

GUN PLAY

“If she and I can’t find a dramatic way to end it then we might as well get married.”
—Ben in a bar.

A one-act triangle

by

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SYNOPSIS

Ending a stale relationship is easiest if a dramatic event, such as infidelity, spurs the process. But when a relationship has no such drama, then drama must be manufactured. Allison and Ben find it difficult to admit that their once-torrid love affair is at an end. When a shooting at the neighborhood school reveals their different worldviews, their friend Clark exploits the situation for his own purposes, and Allison and Ben progress inexorably toward the most conclusive way to end their relationship.

CHARACTERS

ALLISON, 30s

BEN, 30s

CLARK, 30s

SETTING

A space that soon we imagine to be Ben's house. The stage is stuffed with the worn furniture that used to belong to BEN's mother. There are doors to offstage rooms that we can assume are loaded with more stuff. By play's end Allison will upend or destroy just about everything on stage and off.

TIME

Not a happy time. Yet not a time of tragedy either—as long as the gun doesn't go off.

PRODUCTION REQUIREMENTS

This one-act play has a running time of approximately 40 minutes. Blackouts between scenes are optional, but the lighting should change with each scene to reflect different lamp or sunlight patterns.

NOTES: Paragraph breaks in dialogue indicate interruptions or shifts in the flow of a character's thoughts. Actors choose the length of these interruptions, from a short beat to several beats.

A version of this play was produced at The Eclectic Theatre in North Hollywood, USA.

Scene 1

CLARK has just spoken. ALLISON looks shocked.

ALLISON

Scary as shit! You knew her?!

BEN enters, absorbed in his tablet.

ALLISON

Did you hear what Clark said?!

BEN

One sec. Gotta see if they score.

CLARK

Kid where I teach. She and two boys found a gun in the house.

BEN

His team scored.

Yesss!

CLARK

Claim they didn't know it was loaded.

Guess that matters.

Point is, gun went off and a bullet in her face.

ALLISON

The parents must be shattered. No, there's not even a word for it.

CLARK

Shattered's good. Bang: a family destroyed.

ALLISON

I blame the parents. Shouldn't have a gun in the house.

CLARK

That.

BEN

Anyone we know?

CLARK

Said. Girl where I teach. Lori Benson.

ALLISON

Whenever I walk into someone's house now I wonder where the gun's hidden.

CLARK

If it's even hidden.

BEN

I know the Bensons.

CLARK

Right. Karen Benson's the mother. Very sexy.

ALLISON

Clark, what are you saying?

CLARK

She is. Good looks are facts.

BEN

She's all right.

I played against David Benson in that tennis tournament couple months ago.

CLARK

You were in that tournament? I didn't even qualify.

ALLISON

Unbelievable. Tennis is what you're talking about?

BEN

Kicked Benson's ass. Lost eventually but it was to the guy who won the whole thing.

CLARK

You and I oughta play.

BEN

How many sets would I have to give you? You didn't even qualify, you said.

ALLISON

I should be recording this! So you could hear yourselves! Sports?! When we were talking about a girl being shot?!

BEN

I try, Allie. You know that I try real hard to take an interest in your subjects.

ALLISON

Shooting deaths are my subject?!

BEN

I mean I admire that. You get really worked up about things that make a difference.

ALLISON takes the tablet.

ALLISON

Let me turn up the volume so you can enjoy your game!

BEN

I'm saying I love that about you. Caring about people.

ALLISON

Oh, that player threw the ball over there and that player caught it. This is so important.

CLARK gives a quick sideways glance at the screen.

CLARK

Who caught it?

BEN

Can I say something?

ALLISON

Oh look, there's the score. That team is winning and that one is losing! Let me get all angry and hoarse and break things and maybe my team will make a field goal!

She spins the tablet toward a chair ...

CLARK

Whoa...

... where it lands unharmed.

BEN

Allie, let me say something.

CLARK

... amazing toss

BEN

I do, I try. And this thing is real tragic. Benson's a real nice guy and Karen's fabulous looking and their kid was cute and smart. And they must be ... shattered.

ALLISON

If Karen weren't so fabulous looking it would be less tragic?

That's not what I'm saying.

BEN

But it's kinda true.

CLARK

What I want to say. Letting me speak here? Got a point of view too, you know. What I want to say is that I feel real real bad.

