

On Pine Knoll Street

A play by

Mark Cornell

Mark Cornell
Chapel Hill, NC
310-738-0796
markcornell53@yahoo.com

On Pine Knoll Street

By Mark Cornell

Characters:

Thelma, 87, F

Marilyn, 52, F

Curtis, 40, M

Kristie, 38, F

Mitchell, 9, M

Setting:

A small house in a small, southern college town.

Time:

Spring of a recent year to fall of the following year. The play covers about a year and a half.

A note about transitions:

Scene shifts should be made by characters in full view of the audience and thought of as a continuation of the story. For example, when Marilyn puts up the reminder signs, it is not merely to get the signs on the walls. It is at first because she wants to help her mother and later on because she is frustrated. Characters may relate to one another if they share a shift. Although shifts should be efficient, at no time should they feel rushed. Also, between scenes eight and nine, the snow should remain on stage. When needed, use lighting - dawn, midday, dusk, night - to indicate the passage of time.

Act One

Scene One

In the black, we hear a Celtic lullaby, "Dream Angus." As the lights rise, the music lulls to a murmur. It is a spring morning in a small house in the south. There is a living room, small eating area, a small kitchen, and a bathroom. The living room has a large window, a closet, and a hallway that leads to the back bedrooms. There is a utility room through the kitchen. The house is Earth-toned, except for the kitchen, which is neon magenta. There are three potted plants - a cactus, a palm of some kind, and some succulents. In the living room, THELMA, dressed a little garishly, sits in an old barcalounger with a cane leaned against it. An afghan is half-wrapping her. On the side table next to her is an old boom box from which the lullaby plays. Some cat toys are on the floor. On the other side of the room, MARILYN stands at a small kitchen table going through pills in a plastic receptacle, talking to CURTIS, who is distracted by the room's unusual decor - sculptures, paintings, metal works, paper mache, candles, etc - all featuring vaginas.

MARILYN

As you can plainly see, Curtis, all the pills are distributed evenly for each day of the week, and separated by AM and PM. All you have to do is put the appropriate pills on a saucer for her and she'll take them with her morning and evening meals. Easy, right? Just make absolutely sure the pill box goes back on top of the fridge.

She notices that CURTIS is distracted.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Curtis, are you listening to me?

CURTIS

Yes. Sorry.

THELMA

He's hypnotized by the vaginas.

CURTIS

I wouldn't say hypnotized.

MARILYN

You've been in my house before, right?

CURTIS

I don't think so. I would have remembered.

MARILYN

You came to my Super Bowl party this past year.

CURTIS

No, I didn't. I've only ever come as far as the porch, trick or treating with Mitch.

MARILYN

Curtis, I know you've been in here.

THELMA

He hasn't, Marilyn. Obviously. Nobody's ever going to forget a dozen smiling hoo-haws.

CURTIS laughs.

MARILYN

Mom.

(gesturing to the art)

These are leftovers from my gallery in Miami, Curtis. It's art, OK?

CURTIS

Yeah, it's definitely art.

MARILYN

I know what you're thinking. I'm not gay.

THELMA

She's gay.

MARILYN

Mom! Calling someone gay is not funny!

THELMA

I'm not trying to be funny.

MARILYN

I'm not gay.

THELMA

God forbid you should come out to your own mother.

MARILYN

Can we not do this right now, please?

THELMA

I watched my next door neighbor in Key West come out to her mother and it was beautiful.

MARILYN

Curtis, you've said "hello" to my mother, haven't you?

CURTIS

Yes, but I'll say it again. Howdy, Thelma. How are you?

THELMA

Fine as frog's hair.

MARILYN

"Howdy?" Who says "howdy?"

THELMA

Sweetie, he probably doesn't know that saying "howdy" makes him sound like a dipshit.

CURTIS laughs.

MARILYN

I'm sorry to ask you to step in at the last second, Curtis, but I'm in a bind and my mother's nurse was-

THELMA

She fired Lanying. Who wasn't a nurse. I was a nurse.

MARILYN

Lanying was stealing Mom's pills.

CURTIS

Lanying? The hoarder Chinese lady up on the corner?

THELMA

You don't know she was stealing anything, Marilyn.

MARILYN

A bottle of Bumex is missing.

THELMA

Who in the world would steal a diuretic?

MARILYN

She's a hoarder, Mom. A hoarder kleptomaniac.

THELMA

Goodness gracious, if that's true, then why in God's name did you let her in this house?

MARILYN

OK, Mom, that's enough. Can't you sit in silence, please?

THELMA

I'm not a piece of furniture, dear.

MARILYN

Anyway, Curtis, I'll be back super early Monday morning so you're off the hook after Sunday night.

CURTIS

I'm always around, so this is no big deal.

MARILYN

Mom, you sure you can handle making your own meals?

THELMA

I have made one or two meals in my eighty-seven years, honey. And plenty of those were for you.

MARILYN

Do we need to go over again how to use the microwave?

THELMA

Open. Close. Start. What's the mystery? I'm not a child.

MARILYN

(to Curtis)

Mom has a stack of Kashi dinners in the freezer. Have one with her. You could even sit and read with her. Or do one of Mom's puzzles, if you want. She'd like that. They're down here.

She points to a stack of them at the bottom of a bookshelf.

MARILYN (cont'd)

A lighthouse, a bunch of kittens, here's one that's a pile of jelly beans. I dare you to try that one.

THELMA

How's your daughter, Curtis?

MARILYN

He has a son, Mom. I told you.

(to Curtis)

I told Mom a little bit about you before you came over.

THELMA

What's your son's name?

CURTIS

Mitchell.

THELMA

Mitchell? That's a last name, you dummy. How old is he?

CURTIS

Nine.

MARILYN

I mentioned to her that you stay home with him.

THELMA

So is he at home by himself right now?

CURTIS

My wife is at home with him.

THELMA

She doesn't work, either?

CURTIS

She's a professor at the university.

THELMA

Oh, well, la-dee-da. Why isn't she off at the university?

CURTIS

It's Saturday.

MARILYN

Stop badgering him. And Curtis works, too, Mom. He's a writer. I told you.

THELMA

What do you write?

CURTIS

Short stories.

THELMA

Good for you. I like Hemingway. And Fitzgerald. And Steinbeck. All the biggies.

MARILYN

All males, too.

THELMA

What's wrong with that? I like men.

MARILYN

You sure you can handle the cats, too, Curtis?

CURTIS

I can handle it.

MARILYN

I keep the water bowl and the food bowl here by the fridge.

She walks over. He follows.

MARILYN (cont'd)

The food is in the kitty cookie jar. Where is the kitty cookie jar? Mom, stop moving things. Here.

She finds it on the counter, opens it.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Give them exactly a scoop and a half in the evening and the morning. Make sure the water is filled up and fresh. Don't top it off. Got it?

CURTIS

Yup.

MARILYN

"Yup?" First howdy, now yup?

THELMA

Now who's badgering him?

CURTIS

Yup and howdy were words my Dad used. What can I say? I'm turning into my father.

MARILYN

Let me introduce you to the cats, hoss. They're hiding in the closet.

THELMA

Sounds familiar.

MARILYN

Give it a rest, Mom.

MARILYN pulls wide a partially open closet door.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Curtis, say hello to Snatch and Twat.

CURTIS turns to THELMA.

THELMA

See? Ho-mo-sex-u-al.

MARILYN

Mom!

THELMA

If she tells you the shelter named them, she's lying.

MARILYN

Wakey-wakey, babies! Snatch, Twat, this is Curtis. Say "hello" to the cats, Curtis.

CURTIS

(flatly)

Hello.

MARILYN

Snatch likes to be called Snatchy and Twat likes to be called Twa-Twa. Try speaking to them again. From the heart.

CURTIS

Mornin' Snatchy! Mornin' Twa-Twa!

MARILYN

They know when you're faking it, Curtis. Come on. Let me show you the all-important litter box in the utility room. They use it like there's no tomorrow.

CURTIS follows MARILYN into the utility room. MARILYN continues to talk, although we can no longer understand what she is saying. THELMA leans forward to get at a book that is open and face down on the coffee table in front of the couch. But it's too far away for her to reach. She leans back and tries to get at it with her foot, but no luck. She strains hard, but can't reach it. She grabs her cane and stretches out and touches the book with it. After great effort, she pulls the book off the coffee table and onto the floor. Then she drags it along the floor and to herself. She leans down and picks it up. She holds up her arms in victory. MARILYN and CURTIS return.

MARILYN

I'll pay you ten a day for the cats and five for Mom.

CURTIS

You don't have to pay me, Marilyn.

