

GINSENG

Written by

Cole Potas

Logline: After Gene lets a runaway bride use his bathroom, he must find a way to get rid of her before his wife, who suspects him of cheating, gets home.

INT. KITCHEN - GENE'S HOUSE - DAY

Water comes to a boil in a pot on an old stovetop.

GENE (30), terminally uncomfortable, drums his fingers on the kitchen doorframe. He peers into the hallway, barely poking his head out of the room. No one's there.

FLUSH. GURGLE. The water boils over.

Gene turns around and rushes to grab the pot. He realizes he has no oven mitt and his brain short circuits, his hands stuttering. Like a helpless child.

GENE

Shoot shoot shoot.

After a second, he puts on an oven mitt, turns the stove off, and pours some of the water into an OLD LADY MUG.

His fingers rifle through an assortment of tea, till he finds Ginseng. He pulls it out to reveal: a STICKY NOTE.

"Ginseng? This is new... I've heard it's great for libido. Your committed wife, Eliza."

He peels the sticky note off and throws it in the garbage. Rips the tea packaging. Plops the tea bag in the mug.

FOOTSTEPS. The sound of high heels waddling.

BETH (19) appears in the doorway in a tacky BRIDAL GOWN. Her white heels look like they went through an Ironman triathlon.

Gene smiles tentatively at Beth. An awkward pause.

BETH

Thanks for letting me use your bathroom.

GENE

Of course! No worries. Happy to help.

Another awkward pause. Gene picks up the tea bag and dips it in and out of the mug. Beth takes notice of it.

BETH

Ohmygosh you made me tea? Thank you!

Gene looks down, maintaining a smile. He did not make this for her. Oh well. He chuckles awkwardly.

GENE  
Thought you might want some!

BETH  
You are so thoughtful.

Beth gestures to a photo of Gene and his wife on the fridge.

BETH (CONT'D)  
Your wife must feel so lucky.

The two exchange a short smile, interrupted by a DING. Gene picks up his phone. Eliza: "I'm on my way home. We need to talk." Gene rolls his eyes.

BETH (CONT'D)  
So lucky...

Beth breaks into tears, sitting down in the middle of the kitchen, almost disappearing into her gown.

GENE  
(really genuine)  
What's wrong? Are you okay?

BETH  
Yes! I'm fine!

Beth wipes her eyes. Mascara smears everywhere. She erupts into tears again.

BETH (CONT'D)  
No! I'm not fine at all!

GENE  
I'm sure it's not that bad.

BETH  
It's royally bad. I ran out on my high school sweetheart Alec... he's so nice... I'm Beth, by the way.

GENE  
I'm Gene. Alec sounds nice.

BETH  
He is!

GENE  
You can go back to him. If you're feeling any regret, you should.

BETH  
Maybe you're right.

A weight has been lifted off of Gene's shoulders. He puts out his hand and Beth grabs it. She wobbles to stand up. Gene grabs her the tea. It's steaming.

They share a smile. Gene passes the tea over.

BETH (CONT'D)

Thank you.

GENE

After you finish this you should go see Alec.

Beth nods and takes a GULP from the mug. Immediately, she spits it out. She SHOVES the mug at Gene. He grabs it.

BETH

MY TONGUE IS MELTING!

Beth's tongue is solid, and outside of her mouth. Gene grabs a water glass and hands it to Beth. She downs it. Big breath.

BETH (CONT'D)

That. Was a sign. I should not go back to Alec. I can't.

GENE

No, Beth. That wasn't a sign. It would be best if you went to him.  
(pause)  
Is your tongue okay?

BETH

It's just tingly. And I guess, but it was a pretty clear sign to me.

GENE

It's just a coincidence. I'm sure.

BETH

Okay...you're sure I should go?

Gene nods. Beth slowly nods back. Gene sighs.

GENE

Let me walk you out.

INT. LIVING ROOM - GENE'S HOUSE - DAY

Gene eyes the door as they walk towards it. DING. "Now you're ignoring my texts? Be home soon...I know what you're doing."

They reach the door. Suddenly, Beth twirls around.

BETH

Who am I kidding? I can't show my face in this town again! I ran out on him and everyone saw.

Beth walks over and plops down on the couch.

GENE

I don't think everyone saw.

BETH

No! Like everyone saw! "There goes Beth, the cliché dumb runaway bride." Everyone will be saying that... This is a small town!