BEN

Me too.

CLARK

But I'm not sure guns are the problem.

BEN

What!

ALLISON

(to CLARK)

BEN

We're not like this.

(to ALLISON)

I'm trying to share an opinion on one of your favorite issues. I know you hate guns but I'm being honest: Guns help people sometimes.

That is the single worst thing I've heard you say. Watch your damn game.

ALLISON

ALLISON exits. CLARK retrieves the tablet.

Forty-niners down ten.
They suck.

CLARK

Can you believe what she and I have become?

BEN

Gotta say the atmosphere around here is just like Donna and me before we broke up.

CLARK

She was gorgeous.

BEN

CLARK

Still is.

BEN

So why?

CLARK

She was pushing to get married and I'm like, "But, babe, isn't it perfect the way it is?"

BEN

Allie and me don't even talk about it anymore.

CLARK

And kids. She'd open her calendar and plot the night we should get pregnant. She's like, "November first. That way we can still do Christmas at my parents' without having to announce anything."

Fucking freaky!

BEN

Allie too: kids.

I mean, come on. *Me? Kids?* There are days I'm alone, drinking beer—usually an IPA but occasionally can really get into a stout—just sitting there doing nothing, when I get real real sad and I'm like, "Yeah, this is great. But this is *it?*"

CLARK

That's the thing: this right now *is* it. My parents were Catholics, but whatever.

BEN

And then Allie comes home and we're like maniacs in bed.

CLARK

Don't want to hear this.

BEN

We get this end-of-the-world thing going on where we're sweating and clinging and desperate cuz this IS fucking IT and that makes the sex fierce.

CLARK

Nope, stop it!

BEN

And no protection! Caution to the wind and MY GOD did we just do that?! We collapse all sweaty and I'm wondering why is my dick telling me to have kids while my brain's like: *kids?*

CLARK

I refuse to imagine what your dick is telling you.

BEN

Look at me, man. *A father?*

CLARK

You said something about beer?

BEN goes off and is back quickly with two beers.

BEN

Of course you know what Allison's like in bed. She's easily the best you've been with.

CLARK

Near the top, anyway.

BEN

Do you fantasize? About Allison?

CLARK

Shit, man, and I'm being totally honest here: NO!

BEN

You do.

CLARK

Think about it, dude! She and I were years ago, and I never ever fantasize about her because once it's been real there's no more fantasy.

BEN

Last night she said, "Clark's such a truly great person." That "truly" makes a guy wonder. "Such" didn't help much either.

CLARK

I wouldn't worry about it.

BEN

While I was in Chicago what were you and Allison up to?

CLARK

Were we?

BEN

I know you saw her. Just wonder what you were up to.

CLARK

Oh, no, yeah, I remember, we did. Sure, I think we did, grabbed dinner one night. But not like a Friday or Saturday. A Tuesday, I think. No big deal.

BEN

Be honest. Just you and me right now. It wasn't here, was it? In my house? You didn't come back here and—

CLARK

Stop this.

BEN

What could I do about it? I'm in Chicago.
Free agents, man. All of us can do whatever with whoever. Just tell the truth.

CLARK

I got no problem answering your idiotic question, but I'm not going to answer your idiotic question because of course I'd lie if anything happened and so you should ask *her* if she's sleeping with other men or not.

BEN

Men?

CLARK

Seriously, dude, you and she gotta figure this out. Bickering all the time now. You two got a great head start being an old boring married couple.

BEN

Men?

Scene 2

Furniture has been haphazardly moved, and some chairs and tables are overturned.

ALLISON

Is he gone? I didn't want him to see me angry.
This is terrible.

BEN

Yes.

ALLISON

Really bad.

BEN

I know.

ALLISON

It's like we're strangers. It was exciting once being strangers. Now it's scary.

BEN

Yes.

ALLISON

Suddenly you're a stranger.

BEN

I love you.

ALLISON

Don't do that.
When you were in Chicago, I swear, if you did—

BEN

I didn't do anything in Chicago. You're just poking around for drama.

ALLISON

I don't want to have to keep looking. Where is it?

BEN

It?

ALLISON

Just tell me. I'm fine. It'll help me to not have to wonder, is all.

BEN

Hey, careful with mom's chair. That leg's already been broken once.