MARILYN

I paid Lanying, I can pay you.

CURTIS'S cell rings.

CURTIS

Excuse me. Sorry, I usually have it on silent, but Kristie wanted me to...

Pulling the phone out of his pocket.
He answers.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Hi, Kristie, everything OK? (beat) Kristie, this shouldn't be a surprise. This is who he is. (beat) No, you can. You can do it. (beat) OK. I'm coming now. (beat) Yes, right now. (beat) Yes, I promise.

He hangs up.

CURTIS (cont'd)

I need to go.

MARILYN

Just one more thing. Mealtimes are eight in the morning and six in the evening for both Mom and the cats. Lunch for Mom is one, but that's a non-pill meal, so you don't have to be here for that.

CURTIS

I'll be back at six, then. See you soon, Thelma. Have a great trip, Marilyn. Where are you going anyway?

MARILYN

To Wrightsville Beach. With some friends.

THELMA

(air quoting)

"Friends."

MARILYN

It's my book club.

THELMA

(air quoting)

"Book club."

MARILYN

You've met all these women, Mom. They're not lesbians.

THELMA

What book club meets two hours away on the beach?

MARILYN

Ours does. We always go to the beach the weekend before Memorial Day.

THELMA

Stop pretending! You go to the beach and gay it up!

MARILYN

Mom!

THELMA

In Key West, nobody pretended. We let it all hang out. And I mean *all of it*.

CURTIS

Well, Wrightsville sounds fun. Gotta go.

He exits quickly out the door.

THELMA

He left in a hurry.

MARILYN

Sometimes things get crazy, I think, at home. I see his kid running back and forth across their yard sometimes.

THELMA

Sounds normal.

MARILYN

Back and forth, though? Like a tennis ball?

THELMA

You could use a little back and forth. With a man.

MARILYN

You know, Mom, I really wish you would stop with the relentless jokes. They're hurtful. Especially in front of other people.

THELMA

You know what's really hurtful, Marilyn? That you would pay a man more money for taking care of your cats than taking care of me.

THELMA turns the volume knob up on her boom box and a Celtic lullaby gets louder. She reads her book. MARILYN stands there a moment, and then exits. Lights fade. The music should continue in the scene change.

Scene Two

As lights come up, the Celtic lullaby fades, but is still slightly audible from the boom box. It's just past six that evening. Above the kitchen table on the wall is a taped 8x11 sign that says "hearing aids." Nearby are freshly cut peonies in a glass vase. Sitting at the table, where the pill box rests, THELMA eats. Every time she is about to swallow her food, THELMA takes a pill from a saucer and puts it in her mouth, then swallows. Sitting with her, CURTIS watches, curious.

THELMA

You don't have to sit right on top of me. I know how to take a pill. I'm not completely non compos mentis.

CURTIS

You always swallow your pills with food?

THELMA

We had a housekeeper when I was growing up, a Scottish lady, whom we called Mrs., just Mrs., even though she wasn't married, and she believed that food carried medicine with love and that love always beat illness.

He smiles. She eats. He watches her.

THELMA (cont'd)

You have got to be bored senseless.

CURTIS

Me? No. Nothing bores me. Nothing.

THELMA

Really? Marilyn didn't mention you were dim-witted.

He chuckles.

CURTIS

You don't have anything to drink. Let me get you something.

CURTIS groans as he gets up. Grabbing the pill box on the table, he goes into the kitchen and puts the pill box on top of the fridge as:

THELMA

First you bring peonies from your garden, then you grab the mail, now a drink? No one likes a do-gooder.

CURTIS

It's my tragic flaw. What do you want to drink?

THELMA

Ginger beer. Have one with me. Life's short. Let it rip.

CURTIS laughs, getting a Stone's ginger beer from the fridge.

CURTIS

Tempting, but I'll pass, thanks.

Twisting open the bottle, CURTIS gives THELMA her beer.

THELMA

Your loss.

THELMA takes a few huge swigs.

CURTIS

My mother liked Stone's Ginger Beer, too. Not like you like it, but...

THELMA

Invite her over. We'll toast our ailments.

CURTIS

She passed away about two months ago.

THELMA

Then for God's sake, don't invite her over.

Smiling, CURTIS sits.

THELMA (cont'd)

I shouldn't be insensitive, but I have to joke about death, otherwise I start thinking about it seriously, and the next thing you know I'm back in church or walking in front of a speeding bus.

CURTIS

My mother *loved* death jokes. The more grim, the better.

THELMA

Good for her. How did she die?

CURTIS

An aneurism. In her sleep.

THELMA

There are worse ways.

CURTIS

It was hard not getting to say goodbye.

THELMA

When I was a nurse, I learned the only thing harder than not saying goodbye is saying goodbye.

CURTIS

She was a good mother. She found it easy to be good. My brother and I were lucky. I miss her.

THELMA

I can't remember a time in my life when I haven't missed my mother. My parents were Presbyterian missionaries and always gone. She died when I was sixteen, and then she was gone-gone.

CURTIS

How's the food? What is that?

THELMA

Who knows? I burned it beyond recognition. That microwave is defective.

CURTIS

Smells good, though.

THELMA

Grab a fork.

CURTIS

Thanks, but I have to be careful about what I consume.

THELMA

Consume? Lord, you're not one of those irritating vegan-types, are you?

CURTIS laughs.

THELMA (cont'd)

Oh, God, you are. Vegans are ripping this country apart.

CURTIS

Vegans are?

THELMA

Yes, with their fascist views on food, their political correctness baloney, nurturing everything, looking to the moon for answers. If you refer to God as a she, I am going to punch you right in the mouth.

CURTIS

I'm not a vegan. I've just got acid-reflux.
(sarcastic)

I'll have something really yummy when I get home, like plain steel cut oats with shredded coconut. Mmmm!

THELMA

Ha! You know, for a home dad, you don't stay home much.

CURTIS

I can count on one hand the number of times I've been away from my son.

THELMA

Oh, shut up.

CURTIS

It's true.

THELMA

He doesn't go to school? Does social services know?

CURTIS

I home school him.

THELMA

Grandparents don't take him off your hands once in a while?

CURTIS

My in-laws live in New Zealand. I think. They kind of do their own thing. And my family's in California.

THELMA

You don't go back there? Or they come out here?

CURTIS

No. My wife always felt judged by my parents. Devout Catholics. Latin Massers. Old school.

THELMA

Oh, my, that's terrifying.

CURTIS

Yup. My parents' house has holy water in a dish by the front door.

THELMA

Holy crap. So send your father out here. Put him up in a hotel if your wife can't have him under her roof.

CURTIS

After my mom died, my father followed a couple weeks later.

THELMA

Goodness gracious sakes alive.

CURTIS

He'd been sick with prostate cancer for years. He died with sixty-four dollars to his name. And he was the hardest working man I've ever known.

THELMA

Sixty-four dollars?

CURTIS

Everything he earned, he gave to others.

THELMA

Spouses going one right after the other is not uncommon. Somehow, though, I've managed to stick around for twenty-three years since my husband knocked off. So you've never gotten a babysitter?

CURTIS

Nope. So who looked after you with your parents always gone?

THELMA

Our housekeeper.

CURTIS

The Scottish lady? She didn't have a name?

THELMA

Margot Angus. But she was just Mrs. to me. She wanted me to call her that even though she wasn't married.

CURTIS

Yes, you said that. She's responsible for the Celtic lullabies?

THELMA

She would sing them while she worked.

CURTIS

So did you grow up in Scotland?

THELMA

India. That's where the church sent us. There's a photo of my school on the wall there.

He follows her gesture, rising, to a large photo on a wall nearby. He groans as he gets up.

THELMA (cont'd)

That's the second groan I've heard of out you.

CURTIS

Back trouble. When my son didn't walk, I carried him. When he cried, I carried him.

THELMA

Back problems. Stomach problems. I think you're still carrying him.

CURTIS

(peering in at the photo)

Whoa. Woodstock School. 1951. Which one are you?

THELMA

The hot momma with the giant grin in the front row.

CURTIS

(finding her)

I think I can see every single one of your teeth.

THELMA

I was a happy child.

CURTIS

How did you end up in the U.S.?

THELMA

You don't really want to hear my whole story, do you? I'm eighty-seven. It'll be epic.

CURTIS

You could give me the highlights.

THELMA

Well, a lot of it I don't remember, which is fine with me. In fact, there's a lot more about my life I'd like to forget but can't.

CURTIS

I'm the opposite. There's a lot more I'd like to remember.

THELMA

Like what?

CURTIS

I'd like to remember what it was like when I walked for the first time.

