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SCENE TWO

[Curtains remain open. As soon as VALERIE exits, AUSTIN, CAROLYN, FAITH, and ZACH enter Stage Right, chatting comfortably. They each carry a laptop/iPad/notebook, and together they move to the semicircle of chairs in Center Stage and sit down.]

Austin: *[to the others, as they all enter]* ...oh, that's a tough transition.

Faith: Yeah, and I'm still figuring out what my heroine's Moment of Truth is going to look like.

Zach: Moment of Truth?

Faith: Yeah, you know—the climax when the hero has his final choice between the old life and the new life.

Austin: And that choice has to be handled so carefully. I read once that there needs to be a “promise” and a “price” to *both* options.

Faith: Which means it's a hard choice for the hero! *[SANDRA enters Stage Right carrying a large binder.]*

Austin: *[grinning]* Of course. If it were easy, it wouldn't take a whole novel to build up to it.

Faith: Fair point. *[They greet SANDRA.]*

Sandra: Hi, guys. How did writing go this week? *[sitting down with them]*

Zach: *[shrugs]* It went.

Carolyn: My word count was way down.

Faith: *[jokingly]* The writing life.

Sandra: *[with a soft chuckle, nodding]* Tell me about it.

Austin: My characters have been so obstinate lately.

Carolyn: Mine too! At first I thought I was working with an eager hero, but William is totally turning into a reluctant hero and I'm having to throw so many obstacles at him to get him moving.

Faith: Oh, I've had that before and it's super frustrating! Reluctant heroes are hard.

Sandra: Yeah, my heroine isn't exactly reluctant, but she's trying so hard to take the story in a different direction than I want it to go, and I'm just like, “Stop fighting me, Piper!”

Austin: *[grins]* And here we are, complaining about our characters as if they had minds of their own. *[VALERIE enters Stage Right carrying her laptop.]*

Carolyn: *[in mock surprise]* Wait—they *don't*?

Sandra: *[chuckling]* I know, right? They sure feel real sometimes.

Valerie: Hey, guys, what's up? *[sitting down with them]*

Austin: Hey—just talking about our characters like they're real people.

Valerie: Oh my goodness, yeah—I literally have long conversations with my characters in my head.

Carolyn: Oh, you know what's cool is journaling in the voice of your hero.

Faith: Or letter-writing! I've actually written letters from my heroine, Lucy, to all the other major characters, and you get so much insight into their relationships. *[ERNESTINE hurriedly enters Stage Right carrying a large tote bag.]*

Austin: *[after a moment]* Yeah, we sound like actual lunatics. *[All laugh.]*

Ernestine: Hi, everyone—sorry I'm running behind.

Sandra: *[good-naturedly]* No worries, we haven't even started.

Ernestine: *[sitting down, a little breathless]* Good. It's been kinda crazy—I actually went on a research trip to California this week, and I just flew back this morning.

Zach: Oh wow, that's cool.

Carolyn: Welcome home!

Ernestine: Thanks.

Faith: *[indicating VALERIE]* By the way, this is our newest member, Valerie Jones—she joined, what, three weeks ago?—but I don't think you two have crossed paths yet.

Ernestine: *[warmly shaking VALERIE's hand]* It's a pleasure to meet you.

Valerie: You too!

Faith: *[to VALERIE]* This is Ernestine.

Ernestine: Ernestine Dwerryhouse. And that's not a pen name. I get asked a lot.

Valerie: Oh. Well, it's...distinctive. *[unsure what to say]* So, Ernestine, do you write, um...romance novels, or—

Ernestine: May it never be! No, honey, I write thrillers.

Valerie: *[astonished]* Thrillers?

Ernestine: Forensic thrillers. So believe me, I can tell you all about crime labs and autopsies, fingerprinting, bloodstain patterns, and lots more. But what I really enjoy are car chases and shootouts. *[mimics guns with her hands]*

Valerie: *[somewhat baffled]* Cool.

Zach: *[after a few moments of silence]* So what were you researching in California?

Ernestine: *[without batting an eye, as she digs for a pencil in her tote bag]* I went cage-diving with sharks.