ALLISON

Problem is it's your house. You were here six years and who knows how many girlfriends before I came along. How can I complain that the memories are all yours, the shingles that blow off are yours, the grass to cut is yours? When the water heater explodes, it's your problem. You get to worry about it. Every argument we have, I'm always made aware that this is your house, that I'm paying you *rent!*, that every month I have to write you a *check!*
Reminds me ...

She gets her checkbook.

ALLISON

Ben's September rent!

BEN

You want to call about the water heater from now on, go ahead!

ALLISON

Take it.

The check.

BEN

I keep telling you to treat this as your house.

ALLISON

Take it!

The check.

BEN

Fuck the rent. I'll yank the new blower out of the water heater and let you call them to fix it. That what you want?!

ALLISON

Ben, it's not the goddamn water heater, I just want....
Fuck!

BEN

We both do, babe, we both want. Maybe we should get married.
People do.

ALLISON

You don't get it. I want an ending.

BEN

What?

ALLISON

What's with you and guns?! When we were falling in love, how did I not sense that you were a gun freak?!

BEN

So now I'm a gun freak.

ALLISON

And okay, it *is* Chicago. The way you left.

BEN

I said goodbye.

ALLISON

Then the way you said hello when you returned.

BEN

“Goodbye, love.” The way I always do. And then “Hello, love” six days later. What's the problem?

ALLISON

Before goodbye—

BEN

Goodbye, *love*.

ALLISON

Before that. You reminded me to water the plants.

BEN

No
no, pretty sure
no, I'm thinking back, picturing everything, trying to remember and
no, I *know* there wasn't any sinister subtext in what I said.

ALLISON

They're my plants.

BEN

Most of them.
So?

ALLISON

All of them.

BEN

Not that gorgeous jade plant I rescued from my mother's house after the funeral.

ALLISON

It died.

And it wasn't gorgeous. It was scrawny and had bugs. I threw it out months ago.

BEN

Are you blaming my poor mother for not taking care of her plants? She was OLD goddamnit! She was old and she got sick—

ALLISON

Stop talking.

BEN

and I couldn't visit her and so I wasn't there and—

ALLISON

I'm not saying anything about your mother. What I am saying is my African violet, your house; my ficus, your house; my dieffenbachia, your house; my toothbrush, your house. Don't you see what's wrong with us?

BEN

This is because I didn't call that *one* night.

ALLISON

No, it isn't.

BEN

It wasn't a question. You're not allowed to say, "No" to what wasn't a question. I *told* you about that one night and there's absolutely nothing to confess and so even using the word confess is crazy because it's so far removed from anything like the truth.

ALLISON

It's gotten worse, hasn't it? It was terrible five minutes ago and now it's worse.

ALLISON turns over a chair.

BEN

Go ahead, finish tearing up the place.

ALLISON

Just tell me where it is. Don't pretend the gun doesn't exist.

She continues searching.

BEN

I can pretend all sorts of things don't exist.

Scene 3

CLARK

(testing a chair)

This one okay?

BEN

Should hold up. Glued the leg back on and drove a couple nails into it to make sure.

CLARK sits.

BEN

She hasn't broken too many things, she's just searching.

CLARK

For what?

BEN

For whatever's wrong.

CLARK

Don't you want to move all the furniture 'n shit back the way it was?

BEN

I like it this way. It's not boring. Besides, ever since I got back from Chicago...?

CLARK

Yeah?

BEN

We don't spend much time sitting.

CLARK

Nope. No, don't want to picture you and Allie fucking.
Where is she anyway?

BEN

Probably out with one of her many *men* friends! Thank you very much for that!
Want a beer?

CLARK

I'm off beer.

BEN

Since yesterday?

CLARK

Belly.
How about port?

BEN

I don't have port. *Port?*

CLARK

I
I mean
I mean I'm
Oh, hell, it's in the kitchen. Little cabinet over the sink.

BEN

Well well.

CLARK

Forget what you're thinking cuz there's nothing to think.

BEN

She's into port now? It was wine for a while. She'd read me about each one we drank. Good nose, good legs, good tits for all I know.

CLARK

She's far more interesting than you. That's why you're everybody's friend—you're not interesting.

BEN

Let me get you that port. Little cabinet over the sink?

CLARK

Forget it.

BEN

I'll get it, no problem.

