

VERN

She takes out her frustrations with a series of torrid one night stands. (*As SHELLY reacts with disgust.*) It's Netflix. I had to toss in some nudity. Then, (*Reveling in the suspense.*)... the serial killer arrives.

PEG

Serial killer? This is a domestic drama?

VERN

With a twist! (*As if pitching the story.*) All three characters are writing about a pirate. A serial killer in *pirate regalia* begins slicing up townspeople for the slightest transgressions. We only see the killer in shadows. Tri-cornered hat. Motley clothing. Cutlass dripping with blood. Who could it be? A stranger with a motive? One of the authors with a grudge? The demonic manifestation of the writers' collective creativity?

THEO

It doesn't sound like there's any creativity at all, Vern. You took your ideas from my comic.

PEG

(*To VERN, but partly to THEO.*) ... which was based on *my* pirate poem.

SHELLY

(*To VERN, but partly to PEG.*) ... which originated with *my* concept!

VERN

For God's sake, Shelly, you did not invent pirates!

SHELLY

I know that! But Lawrence Pike was *my* pirate! The three of you read my chapters and ransacked my research. (*To PEG*) You can call him Laurence with a U," (*To THEO*) or "Lawry Pike" (*To VERN*) or whatever you want in your slasher porn, but he's still mine!

VERN

(*Adamantly.*) I do not write slasher porn. (*To the others, still selling his idea.*) The killer is nameless but carves the initials L.P. into the flesh of naked victims. (*Back to SHELLY.*) L.P. could really stand for anything, though.

SHELLY

Oh, I can think of several things it can stand for! (*Addressing the threesome.*) Literary Pirates! Lazy... Pilferers! Lame-ass Plagiarists! (*Quietly seething and building slowly.*) I traced the life of Lawrence Pike for five years across three continents. I uncovered facts and made connections that no person – living or dead – could possibly know. I delved so deeply into his passions and pursuits that our souls have practically merged. If I could channel that connection and conjure his spirit, he'd burst in this room, wielding his sword, and slaughter you all in sweet retribution for the wrongs you have done.

(*CHAD bursts into room in full pirate regalia, brandishing his sword menacingly.*)

CHAD

Arrggghhhh!

(There is a beat while everyone stares. No one acts afraid or surprised.)

VERN

(Nodding, non-chalantly.) Hey, Chad.

CHAD

(Lowers sword. Lifts eye patch. Speaks effeminately, in great contrast to our first impression.)
Hey guys. Sorry about the ruckus. Stubbed my toe on the way in.

THEO

What's with the outfit?

CHAD

Dress rehearsal. That's why I'm late. I've written my first one-man show! *(Strikes a flamboyant pose with his sword.)* Larry Carp and his Cutlass of Justice!

PEG

(To SHELLY.) Larry Carp. I suppose he stole that from you, too.

SHELLY

(Calmly.) He changed Lawrence to Larry and replaced "Pike" to a different one-syllable fish.
(Sighs and moves to her seat.)

CHAD

(Agrees Cheerfully.) "Carp" alliterates with "cutlass." Catchy titles fill seats. Anyhoo. You're all invited to opening night! I don't want to give too much away, but I play several characters besides my ruthless swashbuckler: A pervy screenwriter. *(Adopts VERN's mannerisms.)* A quarreling couple. *(Imitates THEO and PEG then sits by SHELLY.)* A disillusioned writer with dashed dreams. *(Mimics SHELLY's sadness then leaps up happily.)* It's fabulous!

PEG

Don't agitate her, Chad. She's a little edgy today. She might go for your weapon.

SHELLY

(Calmly.) No need. The pen is mightier than the sword. *(Takes a pen from her binder.)*

CHAD

(Squeals nervously and leaps away.) Aaaieee! *(Sees SHELLY writing peacefully. To OTHERS as he gathers himself.)* I thought she was going to shiv me with it.

SHELLY

(Barely looking up.) Just jotting notes. Have some new inspiration for my graduate thesis.

VERN

Writing about pirates?

SHELLY

Only the ones I know personally.

THEO

What's the topic?

SHELLY

(Flashing a page of her journal revealing a title.) The Paradoxical Concept of Originality and Tenuous Nature of Intellectual Property in the Field of Literary Pursuits.

PEG

How funny! I just pitched the same thing to *Writer's Digest*.

SHELLY

(Highly dubious.) The same concept?

PEG

The same *title!* *(Points to SHELLY's Journal.)* Although I used an ampersand instead of the "and." I've always said, "Brevity is the soul of wit."*(To THEO who is enthusiastically working on his laptop.)* Put this in your comic and you'll have to draw me filing for divorce.

THEO

(Puts on a large pair of headphones.) This isn't the comic. I'm prepping my *podcast*. The idea you two had about the lack of new ideas is the same idea that I had! *(Pulls out large directional microphone.)* I've been secretly recording audio all meeting.

VERN

Audio? How quaint. I have hidden cameras all over the room to film the premiere episode of my soon-to-be-syndicated investigative television news special, "To Catch a Pirater."

(VERN points out the location of three hidden cameras. The group reacts silently.)

CHAD

(Breaking the awkward beat.) Well, I'm a Thespian. Dissecting the dearth of originality among marginally talented and questionably ethical writers would *not* work on the stage. *(A thought.)* I could see it as a feature film, though. *(Building excitement as he visualizes it.)* A quirky, Christopher Guest-style mockumentary infused with... backstabbing thieves from a Tarantino film. *(With a grand enthusiasm.)* It's *Best in Show* meets *Reservoir Dogs!*

SHELLY

(Stands with purpose.) That's it. I'm out of here. Take the pirates *and* the thesis. Take my whole freaking notebook. There's nothing new in there anyway. *(Tosses it aside.)* Steal all you want! Recycle each other's ideas. Mash things together and convince yourself you're creating original works of art. I'm going home to cleanse my palate... to write something simple and stupid, requiring no thought or research: Something about a... *(Looks at PEG.)* vampire... *(Looks at THEO in his headphones.)* cyborg... *(Look at VERN.)*... sasquatch *(Looks at CHAD.)* ...princess. That ought to make a hell of a short story!