THELMA

You're kind of an odd duck, you know that?

CURTIS

My son has taught me that every milestone in life is precious.

THELMA

For my girls, every milestone had to happen as soon as humanly possible. And when they didn't, they complained. But they were my life.

And my husband hated that I chose my grumpy girls over him, so he chose other women over me, and then when he got sick, I chose forgiveness over resentment, and nursed him all through my fifties all the while I was being a real nurse at Cook County Hospital.

CURTIS

I hope he appreciated it.

THELMA

He eventually said "thank you" by dying. His last words were "OK, that's enough."

CURTIS laughs. She laughs, too.

THELMA (cont'd)

Oh, I shouldn't speak poorly of the man. He wasn't all bad. He loved the one thing about me that I loved the most.

CURTIS

What's that?

THELMA

I could dance.

CURTIS

So what are we doing sitting here? Let's dance!

THELMA

Now?

CURTIS

Why not? Weren't you the one who said "let it rip?"

THELMA

Don't you need to feed the cats?

CURTIS

I already did. Water, too. Scooped the litter box, even. Come on, Thelma, dance with me.

He puts out a hand for her.

THELMA

But I just ate. I'll cramp.

CURTIS

What's your next excuse? You're eighty-seven? All the more reason to get up and dance!

THELMA

I haven't danced in twenty years!

CURTIS

What in the world are you waiting for?! On your feet, Thelma!

THELMA

But I don't have my Greek tunic!

CURTIS

I don't know what that means.

THELMA

Isadora Duncan always wore her Greek tunic when she danced.

CURTIS

We'll imagine. Come on. Take my hand.

She finally takes his hand. He pulls her to her feet.

THELMA

If I fall and break one of my new hips, Medicare will go ballistic.

CURTIS

We'll chance it. Listen, I'm not exactly Baryshnikov, so...

THELMA

Shocker. I'm dancing alone. So shut up and sit down.

CURTIS

Yes, ma'am!

CURTIS sits on the couch. THELMA kicks off her footies, and, in bare feet, steps into the living room. Pauses. Then starts. She starts very slowly, but soon gets into it. She twirls, does little jumps, skips, nothing terribly athletic as she is still eight-seven. It's all free-flowing and fun, about how Isadora Duncan would have done. THELMA smiles the whole time. THELMA finishes and CURTIS applauds.

CURTIS (cont'd)

That was incredible!

THELMA

(breathing hard)

I'm floating! That was so much fun!

She falls into her barcalounger. She is giddy with happiness.

THELMA (cont'd)

Oh, goodness, that takes me back!

CURTIS

You are an amazing woman, Thelma!

THELMA

Yes, I know!

They laugh. CURTIS'S cell rings.

CURTIS

Sorry.

He gets it from his pocket, and, rising, answers.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Kristie, I'm coming home right now. (beat) Mitch? (beat) Mitch, use your words. (beat) Mitch why are you fake crying? (beat) You're imitating Mom? Don't do that, buddy. Mom doesn't fake cry, OK? (beat) She's crying right now? Where is she? (beat) Tell Mom I'm coming home now.

On a cell, MITCHELL appears in the window by the door.

MITCHELL

(outside)

But Dad...but I need candles for my cake, Dad. We have to go get candles.

CURTIS turns to see him. CURTIS puts his phone away, and opens the door.

CURTIS

Mitch?

MITCHELL enters. He's covered in cake ingredients, and cake batter, especially his hands, which are all over the phone. He continues to talk into the phone.

MITCHELL

Dad, Dad, Dad. I want orange candles.

CURTIS

Mitch, you can't just leave Mom crying like that-

MITCHELL

I'm going to...I'm going to cover the cake in candles.

CURTIS

Mitch, put down the phone. I'm standing right here, son.

MITCHELL

(pointing)

What's...what's that, Dad?

MITCHELL eyes a piece of art, an orange candle in the shape of a vagina.

CURTIS

Nothing. Give me Mom's phone.

MITCHELL

Doesn't look like nothing.

THELMA

It's a vagina.

MITCHELL

A what?

THELMA

Va-gi-na. Rhymes with China.

MITCHELL

What's a va-gi-na?

THELMA

(giggling)

Boy, you've got a long night ahead of you, Curtis.

CURTIS

Thelma, this is my son Mitch. Mitch, this is Thelma.

MITCHELL

It looks like a candle, Dad.

CURTIS

It is. Phone, Mitch-

CURTIS takes MITCHELL'S phone.

MITCHELL

(moving towards it)

Can we put it on the cake, Dad?

CURTIS

No. Don't touch the vagina!

Too late. MITCHELL grabs it with his cake batter hands.

MITCHELL

Candle, candle, candle, candle, candle-

CURTIS

Let me have that.

He grabs it, but MITCHELL won't let go.

MITCHELL

Candle, candle, candle, candle, candle-

They struggle over the candle.

CURTIS

Mitch, you're getting it messy, let go of it.

MITCHELL

But it's perfect for the cake, Dad. It's orange! And huge!

CURTIS

Let go, Mitch. It's not a cake candle. And it's not ours to touch. And the cake is not a birthday cake, it's just a cake-

MITCHELL

Cakes always need candles!

CURTIS

Let go, son!

MITCHELL does, opening his arms wide.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Now freeze!

MITCHELL freezes, but has fun with it, standing perfectly still in an awkward and silly position.

MITCHELL

Mr. Freeze strikes again!

CURTIS takes the candle into the kitchen and wipes it off with a rag. MITCHELL hums happily, grinning.

MITCHELL (cont'd)

I'm frozen, I'm frozen! Look at me! My whole body is...is one giant block of ice! Ahhhhhh! I can't move! Dad, I can't move! Unfreeze me! I don't want to be frozen for the rest of my life! Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad! Dad!

THELMA

For God's sake, unfreeze the kid!

Hold on! I'm coming!

CURTIS

CURTIS puts the candle, now clean, back in its place.

Unfreeze me! Please!

MITCHELL Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

MITCHELL is wiggling now with excitement.

Hang on!

CURTIS

CURTIS takes the rag and wipes MITCHELL'S hands.

I can't unfreeze you unless I clean your hands.

CURTIS (cont'd)

You can't...Dad, you can't make up new rules, Dad.

MITCHELL

Yes, I can.

CURTIS

CURTIS licks one of his son's fingers.

Mmm, chocolate.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Dad!

MITCHELL (giggling)

Curtis!

THELMA

Unfreeze!

CURTIS

MITCHELL lets his body go limp in a hugely dramatic way.

Thank you, Jesus!

THELMA

I'll wash your rag at home, Thelma. I need to take him back.

CURTIS

MITCHELL fake cries.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Please, don't do that, son.

MITCHELL
OK.

CURTIS turns to THELMA.

CURTIS
Did you finish your pills, Thelma?

THELMA
I did.

CURTIS
You going to be OK here by yourself?

THELMA
I'm almost always here by myself.

CURTIS
Marilyn gave me a key, so I'm going to lock the door, OK?

THELMA
Who's going to stop you?

CURTIS and MITCHELL head to the door.

CURTIS
Good night, Thelma. I've really enjoyed myself. See you in the morning.

MITCHELL
We still need orange candles!

CURTIS
Let's go see how Mom is doing and then we'll go out and get your orange candles. Come on, pal.

MITCHELL starts clapping, happy. They exit. We hear CURTIS lock the door from the outside. THELMA sits there a moment, then she rises, grabbing her cane. She goes slowly to the window and looks out.

THELMA
Yeah. I enjoyed myself, too.

She grins and begins to dance again, very slowly, but happily.

Lights down.

Scene Three

Tuesday morning, early. A few days later. The house is dim. A puzzle is out and finished on the table. With a brightly-colored robe over her clothes (which she has not changed), THELMA is asleep in her barcalounger. But with her mouth open, she looks dead. There is a book on her lap. After a bit, keys jangle in the outside front door lock, and in comes MARILYN. She has an overnight bag over her shoulder. Her clothes are disheveled, her hair a little wild. She closes the door and puts down her bag. She then hits the lights, seeing her mother. She cries out, startled. THELMA doesn't move.

MARILYN

Mom?

Nervous, MARILYN approaches her mother.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Mom?! (beat) MOOOOOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMM?!

THELMA snaps awake, screaming.

MARILYN, startled, cries out again.

MARILYN (cont'd)

What are you doing, Mom?

THELMA

What?

MARILYN

I said, what are you doing?!

THELMA

What am I what?

MARILYN

Turn up your hearing aids!

THELMA

Speak up!

MARILYN

(loud and slowly)

Turn..up...

THELMA

Turn up what?