CLARK

I don't want any damn port.

BEN turns a chair upright.

BEN

Seems safe.

BEN sits.

BEN

Remember that plant I saved from my mother's house? That really gorgeous jade plant that used to be over there?

CLARK

What's a jade plant?

BEN

Point is Allison mentioned the plant in order to get me all sentimental about my mother in order to bring up the whole Chicago thing in order to bust me again for not calling that one night.

CLARK

This is what you fight about? Jade plants?

BEN

She's noodling for drama. I didn't do anything in Chicago. "Anything" meaning "sex." But it's like she wishes I did to justify she's so angry she wants to kill me.

CLARK

I've always wanted a woman to love me enough to kill me.

BEN

She's hunting for the dramatic climax that ends it like a story. She wants us to be a story. But instead of "They live happily ever after" it's "The bastard's like all the rest of them." What do you think of that?

CLARK

I guess.

BEN

When you and Donna broke up, how bad was it?

CLARK

She still hates me.

BEN

Was it all drama and screaming and like this close to violence?

CLARK

Oh my god, the screaming. Sadly though she never got to the point of wanting to kill me. We fizzled out instead.

BEN

My point! No one wants their great love to fall asleep at the wheel. The ending should be huge to make those years together mean something.

CLARK

And the jade plant is your big drama?

BEN

No, it was you telling us about that kid got shot, and me saying guns aren't all bad. Allie's tearing up the place looking for the gun to hate me with.

CLARK

So you *are* a gun guy.
Where is it?

BEN

Anytime she asks about it I take the fifth.

CLARK

It's become a court case? Easiest way to end it is to show her the gun.

BEN

I don't want to end it, but if it's going to end I want it to be good again first.

CLARK

But if it's good again—

BEN

I know: why end it? Allie and me are all paradoxical now.

CLARK

Things must be improving cuz you said the sex—

BEN

is great because in bed we treat each other like complete strangers.

CLARK

(taking a moment to imagine all this could entail)

Wow.

BEN

The things we do to each other are never what Allison and Ben do. We're a couple of fucking strangers. Best sex ever but there's no love.

CLARK

Damn.
I'm jealous.

BEN

Tell me something. Did you two have a good time while you were here?

CLARK
While I was here?

BEN
The little cabinet over the sink?

CLARK
It was just a drink, man. Old times. We talked about old times.

BEN
So you were here.

CLARK
Don't look at me like that.

BEN
In this house.

CLARK
Sure.

BEN
What kind of old times?

CLARK
Whatever that means.

BEN
Were you talking old times or fucking old times?

CLARK
Talking talking talking, I told you that. Talking.

BEN
But you want to fuck Allie, right? That's just as bad because in your head you two are doing it.
Right?
I mean, come on.

CLARK
What the hell?

BEN
Were you sitting in that chair?

CLARK

Where was I *sitting*?

BEN

Oh, I see, you moved around. Okay, so you're in my house moving around, sucking in your gut, and it's nighttime and all your little gestures are basically saying, "I'm gonna fuck you." And if all her little gestures are saying the same thing—"Yes, Clark, let's fuck"—then I'm so goddamn happy for you two, I am.

CLARK

I *like* Allison. I think Allison is gorgeous. But I don't fantasize about her because we were lovers years ago. Which you KNEW. Which I TOLD you all about. At the TIME!

BEN

Want some port?

CLARK

Fuck you.

BEN

Sex these last couple of nights has been fierce but weird. I want the old Allie back, but she's somewhere far away and the woman I'm wrestling with in bed is just as crazy lost as I am.

CLARK

Don't let it end with you two all suspicious. That was Donna and me. Christ, what a waste of time. It's like death, and death is a waste of time. Do it clean and fast. Tell her I said that.

BEN

Oh I will. I'll tell her right away.

CLARK

What's the charge anyway in this court case that is your life?

BEN

That I'm hiding my true self. But she is too! I mean, shouldn't she and I resolve the issue of her thinking these things about other men? Instead, she wants to believe I had sex while in Chicago with a girl I knew in high school.

CLARK

Did you?

BEN

Taking her side just like that?

CLARK

You're a man and I'm a man.

BEN

I don't *like* being this way, but of course I saw her, yeah we flirted, sure I wanted to for at least a few seconds, but nothing.... Not a whole lot.... Not sex anyway.

