

WILLIAM EDGAR, aged 13 Peterborough 1999

DAVID MEFFE, aged 16 Toronto 2002

ASHLEY SMITH, aged 19 Kitchener 2007

GLEB ALFYOROV, aged 17 Oakville 2008

JARED OSIDACZ, aged 8 Brantford 2009

MATHEW REID, aged 3 Welland 2010

REST IN PEACE")

FLORA

Somebody has to care.

NORMA'S GHOST

But where no one is watching, history will find a way to repeat itself.

END OF PLAY