MARILYN

...your...hearing-

THELMA

Hold on, I forgot to turn up my hearing aids!

THELMA fiddles with the her hearing aids. They squeal, stop.

THELMA (cont'd)

There. OK. Go ahead.

MARILYN

What are you doing, Mom?

THELMA

Well, I was sleeping.

MARILYN

In your barcalounger? At six-forty-five in the morning? I thought you were dead.

MARILYN crosses to the bathroom. Rising, THELMA grabs her cane and follows.

THELMA

Nothing can kill me. Except maybe your father. And he's no longer alive to do it.

MARILYN

Are you feeling OK?

THELMA

I'm fine as frog's hair.

MARILYN

(entering bathroom)

Why aren't you in bed?

They talk through the door.

THELMA

I couldn't sleep.

MARILYN

Were you reading *The Grapes of Wrath* again?

THELMA

The Grapes of Wrath is the greatest novel in American Literature!

MARILYN

It weighs heavily on your mind and you can't sleep!

THELMA

It wasn't the book, it was you!

MARILYN

Can we not have this conversation while I'm peeing?

THELMA

What conversation do you want to have then?

MARILYN

No conversation! I want total silence!

THELMA

You know, in Key West, we didn't close bathroom doors!

MARILYN

SILENCE!

THELMA says nothing. A moment passes.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Mom?

THELMA

I thought you didn't want to talk?

MARILYN

I don't want you standing right outside the door, either!

THELMA

Fine!

THELMA takes two steps back. Waits. In a bit, the toilet flushes, the sink runs, stops, and out comes MARILYN.

MARILYN

Is this you not standing right outside the door?

MARILYN crosses into the kitchen and gets herself a glass of juice. THELMA follows. All of this as:

THELMA

You're late. By twenty-four hours.

MARILYN

I don't have a curfew, Mom. I'm fifty-two. And I called you and told you I was coming on Tuesday instead of Monday.

THELMA

Why did you stay an extra day?

MARILYN
 (noticing the cat bowls)
 You fed the cats?

THELMA
 Me? No. Curtis was just here.

MARILYN
 What? We texted. I told him I'd be here to feed the cats.

THELMA
 He saw a light on, he said.

MARILYN
 A light? So he just came over?

THELMA
 He's like a moth. It's in his nature.

MARILYN
 It's way too early for him to be coming over. Now I'm going
 to have to pay him extra on top of the extra.

MARILYN sees a puzzle out.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 You do a puzzle together while I was away?

THELMA
 Why? Do you pay him for that, too?

MARILYN
 No, of course not.

THELMA
 We did the lighthouse puzzle. Curtis got very animated. Did
 you know Curtis is a writer? He writes short stories.

MARILYN
 Yes, I told you that, Mom.

MARILYN swings open the already open
 closet door.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 Hi, Snatchy, hello, Twa-Twa.

We hear the cats meow.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 You miss Mommy? Awwwww. I'm so sorry I was late.

THELMA
 Did you stay an extra day because you don't like me here?

MARILYN goes inside the closet and pets the cats.

MARILYN

Oh, big stretch!

The cats meow.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Who's my little Snatchy-poo? Who's my little Twaty Twa-Twa?

THELMA

I don't have to live here, you know. We can load the Bug and I can drive back to Key West this afternoon.

MARILYN

Mom, Key West is like a thousand miles from here.

THELMA

Then we'd better get started.

Exiting the closet, MARILYN grabs her bag, and pulls out dirty clothes.

MARILYN

A, we just sold your house, and B, you can't live on your own anymore.

THELMA

C, so what, and ha!

MARILYN

Do you want me to list off all of your issues?

THELMA

No.

MARILYN

Hypertension, high cholesterol, iron deficiency anemia, osteoporosis-

THELMA

Minor problems-

MARILYN

-skin cancer, chronic bronchitis, you can't drive anymore-

THELMA

I can, too, drive-

MARILYN

-because of the cataracts and dizzy spells, your hearing is rapidly deteriorating-

THELMA

But I'm wearing my hearing aids-

MARILYN

-and you're still recovering from two hip replacements, not to mention the fact that you have dementia.

THELMA

I do not have dementia.

MARILYN

You're in the early stages, Mom.

With her dirty clothes, MARILYN crosses through the kitchen to the utility room door. THELMA follows.

THELMA

Says who?

MARILYN

Your geriatrician.

THELMA

He's a goddamn nut.

MARILYN

And the neurologist your geriatrician referred us to.

THELMA

He's a goddamn nut, too. Both of those men are goddamn nuts.

MARILYN

Both of those men are women, Mom.

MARILYN opens the door to the utility room and tosses in her clothes.

THELMA

Holy crap. Are they transitioning like everyone else?

MARILYN

I want to tell you a story. I could tell you fifty stories, but I'm just going to tell you one. For the last year, I had Mario make new house keys because you kept losing them.

THELMA

Who's Mario?

MARILYN

Your gardener. In Key West.

THELMA

Oh. Right.

MARILYN

Remember when I came down for Christmas? I found all those lost keys. Twenty-five of them. In the freezer. Underneath a gigantic bag of frozen tater tots.

THELMA

Oh, well, put me in a straitjacket because I misplaced a few keys.

MARILYN

Why do you think I keep your pill box on the fridge?

THELMA

Because you're quirky and controlling.

MARILYN

Because you'll forget what day it is and keep taking pills. Three weeks ago, I had to have your stomach pumped. You took a week's worth. You almost died.

THELMA turns away.

MARILYN (cont'd)

I'm sorry I told you that. (beat) You're here now, living with me, because I love you, Mom. OK?

THELMA

Yes, I feel the love emanating.

MARILYN

I fought with Jayne about you because Jayne, who is all about Jayne, wanted to put you in a home and I wanted you here.

THELMA

Really?

MARILYN

And since you've arrived, I've done everything I can to make sure you're comfortable. I moved your old barcalounger in here. You have your boombox and your puzzles and some of your plants. Your bedroom is exactly as it was in Key West. My God, I even painted my kitchen neon magenta for you!

THELMA

My life was Key West. Not this. How come I don't get to choose? It's my life, after all.

MARILYN

I know. I'm sorry. (beat) Are you wearing the same clothes as when I left?

THELMA

No.

MARILYN

(peeling back Thelma's robe)

They *are* the same clothes. You haven't gotten dressed in three days?

THELMA

I'm old. I can do whatever I want.

MARILYN

Do you want breakfast? I know it's early, but-

THELMA

I want to know why you stayed an extra day.

MARILYN

It doesn't matter. I'm going to have a bowl of granola. Do you want to change up the bananas and milk routine and have one, too?

She looks for the granola in the cupboard.

THELMA

I had breakfast.

MARILYN

Already?

THELMA

I finished the granola.

MARILYN

You finished the granola? That was the last of the cereal!

THELMA

You said I could have anything I wanted!

MARILYN

Yeah, everything *except* the granola!

MARILYN gets a spoon and a yogurt out of the fridge.

THELMA

Well, smother me in my sleep for eating your precious goddamn granola!

THELMA moves to her barcalounger as MARILYN follows.

MARILYN

You see, Mom! This is what I'm talking about! You never have granola! Never! Every day for breakfast it's bananas and milk, but now, suddenly, you have granola!

THELMA

That doesn't mean I'm senile!

THELMA sits. MARILYN sits on the couch.

MARILYN

OK, you want to know why I'm late?

THELMA

Yes.

MARILYN

I met a man.

Everything stops.

THELMA

What do you mean, you "met a man?"

MARILYN

What do you think I mean?

THELMA

A man? Like a male? Like a he?

MARILYN

That right there is why I didn't want to tell you! I'm sick of the lesbian jokes, Mom! Sick of them!

THELMA

Come out to me and I'll end the jokes!

MARILYN

What?

THELMA

I just want you to be who you are. I'm an accepting person. I'm your mother and I love you. Please come out to me. Please. I beg you. I could die at any moment and it will haunt you the rest of your life-

MARILYN

I'm not a lesbian!

THELMA

Why do you insist on breaking my heart over and over?

MARILYN

I met a man, Mom, and I spent last night with him at his house. That's why I'm late. OK? I spent the night and we had Earth-shattering sex.

THELMA

You think saying that is going to shock an eighty-seven-year-old woman?

MARILYN

I'm just telling you.

THELMA

How old is he? Because, you know, "*Earth-shattering?*"

MARILYN

Why can't you just be happy for me?

THELMA

I'm sorry. I'm thrilled. How old is he?

MARILYN

Thirty.

THELMA

Is he dying?

MARILYN

What does that mean?

THELMA

Is he dumb as a box of rocks? Is he just out of prison?