CLARK

If your relationship has become a court case, reasoning like that does you no good.

BEN

Suddenly there are all these other people in our lives we can't get rid of.
Like you.

CLARK

Give her the gun. It'll end things quickly and cleanly.

BEN

If there is a gun.

CLARK

Isn't there?

Scene 4

ALLISON is offstage searching other rooms. CLARK is kneeling at an overturned chair.

CLARK

Just saying you were, *are*, the love of my life, and I'm *glad* we didn't stay together, cuz if we had I'd no longer have the love of my life cuz it would've become all horrible and hating each other and then poof: love of my life gone.

Forever.

That's all I'm trying to say.

ALLISON enters.

ALLISON

What's the point of having a handgun if you can't lay your hands on it?

CLARK

You listening? What I'm telling you is vital.

ALLISON

I mean if Ben's gonna be one of those people, *be* one. I'd respect him more if he'd just come out and say, Yes, Allie, I am one of those gun weirdoes.

CLARK

If you're sure the gun exists, no need to search for it. Leave him.

ALLISON

But I want to shove that gun in his face to prove to him that I know what I know.

CLARK

Then what?

ALLISON

If I'm standing in this house waving a gun in Ben's face it'll be clear to both of us that we don't belong together.

CLARK

Has he told you? He thinks we made love while he was in Chicago.

ALLISON

He knows that would never happen.

CLARK

I think you just insulted me.

ALLISON

If we had sex right now would you stop this obsession?

CLARK

I mean....

ALLISON

It might be the only way to get you to shut up.

CLARK

Ben would have to catch us at it to make this really work. If I just *told* him you and I were lovers again he'd think I was bullshitting him, and when you think about it, truth *is* bullshit.

ALLISON

Bullshit.

ALLISON goes to another room to continue her search.

CLARK

Did we ever do it in an elevator? I swear I can picture us in an elevator.

ALLISON

(off)

I don't remember an elevator.

CLARK

(to himself)

Am I so fucked up in love I'm delusional?

(to ALLISON)

Do you ever maybe think about me while you're with him?

In bed?

Doing it?

ALLISON returns.

ALLISON

No, I do not think about you while I'm in bed with Ben. And, no, I am not sleeping with you just so you can get over me.

Men are such perverts.

CLARK

You're wrong. We're natural. Like cats, like dogs. It's women who are perverts. You won't find a woman's idea of love in nature.

ALLISON

Why do you pretend I was the love of your life?

CLARK

Because every time I think of you, I get that tingle. That's how I know it's love.

ALLISON

A tingle?

CLARK

Just so you know, Ben doesn't care if we have sex. He says the two of you are over.

ALLISON

What?

CLARK

Says you're fooling yourselves.

ALLISON

Get your hands off my ass!

CLARK

I can't stand being in love with you. Let's get it over with.

ALLISON

This hand goes back there and this hand there. You aren't even drunk, what's the matter with you?

CLARK

I'm sick of being in love with you!

ALLISON

Be sick outside.

CLARK

Think maybe I'll go now.

ALLISON

Come back in an hour. I'll find it soon enough. Not that many places to left to look, and I want you here as witness.

CLARK

You know he'll try to lie his way out of it.

ALLISON

Not Ben. We both know that it's over, that we never really belonged together. We love each other but we've never been sure why. We're so different.

CLARK

So when you find the gun?

ALLISON

Relief. For both of us. Because there will be no regrets saying that it's over.

CLARK

Then I hope you find it.

He leaves. She continues searching.

Scene 5

BEN is looking especially hard at one overturned chair.

ALLISON

I know, I know—I'm done. I'll put everything back the way it was.

BEN

Stop. I prefer the house this way.

ALLISON

Good, cuz I'm worn out.

BEN kneels at the overturned chair.

ALLISON

There was one casualty. I broke this pot. But it's my plant so don't worry. I could repot it but I don't think I care enough.

BEN swiftly turns the chair upright and sits while shoving his hand along the cushion.

BEN

Clark explained about you two while I was in Chicago. Guess it was nothing.

ALLISON

He said love is a tingle. Is that all it is for you?

BEN

We haven't been together all this time cuz of a tingle.

ALLISON kneels on the chair and straddles his legs.

ALLISON

Still. Tingling's not a bad thing....

BEN

No.