GENE

It's LA.

BETH

Exactly! You get it.

Gene does not get it. He's growing impatient. He stays at the door, plotting a way out of this.

BETH (CONT'D)

We've been together since we were thirteen. That's six years I'm never going to get back. Like, I'll have lost my teens to him. But, I keep telling myself: you can't marry someone who pronounces synonym rolls wrong. Ya know?

(no response)

You're not even listening to me!

GENE

Sorry? No, I am listening.

(pause)

I'm sorry. I'll sit down.

Gene's apology comes out like projectile vomit. No control. He sits down in the chair across from Beth.

BETH

You're just like Alec. Men never listen. You know what? I think I'd rather die than be with a man.

BEGIN FANTASY SEQUENCE:

- Gene pours RAT POISON into a tea mug.
- Beth sips from the mug. She starts choking.

- Beth's limp body gets dragged off the couch.
- Through the sliding glass door we see Gene SHOVELING.

END FANTASY SEQUENCE.

BETH (CONT'D)

Yeah... I'd definitely rather die.

Gene shakes himself out of his intrusive thoughts.

GENE

Beth, I'm so sorry to say this.  
You've been a pleasure to get to  
know, but I need you to leave.

BETH

What? I'm crying and you're kicking  
me out? You're just like Alec! He  
would do this to me! I HATE YOU!

GENE

You know what, Beth? Maybe I hate  
you. You are a complete stranger  
that I let into my home to use my  
bathroom. That was it! I have no  
civic duty to pamper you. You are  
incredibly rude! And your marriage  
to Alec is incredibly stupid! So,  
there. I. HATE. YOU. TOO.

ELIZA (29) now stands behind Gene. Her fists are balled up.  
It's quite clear Eliza is above Gene on their totem pole.

ELIZA

GENE? WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?

Beth's mascara has formed even darker streaks on her cheeks.  
Gene swivels to face Eliza. No longer enraged.

GENE

Eliza, I can explain.

ELIZA

SHUT UP!  
(kindly, to Beth)  
Are you okay sweetie?

BETH

(sniffles)  
I'm fine.

ELIZA

What's your name?

BETH

Beth.

ELIZA

(to Gene)

Are you kidding me? Beth? That takes the cake. Eliza and Beth. Elizabeth. Fuckin' a.

Eliza turns back to Beth, demeanor completely sweet again.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

And how old are you doll?

BETH

Nineteen.

ELIZA

(to Gene)

Nineteen??

GENE

I didn't ask how old she was!

ELIZA

You didn't ask how old she was??

Gene throws his hands up in defeat.

GENE

She came in here to use the bathroom. That was it.

ELIZA

Gene, I find that hard to believe when I know you're cheating on me.

GENE

I'm not cheating on you! I stay at home all day. I am a *househusband*.

ELIZA

Shut the hell up! Get out! I can't believe you'd cheat on me after...

(sigh)

Unbelievable. And you will not lie to my face.

GENE

Ask Beth! She'll tell you this is all a big misunderstanding. She knocked on the door and asked for a bathroom. She's a runaway bride for Christ's sake.

Eliza and Gene both look to Beth. Beth is still hurt by Gene's outburst. She tries to hide a smirk through her tears.

BETH  
I won't lie, Gene. Your wife has  
the right to know. He's cheating.

Gene's mouth lies agape.

ELIZA  
Get the hell out, Gene.

Gene turns around, shoulders slumped. Completely defeated. He walks to the door. Puts on his shoes.

BETH (O.C.)  
I'm so sorry.

ELIZA (O.C.)  
It's OK. It needed to happen.

Gene pivots toward the two women and opens his mouth to say something when:

BETH  
He even gave me Ginseng tea.

ELIZA  
Ugh. I've heard it's great for...

BETH  
Lidibo!

GENE  
I did *not* make that for her. I  
swear to God. How the hell can--

EXT. FRONT PORCH - GENE'S HOUSE - DAY

SLAM.

Gene stands on the front porch with his MUG in hand. Stunned for a second. He turns around to see a young man in a TUXEDO frantically running down the street. It's ALEC (20).

ALEC  
Beth? Beth?!

No response. Gene looks down to take a sip of his tea to avoid Alec's gaze. He walks off.

FADE TO BLACK.