All: What?!

Ernestine: Cage-diving, at San Diego.

Sandra: With sharks??

Ernestine: Yeah.

Austin: *[still shocked]* Wait, hold up—you voluntarily climbed into a cage and allowed yourself to be lowered into shark-infested waters?

Ernestine: *[unconcerned]* You go ten feet down, you look at the great whites, they look at you—

Austin: —the theme from *Jaws* plays in your head—

Ernestine: —and you go back up to the boat. Perfectly safe. *[The others look at her, unconvinced.]* And super cool! In a few chapters my hero is gonna get trapped in a shark cage—and he gets out, of course—and I wanted to experience it. *[Others look at each other skeptically.]*

Faith: Well.... Maybe we should get down to business.

Zach: Yeah, good idea.

Carolyn: Is it Austin's turn to go first this week?

Sandra: I think so. *[to AUSTIN]* How's the Wild West been treating you?

Austin: Eh, okay. The scene I'm having the most trouble with is where Gabe and his niece are ambushed by the outlaws—and I just can't seem to get the pacing right. *[opening his laptop]*

Sandra: *[nodding]* Pacing is tricky.

Carolyn: Can we hear the scene?

Austin: Yeah, I'll read you what I've got.

Faith: Hey, before you start—you know, it's so beautiful outside, would you guys want to move to the picnic table?

Sandra: Hey, that's a great idea!

Austin: Yeah, good call. *[as they all gather their notebooks, laptops, etc.]*

Valerie: It'd be a shame to waste a lovely day like this.

Ernestine: *[half-jokingly]* And maybe the natural world will stimulate our creative juices.

Carolyn: Let's hope so! *[as they stand and move Stage Right]*

Faith: Oh by the way, before I forget, I will have to leave early, because I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon.

Sandra: No complications with your treatment, I hope.

Faith: No, just making sure we're still on track.... *[They all exit Stage Right.]*

SCENE THREE

[Curtains remain open. A few seconds of stillness follow the exit of the seven authors. Then heads start appearing from behind chairs and walls and in doorways and windows. MABEL, LUCY, and BLANCHE appear together first.]

Lucy: Are they gone?

Blanche: *[carefully looking around]* Yeah, it's all ours.

Mabel: *[gently calling to the others]* Come on out, guys, it's safe. *[JACK and TORI emerge together, and PIPER and QUINTUS individually.]*

Jack: Wow. *[breathing deeply, trying to steady himself]* Did you all hear that?

Quintus: *[annoyed]* Yeah, they called us "obstinate." *[In the background, Mabel and Blanche hang a banner that reads "League of Heroes."]*

Jack: *[distressed]* No, about the cage-diving! Ernestine is going to trap me in a cage underwater with sharks!

Tori: *[concerned and sympathetic]* She said you'll escape.

Jack: *[still shaken, sits down in one of the chairs]* I've got to process this. I mean, I've been through a lot of car chases and shootouts.... But she knows I'm afraid of water! AND sharks! *[TORI sits down next to him.]* How could she do this to me? *[TORI tries to reassure him.]*

Piper: *[bitterly]* Did you hear what Sandra said about me? "Stop fighting me, Piper." Yeah, of course I'm trying to take the story in a different direction, because the way she's writing it my life is gonna be

nasty, brutish, and short. *[KELLY and DANIELLE enter Stage Left, as PIPER sighs with disgust.]* It's absurd.

Mabel: Oh, Kelly, hi! *[approaching KELLY and DANIELLE]* So glad you made it! *[BLANCHE is moving the extra chairs from Stage Left and Right into the semi-circle of chairs in Center Stage.]*

Kelly: Thanks for inviting me! I hope it was okay to bring a friend?

Mabel: Oh yeah, you're both welcome. As soon as everyone's here, we'll do introductions so you can meet all the other characters.

Danielle: Awesome, thanks!

Mabel: *[turning to PIPER, tentatively]* Piper, it's good to see you here! You haven't been able to come in a while.