ALLISON

Who knows, maybe we're okay after all.

BEN

That's a pretty.... That thing you have on. What would you call it?

ALLISON
This? Or this?

BEN
That.

ALLISON
A blouse. I'd call it a blouse.

BEN
Amazing.
Shows a little flesh.
There. I can put my hand there.
Skin is so amazing.

ALLISON
That hand going any further?

BEN
Depends. These past several days feels like you've been saying goodbye to me.

ALLISON
Honey.

BEN
Just tell me if you are.

ALLISON
Lover. Our problem is not you in Chicago or me here with Clark. It's do we really know each other?

BEN
See it?

ALLISON
Of course.

BEN
Not it. *It.*

He produces the gun hidden in the cushions.

ALLISON
Ah.

BEN

Yeah.

ALLISON

Now we know.

BEN

You got the evidence you wanted. Now what?

CLARK enters.

CLARK

I need to apologize—oh, shit.
A gun.
So you were right about him.

BEN

Here.

He tosses the gun to CLARK.

CLARK

Are you nuts?!

BEN

Show us how to use that thing.

CLARK

Guns scare me. I don't even know if I'm holding it right.

CLARK gets BEN to take back the gun.

BEN

Right. *I'm* the gun guy. That's a Ben you can dump with a clear conscience. "It wasn't another woman I caught Ben with but a *gun!*"

ALLISON

Not so much that you love guns—freaky though that is—but that you hid that about yourself.

CLARK

Can I point something out? That little finger of metal...?

BEN

This?

CLARK
That's the safety catch.

BEN
Okay.

CLARK
It isn't on.

ALLISON
What do you know about it? You a gun nut too?

CLARK
I mean I don't go around killing people.

BEN
So anyway.

ALLISON
I suppose you think this is where I apologize.

BEN
Well, yeah.

ALLISON
Women are expected to be spectators. Oh, aren't they so manly fighting like that, oh do, oh beat each other up, kick someone's ass, I'm so impressed. Well, I don't want to be a spectator, to sit there and admire. I want to be the one you need to watch.

ALLISON takes the gun from BEN.

ALLISON
Four years, Ben.

CLARK
Guys?

ALLISON
Maybe it is time to end it.

Points the gun at BEN.

ALLISON
Say you don't believe it.

Sure. BEN

Say it! ALLISON

What don't I believe? BEN

About me and Clark. ALLISON

I don't believe that you were fucking Clark. BEN

Other people are not our problem. ALLISON

For sure Clark is not our problem. BEN

She points the gun at CLARK.

CLARK
As someone who's not a fan of guns you might not know how dangerous it is to point it at someone's belly. The head you're likely to miss, the gut not so much.

Say you don't know what love is. ALLISON

You don't know what love is. CLARK

I don't know what love is. Say it. ALLISON

I don't know what love is. CLARK

A tingle. ALLISON

A tingle. CLARK

ALLISON

That's all love is to me.

CLARK

That's all love is to me.

ALLISON

I know it's more than that but I'm an idiotic asshole who has nowhere near the imagination needed to love well and if I'd been a monk the world would be a better place.

CLARK

I know it's more than that but I'm an asshole etcetera.

ALLISON

This is fun. What should I say with the end staring me in the face?

Points the gun at herself.

BEN

Fuck no, Allie.

ALLISON

Fuck no, Allie.

BEN

No one has to die.

ALLISON

No one has to die.

She points the gun at each in turn.

ALLISON

(at CLARK)

Fucking gun nut.

(at BEN)

Trust, Ben. We never really trusted.

(at herself)

According to the rules of drama it has to go off.

BEN

Allie ...

CLARK

Having been forced to confess I'm not at all important, I think I'll just head out...

ALLISON

Stop.

One of us. You or Ben or me.

BEN

Allie ...

ALLISON

Otherwise this nonsense keeps going, and if it just keeps going, how do we gain that necessary blank page where we close the book and figure out if it meant anything?

BEN

Allie, love ...

ALLISON

I guess it's you. I loved you so I guess it's you.

The gun toward him.

BEN

Sweetheart.

Love.

Can I say something?

Something kind of important?

ALLISON

Make it good.

BEN

Baby, it doesn't have to end all dramatic like a story.

ALLISON

Mmmm.... Yes it does.

Blackout.

END