MARILYN

OK, I get it. I can't get a thirty-year old? Let me tell you something, I *got* a thirty-year old!

THELMA

Congratulations. Why do you have to be so sneaky about it?

MARILYN

Because you're hyper-critical!

THELMA

You were sneaky as a child, too. When you were thirteen, you stole some of my tampons and when I asked you about it, you denied it, denied having your period until I showed you the evidence, which you tried to hide by flushing down the toilet, which was backed up with all these blood-soaked-

MARILYN

OH MY GOD!

MARILYN starts in on the yogurt. Beat.

THELMA

What's his name?

MARILYN

Bruce. His name is Bruce.

THELMA

Strong, masculine name. What's he do?

MARILYN

He's a cabinet maker. He was working on the kitchen of the condo next door to where we were staying.

THELMA

A manual laborer. Oooh. *Gritty*.

MARILYN

OK, we are done.

MARILYN sees the peonies.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Where did the flowers come from?

THELMA

Who knows? It's spring. Flowers appear.

MARILYN

What's this?

MARILYN grabs a pill bottle on the side table.

MARILYN (cont'd)

This the stolen Bumex? Lanying returned it?

THELMA

I don't know. Curtis found it. I asked him to get me a lemon drop from my night stand and-

MARILYN

It was in your night stand? How did it get there, Mom?

THELMA

Who knows? I'm not Sherlock Holmes.

MARILYN

Mom, I fired that woman over those pills. Speaking of pills, have you had yours this morning?

THELMA

I had them with your precious granola.

MARILYN

And Curtis was here to watch you take them?

THELMA

He doesn't watch. He stares.

MARILYN

You two getting along?

THELMA

He makes me laugh. I make him laugh. It's been a long time since I laughed with someone. Or really talked to someone. Old people tend to get ignored, in case you hadn't noticed.

MARILYN

Look, I mention Curtis because I asked him to come by again next weekend. I'm going back to Wilmington.

THELMA

Why your book club won't meet where everyone lives is beyond me.

MARILYN

I'm not going back for the book club. I'm seeing Bruce. I like him. I really like him. He noticed me. I get ignored, too, Mom. I get ignored, too.

THELMA considers her daughter.

THELMA

Does this mean you're going to take down the vaginas?

MARILYN

What? No!

THELMA

Why not?

MARILYN

You'd think, as a former nurse, and a woman who "let it all hang out," that you'd be a lot more comfortable with female genitalia.

THELMA

I'm plenty comfortable. It's just that everywhere I turn, there's a vulva saying "hi."

MARILYN

Well, start saying "hi" back.

THELMA

Are you making some half-assed political statement with these things?

MARILYN

No. I just couldn't sell them in Miami, and I can't seem to sell them online now, either.

THELMA
But why do you have so goddamn many of them? And why are they up?

MARILYN
I like them.

THELMA
You *like* them?

MARILYN
As art!

THELMA
You bring this Bruce guy here and he will run like the wind.

MARILYN
No, he won't.

THELMA
Honey, the vaginas scream "I like vaginas."

MARILYN
Why is it when I celebrate the vagina, I'm a lesbian?

THELMA
What would you think if you went into some man's house and there were cocks everywhere?

MARILYN
I don't want to hear my eighty-seven-year-old mother use the word "cocks."

THELMA
You'd think "very gay man lives here."

MARILYN
You don't know what you're talking about.

THELMA
Honey, I lived in Key West for twenty-three years. I know gayness.

MARILYN
This is the dumbest conversation we've ever had.

THELMA
I'll drop it yesterday if you lose the vaginas.

MARILYN
THE VAGINAS ARE STAYING!

THELMA

Fine! Just promise me you won't start putting up tits everywhere!

MARILYN

I won't put up any tits!

THELMA

Hallelujah!

They smile. Laugh together.

THELMA (cont'd)

Look at my girl. Happy and ruffled. Hair a mess. Make-up smudged.

MARILYN

Mom, I'm not wearing make-up.

THELMA

You should wear make-up.

MARILYN

I am who I am. Bruce likes me for who I am. And that makes me happy. I like being happy.

MARILYN eats. THELMA'S mood shifts. Dark, somber. Something's suddenly on her mind.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Listen, Bob Traxler, next door, invited us to a neighborhood pot luck, and I thought you could make your cardamom pie-

THELMA

(suddenly)

I'm not going into a home.

MARILYN

What?

THELMA

I'm not going into a home. If your boyfriend moves in here or you go there, I will go live with Jayne.

MARILYN

You can't live with Jayne. I told you, she-

THELMA

(growing angry)

I will not go into a home! Do you hear me?! I will not go into a goddamn home!

Lights fade.

Scene Four

Several weekends later. Early evening. Summertime. Around the room are new notes: "Eat." "Sleep." "Shower." We hear the faint noise of a shower from the bathroom. The microwave is quietly humming in the kitchen. CURTIS, in summer shorts, is cleaning up a spill under the table. KRISTIE, with long, beautiful hair, is halfway across the room. She is desperately trying to keep from falling apart.

KRISTIE

I need you to come home right now.

CURTIS

I can't come home right now.

KRISTIE

You can't leave me alone with him.

CURTIS

I've only been over here about a half hour.

KRISTIE

You've been coming over here for weeks!!

CURTIS

Would you keep your voice down, please? Sometimes Thelma forgets to take off her hearing aids before she showers.

KRISTIE

She's showering?

CURTIS

Yup. In the bathroom there. She spilled ginger beer all over herself.

KRISTIE

What if she falls?

CURTIS

She won't fall. She used to be a dancer.

KRISTIE

Old people fall, Curtis.

CURTIS

Marilyn installed hand rails. And a chair. Thelma is fine.

KRISTIE

If she falls, you are not going in there and seeing that woman naked!

CURTIS

OK, then you go in there.

KRISTIE

What? Me? No way. Where is Marilyn?

CURTIS

She's in Wilmington.

KRISTIE

Again? Why can't her sister come help out?

CURTIS

Jayne lives in Barcelona.

KRISTIE

You have to start saying "no." When Marilyn asks if you can look after her mother, or the cats, you need to say "no."

CURTIS

She doesn't have anyone else right now.

KRISTIE

That is not your problem! She needs to *get* someone! Someone like a qualified medical professional!

CURTIS

Kristie, can you keep your voice down?

KRISTIE looks at the table.

KRISTIE

Look at all these medications. Fosamax? Spiriva? What is Spiriva?

CURTIS

It's an inhaler. Thelma's got a bronchial thing.

KRISTIE

And I suppose you administer that?

CURTIS

Her fingers are crooked and she can't manipulate the-

KRISTIE

You are not Thelma's nurse! You're just a guy who lives across the street!

CURTIS

Marilyn is paying me, it's extra cash. You've said you need me to bring in some money and-

KRISTIE

You want to bring in money? You and your brother need to sell your parents' house.

CURTIS

I know, I know, it's just hard to let go of and-

KRISTIE

And you need to send out more of your stories.

CURTIS

I do send them out. I'm in a dry spell.

KRISTIE

How come you don't let me read them anymore?

Beat.

CURTIS

You don't seem interested anymore.

KRISTIE

And when you write, why do you sneak away to do it?

CURTIS

Sneak away? I go into the den when Mitch goes down.

KRISTIE

The complete other end of the house.

CURTIS

I remember when we were in grad school and you wrote, in pen no less, a note on the inside cover of my copy of *Winesburg Ohio*. It said, "You are a born writer."

KRISTIE

You are.

They look at each other.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

I miss us. I miss the way we used to laugh. I thought it would never end.

CURTIS'S attention is drawn to the front window, which is open.

KRISTIE

I see your eyes. Your nose. A little freckle on your cheek.

Her breathing slows.

CURTIS

Tell me what you need.

KRISTIE

Hold me.

He does. After a moment:

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Kiss me.

He comes out of the hug and looks at her, not understanding.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Kiss me.

He leans in, to kiss her, but his attention is taken away by MITCHELL clapping outside. He goes to the window to look out. She deflates.

CURTIS

Listen, Kristie, take Mitch and go back home.

KRISTIE

You have to come with us. You know how to deal with him. I don't know what I'm doing at all.

CURTIS

(sitting back down)

I don't know what I'm doing, either. I'm just doing it.

KRISTIE

I have no maternal instincts.

CURTIS

Stop saying that. You do.

KRISTIE

Oh, please. I couldn't even get him to breast feed.

CURTIS

That wasn't your fault. And that was a long time ago-

KRISTIE

I don't feel like I'm a mother. Do you know how hard that is for me to admit? He's such a surprise. Always has been.