Piper: Well, I'm not here to socialize. *[turns away]*

Mabel: *[half to herself]* I doubt anyone would suspect you of that. *[WILLIAM and ROSAMUND enter Stage Left.]*

William: Hey, guys, sorry—we had the wrong room at first.

Rosamund: It's been too long since we had a meeting.

Mabel: No worries. *[glancing around]* I guess that's everyone for now, since Gabe and Nettie are out while their scene is being read.

Kelly: *[looking at the "League of Heroes" banner]* Um, sorry, who made this banner?

Mabel: My sisters, Lucy and Blanche.

Kelly: *[hesitantly]* It's...pretty offensive.

Blanche: *[offended]* What do you mean?

Kelly: It's misogynistic! "League of Heroes"? Couldn't you have said League of Protagonists? Or if you want to pick a gender, why not League of Heroines? I mean, that's just as valid.

William: *[raises his hand]* Question.

Mabel: What?

William: What is "misogynistic"?

Quintus: I second that.

Kelly: *[rolls her eyes]* Oh my goodness, what century are you guys from?

William: *[cheerfully]* The fourteenth.

Quintus: The first! Which means I'm the most ancient and therefore wisest member of this league.

Kelly: Well, no wonder you guys don't know what "misogynistic" means—you're from the Dark Ages!

Quintus: Actually I'm four centuries older than the Dark Ages.

Mabel: *[interrupting the conversation]* Alright guys, let's focus. It's been a while since we all met, and we've gained new members since then, so let's do quick introductions. Everyone, this is Kelly and...? *[looking inquiringly at DANIELLE]*

Danielle: Danielle. I'm just a friend—she's the hero.

Kelly: *[whispers]* Protagonist!

Danielle: *[quickly]* Sorry.

Mabel: Yes, I think several of us are technically sidekicks, so you're in good company. And you two are from what genre?

Kelly: Contemporary fiction.

Mabel: And their author just joined our authors in their writing group, so I thought we could invite them to join our league of...heroes. *[clears her throat, with a side glance at KELLY]* Okay, guys, introduce yourselves. *[points at PIPER, who is standing closest]*

Piper: Oh, I'm Piper. I'm the protagonist of a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel, so my life is...pretty awful.

Kelly: Which is why we're all here, right?

Piper: You better believe it.

William: William Granger, at your service. *[with a casual bow]* I'm the hero of a medieval adventure novel. And this is my sister, Rosamund. *[ROSAMUND curtsies slightly.]*

Kelly: Pleased to meet you both.

Rosamund: You too. *[looking down at her clothes with dislike]* And, we're sorry about these stupid... costumes, which our author promises she'll change after she's done research on real medieval clothing. But right now we're stuck with these figments of her uninformed imagination.

Jack: At least you don't get thrown to sharks. *[extends a hand to KELLY]* I'm Jack—Jack Morgan—police detective and the hero of a forensic thriller. This is my colleague, Victoria White.

Tori: *[shaking KELLY's hand warmly]* Just "Tori" is fine. It's so nice to meet fellow characters from contemporary fiction. *[confidentially]* Except for Piper, everyone else in the league is historical, and they can get really snobbish about it. *[KELLY chuckles knowingly.]*

Quintus: *[stepping forward]* Greetings. My name is Quintus Claudius Sulla, from historical fiction, during the reign of the emperor Nero, to be exact. I'm proud to say I'm a senator in the empire that rules the entire globe. *[TORI and KELLY glance at each other.]*

Blanche: Yeah right, your empire doesn't even know that the globe is round.

Quintus: Actually globe *means* round.

Blanche: *[thinks for a moment]* Well, yeah, I said the word "globe."

Quintus: I said it first. Romans have known for centuries that the earth is round.

Tori: *[to KELLY]* See what I mean?

Mabel: *[stepping in, addressing KELLY]* Alright, thank you, everyone, for introducing yourselves. Of course you've already met me and my sisters *[indicating LUCY and BLANCHE]*. We're also from historical fiction but from the 1930s, so...Depression Era.

Blanche: *[dryly]* It's a real party, let me tell you.

[Cont...]

[END OF SCRIPT SAMPLE.]