CURTIS

I know. Try joining his world.

KRISTIE

Meaning what?

CURTIS

Do what he does when he does it. Clap with him. Hum with him. Run with him. *Talk to him.*

KRISTIE

I don't know how.

CURTIS

He's just a person, Kristie, like you and me-

KRISTIE

The other night, I was in the office, and I found this old early-intervention evaluation.

CURTIS

And you read it?

KRISTIE

The things it said about our son.

CURTIS

That was years ago.

KRISTIE

The judgement! Because he's different!

CURTIS

They're not trying to be-

KRISTIE

Don't defend them! This is why I don't want him evaluated again. Because they will stamp some horrible label or *labels* on him, which he'll have the rest of life, and I won't be able to live with a child who has...

She stops, looks at him pitifully.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Everyone told me children were such a joy. The giggling and cute little outfits. No one ever said they might have trouble sleeping, and eating, and talking, and just being *normal*. (beat) I had so many dreams for him. For us. And now none of them are going to come true.

CURTIS

All we can do is make the best of the life we are given.

KRISTIE

I don't know how to do that. I'm going to crack, I tell you.

CURTIS

Maybe you need a different medication. You're either on edge or in bed or-

KRISTIE

I need a drink is what I need.

CURTIS

No! No more drinking!

KRISTIE

And I need you to pay more attention to me, Curtis.

CURTIS

I know, but Mitchell is a *huge* responsibility.

KRISTIE

Don't use our son as an excuse-

CURTIS

Yup, OK, except-

KRISTIE

-when we both know it's not Mitchell. You resent me because I don't help enough. I get lonely, Curtis.

CURTIS

So do I. You don't think I desire *connection* being with Mitchell all day?

KRISTIE

You say that, and yet you still won't touch me?

CURTIS

I'm *tired*, Kristie. I'm so tired I piss sitting down now.

KRISTIE

Is that supposed to be funny?

CURTIS

How come when we go out you don't come with us?

KRISTIE

See, this is the resentment I'm talking about.

CURTIS

And why won't you take him somewhere without me? It's summertime right now, there's a million places you can-

KRISTIE

I can't.

CURTIS

You have to try.

KRISTIE

I've tried. I've taken him swimming. Have I not taken him-

CURTIS

Oh, when was the last time you took him swimming-

KRISTIE

I'm embarrassed of him!

She grabs her mouth like she wants to take back what she's said. She crosses away from him.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God.

CURTIS

He's your son, Kristie.

KRISTIE

I know. *I know.* It's just that I see the way other kids look at him. Other parents, too.

CURTIS

So what? He smiles and laughs and finds such happiness in the smallest things. He's a beautiful child.

KRISTIE

Don't pretend like you don't wish things were different.

CURTIS

I don't wish things were different.

KRISTIE

I see you, in the house, *looking at him*, and-

CURTIS

Really? You're hardly home, Kristie. Between teaching, and meetings, and conferences and-

KRISTIE

I want out. I'm not a mother. I'm not.

CURTIS

What does that mean, you want out?

KRISTIE

Even when the mid-wife handed him to me, I didn't even know how to hold him.

He gets up, groaning, crosses to her.

CURTIS

Answer my question! What do you mean, you want out?!

KRISTIE

Us, Curtis. This family. I can't do it.

CURTIS

You're just in a low moment right now-

KRISTIE

So what if I am? It's too much!

CURTIS

Too much? I've asked almost *nothing* of you.

KRISTIE

Oh, like my job is nothing. Like my salary is nothing. It only bought us our house-

CURTIS

Oh, come on-

KRISTIE

And our car, and your new MacBook-

CURTIS

We agreed, when you got pregnant, that I would stay home with him and you, because you had a real career going, would-

KRISTIE

I can't do it all!

CURTIS

I'm not asking you to-

KRISTIE

I'm moving.

CURTIS

What? What are you talking about?

KRISTIE

I'm going back to Naperville.

CURTIS

Chicago?

KRISTIE

Yes.

CURTIS

No one is there anymore. Your parents are in New Zealand.

KRISTIE

They've moved back.

CURTIS

To Naperville? Since when?

KRISTIE

(overwhelmed)

I just want to go home!

Beat.

CURTIS

This is your home, Kristie. Here. On Pine Knoll Street. In Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

She looks at him pitifully, as if to say "no, it isn't."

KRISTIE

I know I'm springing this on you.

CURTIS

Yup, and in our neighbor's house, no less.

KRISTIE

And I know your parents just died, but I don't know how to be there for you.

CURTIS

Yup, that's true-

KRISTIE

Yup, yup, yup, yup, yup, stop talking like your father!

Beat.

CURTIS

So you're quitting your job, too?

KRISTIE

I've always hated academics. You know that. Maybe I'll open a bookstore, I don't know.

CURTIS

You just got tenure two years ago.

KRISTIE

I DON'T CARE!

From the bathroom shower:

THELMA

Who's talking out there?!

They stop.

CURTIS

(crossing to the door)

It's me, Thelma. It's Curtis. Kristie is here, too.

KRISTIE turns away.

THELMA

Who's Kristie?

KRISTIE

She doesn't know about me?

CURTIS

She knows. She forgets.

(to Thelma)

Kristie is my wife, Thelma.

THELMA

Anyone *else* out there? Did you invite the whole goddamn neighborhood?

CURTIS

No. It's just us. Sorry.

He waits a moment, hears only the shower, and then moves away from the door. To KRISTIE.

KRISTIE

I'm going to give you the house. And I'll call TIAA tomorrow and sign over my grandfather's trust so you and Mitch don't have to worry about-

CURTIS

Please, just hold on a second, Kristie-

KRISTIE

I'm walking away from everything.

CURTIS

This is insane! I love you, Kristie. I know our son has trouble showing it, but I know that he-

KRISTIE

He doesn't love me. I wouldn't, either, if I were him.

CURTIS

How can you say that? He cries for you, when you stay late at school, or you're out of town at a-

KRISTIE

I cheated on you.

Everything stops.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Last year. In Palo Alto. (beat) I'm sorry. (beat) I was drunk. And so lonely. (beat) I hated myself afterwards. I still do. I'm a terrible person.

CURTIS

You're not a terrible person. You're just a little lost and-

KRISTIE

Lost? I'm broken! (beat) There's no place for me here. You walk around the house...it's all about Mitchell. Mitchell, Mitchell, Mitchell!

CURTIS turns to the window.

CURTIS

Nothing, son, nothing. Your mother wasn't talking to you.

He closes the window, groaning, clutching at his back. He turns back to her, angry, knowing their son may have heard everything.

CURTIS (cont'd)

OK, I hear you. We all hear you. I will try and-

KRISTIE

It's too late, Curtis.

CURTIS

It's not too late!

KRISTIE

For years, I've thought about taking a canoe out on Jordan Lake and drowning myself. (beat) I always felt like that would have been best for everyone. But I didn't have the courage to do it. But I've thought about it. A lot. *Dreamed* about it.

The shower stops.

THELMA

(from the bathroom)

Mother?! Do I need to iron my new dress for church?

KRISTIE

What is she talking about?

CURTIS

She's tired. She gets loopy when she's tired.

He goes to the door.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Your mother isn't here, Thelma. Just me, Curtis.

THELMA
Curtis?

CURTIS
Yes. From across the street. You're in your daughter Marilyn's house.

THELMA
Oh. Oh, gosh.
She laughs at herself.

CURTIS
I made your dinner. It's ready now.

THELMA
Oh.

KRISTIE is distracted by MITCHELL, who is still outside. She goes to the window. CURTIS grabs a plate, and THELMA'S meal, from the kitchen, and the pill box from the fridge top and puts the pills on the plate. He puts the plate, and the meal, on the table.

CURTIS
(seeing Kristie)
What is it?

KRISTIE
He's jumping up and down.

He approaches the window, opens it.

CURTIS
What is it, buddy?
(to Kristie)
He's coming around.

CURTIS follows his son around to the front door. CURTIS opens it and in comes MITCHELL, hopping up and down. He's squealing in delight. He runs back and forth across the room.

CURTIS (cont'd)
What's going on, son? What is it?

MITCHELL stops, holding up something pinched between his thumb and finger.

MITCHELL

Four-leaf clover!

MITCHELL hops up and down.

CURTIS

You found one? You found a four-leaf clover! That's incredible! Ha ha!

Celebrating MITCHELL'S good fortune, CURTIS hops up and down, too, imitating his son.

MITCHELL

Dad, will I...will I...am I going to be lucky now, Dad?!

CURTIS

You're going to be the luckiest kid in the world!

MITCHELL

Lucky, lucky, lucky, lucky me!

Suddenly, CURTIS'S back seizes up, and he falls to his knees. He grabs at a chair, holding himself.

KRISTIE

Curtis?

MITCHELL doesn't stop hopping. And hopping.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Mitch! Please, stop hopping!

But MITCHELL doesn't stop. As she crushes a piece of paper in her hands, THELMA comes out of the bathroom in a robe.

THELMA

I'm sick of these stupid goddamn notes. I don't need a note to "use soap."

THELMA sees what's happening.

THELMA (cont'd)

What the hell is going on out here?

Lights fade.

Scene Five

A month and a half later. Near midnight. Late August. A hot, muggy night. Even more notes are around the house. A small thunderstorm has come, so light flashes in the dark house. Thunder rumbles. It's raining. MARILYN is curled up in THELMA'S chair, under her afghan, on the phone. She's crying, deeply emotional, grieving. She's drinking wine out of the bottle.

MARILYN

I can't believe she's gone. There was no warning, nothing. (beat) I know she was old, Bruce, but... (beat) How am I going to live without her? (beat) Well...she was her usual self this morning at breakfast. Then an hour later I found her face down in her litter box.

She cries.

MARILYN (cont'd)

The vet said she'd choked on a hair ball.

She sobs.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Poor Snatchy. (beat) Bruce, please don't talk about the circle of life, OK? (beat) No, Twat's acting like nothing's different. Little fucker. Fifteen years those two were together. (beat) Yeah, I told Mom. But a half hour later she was asking me where Snatch was. (beat) Oh, she's, you know, getting around. Slowly. Her left eye needs surgery and- (beat) Cataracts. (beat) Things are changing fast. She can't cook anymore. She can hardly bathe herself. Gets so irritable. One night about a week ago, she looked at me and it was like there was, for the briefest moment, another person there. Like her face had literally changed into someone else. Spooked me. (beat) I don't know, a person reaches a certain age and they start to outlive their life, you know? (beat) Mom's in bed. (beat) Yeah, I got a lock for the front door, to lock her *inside*, so she won't try and drive back to Key West or something at three in the morning. If you'd ever visit me, you'd see all this for yourself. (beat) I'm sorry. I haven't been able to reach you all day and I wanted to tell you what had happened to Snatch. (beat) I know you're working. When can I see you again? I haven't see you in- (beat) OK. (beat) OK. (beat) Can I tell you something funny? My mother thinks you're thirty.

She chuckles. It dies quickly.

MARILYN (cont'd)

OK, so I lied. You come live with my mother and then tell me you won't start making shit up. (beat) I'm sorry. You're not old. (beat) Sixty-eight is not old. (beat) Come here and meet her then. We've been together two months and you've never- (beat) I know you work a lot. (beat) Are you surviving the heat? God, it's been so muggy here. Hope the rain cools things off. (beat) What are you doing right now? (beat) Oh, I love that movie. You know, my father named me after Marilyn Monroe. (beat) It's true. (beat) I wish you were here. (beat) Is that so horrible? (beat) I just want you to hold me. Brush my hair. Make me toast. (beat) Sometimes I just want someone to take care of me.

There is a bump from somewhere in the house.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Hold on.

MARILYN pulls the phone away.

MARILYN (cont'd)

(calling out)

Mom?

She gets up and moves towards the hallway.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Mom?

Just then, laughter, distant. She listens, slightly spooked, unsure of what it is or where it's coming from. She puts the phone to her face.

MARILYN (cont'd)

I sure wish you were here. I'm hearing laughter. Like a child's.

She pulls the phone away again and listens, following the laughter. Clapping starts, too. She goes to the front window. She peers out. Light flashes from lightning.

MARILYN (cont'd)

The neighbor's kid is out on the lawn. He's digging in the grass. In pajamas. In a thunderstorm. I need to call my neighbor. I'm sure he has no idea his son is out there. Hold on. Someone's buzzing in.

She looks at her phone.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 (putting the phone to her face)
 It's Jayne. Jesus. I'd better take this. Bye bye. I love-

She stops when she senses he has hung up. She looks at her phone, disappointed. Then swipes it.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 (putting the phone to her face)
 Jayne, do you have any idea what time it is? (beat) Yeah, well, it's midnight here, OK? (beat) Jayne? (beat) Jayne?! (beat) I can't understand you. Are you high? Every time you get high, you call me, and cry, and speak in Spanish. (beat) Oh, I don't want to hear about your guilt right now, OK? You want to alleviate the guilt? Come and visit, all right?

Just then, appearing from the hallway, shuffling without her cane, is THELMA, who looks lost and unsteady on her feet. She's in a long nightgown and she isn't wearing her hearing aids.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 Quit sobbing. I have to go. I have an issue out on my front lawn. Goodbye.

MARILYN kills the call and then she starts searching the phone. Her back is to THELMA, who begins to approach, shuffling quietly in her socks. MARILYN makes her call and puts the phone to her face.

MARILYN (cont'd)
 Curtis, it's Marilyn across the street. Did you know Mitchell is out on my lawn? (beat) Well, that will teach you to take a shower at midnight. (beat) He's digging around in the grass. (beat) He lost his what? Four-leaf clover? (beat) I'll go out there. (beat) OK, I'll see you in a moment.

MARILYN ends the call.

THELMA
 Mrs.?

Startled, MARILYN screams, and turns.

THELMA
 Has Mother come home yet, Mrs.?

MARILYN

Jesus, Mom. Let me walk to you back to bed.

She grabs her mother's arm, but THELMA resists.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Come on, Mom. Don't be stubborn. And where's your cane? And your hearing aids?

THELMA

I want to wait for Mother.

MARILYN

Mom, your mother isn't coming.

THELMA

Mother and Father are arriving on the train, Mrs.

MARILYN

Mom, I'm not Mrs.

THELMA

What?

MARILYN

Look at me.

MARILYN grabs her mother gently by the face and really looks at her.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Do you see me?

THELMA nods.

MARILYN (cont'd)

It's me. Your daughter. Marilyn. You're in my house. On Pine Knoll Street. In America.

THELMA looks at her blankly.

MARILYN (cont'd)

It's about midnight, and you've woken up. Were you dreaming of India again?

THELMA just stares her.

THELMA

I'll wait for them by the window, Mrs.

THELMA shuffles to the window.

THELMA (cont'd)

We have to tell mother the monkeys raided the pantry again.

Blinking hard, THELMA looks out into the night. Lightning flashes.

THELMA (cont'd)

Look! Mother is out in the garden. Digging. They're home!

MARILYN

Mom, that's not your-

THELMA knocks on the glass.

THELMA

Mother! Mother!

(rubbing her eye)

Everything looks all cloudy! I can't see anything!

She loses her balance, and nearly falls. MARILYN lurches towards her, and holds her steady.

MARILYN

Careful, Mom!

THELMA puts her hand flat on the glass, confused. She then looks up and around at the house. Then to MARILYN.

THELMA

Goodness. Where am I?

Lights fade.

End Act One

Act Two

Scene Six

Lights up. Early fall. Late morning. There are cat water bowls all over the room. One of the vagina paintings is down and in it's place is a garish painting of a beach. All of this should be set up by MARILYN and THELMA and CURTIS during intermission. CURTIS is at the table with MITCHELL where a large bowl of origami monkeys rests. Holding his pencil funny, MITCHELL is attempting to write on a card.

CURTIS

M. (beat) i. (beat) t. (beat) t. Not d. t. (beat)
c. (beat) h. Nice!

CURTIS reads the card as MITCHELL hums and rocks in his chair.

CURTIS (cont'd)

"Welcome home, Thelma. Curtis and Mitch." Looks great, son.

CURTIS slides in front of MITCHELL a piece of brown origami paper.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Here's more origami paper. Finish up your bowl of monkeys. Thanks so much for doing all this, Mitch. The bowl of monkeys is going to make Thelma laugh.

MITCHELL

Yup!

CURTIS grins at the "yup."

CURTIS

Love you, pal.

MITCHELL calmly folds.

CURTIS (cont'd)

This afternoon, we'll finish up our Egypt project at home, OK? And work a little more on fractions, OK?

MITCHELL says nothing. CURTIS looks at his son a long time.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Son, do you ever wish you could go to regular school?

MITCHELL concentrates on folding.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Mitch, do you ever wish you could go to regular school?

MITCHELL

I don't know.

CURTIS

But you'd be with other kids, and, maybe, you know, you'd have a friend.

MITCHELL

You're my friend. Aren't you, Dad? Aren't you?

CURTIS

I am. Always. Where I go, you go. Where you go, I go.

Slightly flustered, MARILYN enters from the hallway in a hurry with a sweater of her mother's in one hand, and a cat carrier, holding TWAT, in the other.

MARILYN

OK, here is Twat. You two are life-savers.

MARILYN puts the carrier on the floor.

CURTIS

We're glad to help.

MARILYN

They're going to examine her, probably do blood work, and maybe even an x-ray. I can't believe I made two appointments at the same time. I just blanked.

CURTIS

You think it's a hair ball?

MARILYN

I don't know. Maybe. She's puking, she's lethargic. This is why I have all the water bowls everywhere. Water is supposed to flush things out. Curtis, you look gaunt.

CURTIS

That's my normal look.

MARILYN

Have you eaten anything today?

CURTIS

Uh...I ate the crusts of Mitch's Eggos at breakfast.

MARILYN

Seriously? Let me make you what I make my mother every morning.

MARILYN starts into the kitchen.

CURTIS

Oh, come on, Marilyn. You have to go pick up your mother.

MARILYN

This will take one minute. Come into the kitchen. Let me show you what I do.

CURTIS follows her.

CURTIS

Please don't worry about me.

MARILYN

Shut up and listen.

MARILYN prepares a Tupperware container as she describes it.

MARILYN (cont'd)

I slice a banana first. (beat) Then I add some milk. (beat) Then some vanilla extract. Just a dash. Just a little something that says "taste me!" Mix it all up. (beat) Some blueberries. Some raspberries if we have some. And we don't. (beat) A couple of spoonfuls of lentils, if you can believe that. My mother likes lentils for breakfast. I think it's a childhood thing. I know you're thinking lentils are going to ruin the whole thing, but trust me on this. It's really good. Do I eat it? Hell no. (beat) OK. A sprinkle of cinnamon. Mix it up. We call this concoction bananas and milk. But it's really bananas and milk and a whole lot of other things. Take it. Eat it. You will love it. Your stomach will handle it fine. And it's good for you. My mother has lived to nearly ninety, so she's doing something right.

MARILYN hands him the Tupperware and a spoon. He eats it. He doesn't like it, but he pretends he does with a big "mmmm mmmm."

MARILYN (cont'd)

Shit. What am I doing? I'm losing it. You know how to make this, don't you? You've made it for Mom, haven't you?

CURTIS

Once or twice. It was nice of you to do this nonetheless.

MARILYN

Nice? It's a compulsion. That's what Bruce calls it. Don't hog the bananas and milk. Share it with your son.

CURTIS

Definitely.

MARILYN

He won't touch it, will he?

CURTIS

Definitely not. He likes pizza, and mac and cheese, and his mom's grilled cheese, and Eggos, and bagels, and now we're done.

MARILYN

His loss. Keep eating, Curtis.

He does, over-smiling the whole time.

MARILYN (cont'd)

All right, I'm out of here. You have my cell and the directions to the vet?

CURTIS

I have everything.

MARILYN

I should've canceled the vet, but I didn't want to, and I know I can totally trust you with my little Twat. Oh, that came out wrong.

CURTIS

Go. All will be fine.

MARILYN

The appointment is at 12:15, so leave the house in about ten minutes, OK? It's twenty-five minutes down 15-501. Enjoy the drive. The fall leaves are like a clown show. I know I'm being controlling.

CURTIS

You're being thorough.

MARILYN

I'm being controlling as hell. My co-workers at the Arts Council call me My Way Marilyn.

CURTIS tries not to laugh, but can't help it.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Are you laughing?

CURTIS

No. There is absolutely nothing funny about My Way Marilyn.

He can't stop laughing. She laughs, too. MARILYN checks her watch.

MARILYN

Oh, crap. I gotta go. You still have a key to my house?

CURTIS

Yup. Would you get out of here?

MARILYN

All right. Lock up after you go. Thanks, thanks, thanks.

She leaves. He puts down the Tupperware quickly, making an ugly face.

CURTIS

Mitch? (beat) Mitch, did you see who's here?

MITCHELL looks up. Sees the cat in the carrier.

MITCHELL

Twa-Twa!

MITCHELL rushes over to the carrier, gets down on the floor and entertains himself with the cat. He bounces, and squeals, and calls the cat funny names, all based on the word twat. A knock at the front door. CURTIS gets it. KRISTIE is on the other side. She's frayed and a little drunk. They look at each other a moment.

KRISTIE

Hi. (beat) How are you?

CURTIS

You smell like beer.

KRISTIE

Good to see you, too.

CURTIS

I'm sorry. How's the hotel?

KRISTIE

It's a hotel.

CURTIS
How did you know we were here?

KRISTIE
You're always here.

CURTIS
We're taking Marilyn's cat to the vet while Thelma's in the hospital.

KRISTIE
Hospital?

CURTIS
Nothing major. Just outpatient stuff. Cataract surgery. Marilyn went to pick her up. It's nice to see you.

KRISTIE
Sincere. My house key won't work.

CURTIS
I know.

KRISTIE
Did you change the locks?

CURTIS
Yes.

KRISTIE
To force me to talk to you?

CURTIS
Yes.

KRISTIE
I just need a couple things from the attic. Some personal stuff, that I've kept, from my childhood. That I absolutely have to take. I don't have a lot of time. I'm getting on a plane in an hour and a half.

CURTIS
To Chicago?

KRISTIE
Can I have the new key?

CURTIS
Don't do this, Kristie.

KRISTIE
Can I have the new key, Curtis?

CURTIS
What can I say to get you to-

KRISTIE
Nothing. There's absolutely nothing you can say.

Beat.

CURTIS
Your son is here.

KRISTIE
Curtis, I'm going to be late.

CURTIS
I want you to come inside and say goodbye to Mitch.

KRISTIE
I've said goodbye to him.

CURTIS
No, you haven't. Not *goodbye-goodbye*.

KRISTIE
Just give me the key, would you?

CURTIS
No.

KRISTIE
Don't put me through this.

CURTIS
How much have you had to drink?

KRISTIE
Not enough. Give me the key!

CURTIS
You want the key, you come inside and you say goodbye to your son.

She enters. MITCHELL, down on the floor with the cat, doesn't look up. She hesitates. She looks to CURTIS for help. He gives her none. She turns back to her son.

KRISTIE
Hi, Mitchell.

He still doesn't look up.

KRISTIE (cont'd)
 Mitch? (beat) *Mitchell?* (beat) Hey. Mitty?

He looks up at "Mitty."

MITCHELL
 Mom? Are you home from work, Mom?

KRISTIE
 No.

MITCHELL
 You look like you're home from work. You do. You do look like you're home from work.

KRISTIE
 I'm leaving.

MITCHELL
 Another conference?

MITCHELL fake cries. In a big way.

KRISTIE
 Please, don't do that, Mitty.

He stops.

MITCHELL
 OK. Look. It's Twa-Twa.

KRISTIE
 I see.

MITCHELL
 It's Twa-Twa pussy cat.

KRISTIE
 Yes.

MITCHELL
 Mom? Mom? Mom? You need to...you need to sign the card.

KRISTIE
 Card?

Rising, he shows her the card from the table, proud. He hums, and bounces, and claps.

MITCHELL
 For Thelma. She's very old, Mom.

KRISTIE

Did you do these monkeys?

He nods wildly as she picks up one out of the bowl.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Wow. I don't know how you do it.

MITCHELL

You need to...you...Mom, you have to put your name on the card, too, Mom.

KRISTIE

No, I don't think I should.

MITCHELL

My name is here, Dad's is here, yours is...is not. It's not there. You can't give someone a card, Mom, unless you sign it.

KRISTIE

The card is not from me.

MITCHELL

Yes, it is. It's from all of us. Sign the card, Mom.

She turns to CURTIS for help. He gives her none. She sighs.

KRISTIE

Fine.

Putting down the monkey, she signs the card. MITCHELL looks at it.

MITCHELL

(pointing to the signatures)
Me, Dad, Mom.

KRISTIE

Yeah.

MITCHELL

Me, Dad, Mom. Mom, Dad, me.

KRISTIE

I need to go, Mitty.

MITCHELL

When will you be home?

KRISTIE

I don't know. Maybe Christmas.

MITCHELL

I love Christmas. I do.

KRISTIE

I know.

MITCHELL

What should I be for Halloween this year, Mom? What should I go as? It's Halloween in three days, Mom.

KRISTIE

Goodbye, Mitty.

He sniffs her. He smiles.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

I'm sorry. I know I smell like beer.

MITCHELL

You smell like...like you. I like how you smell.

KRISTIE

Goodbye, son.

She is crying now. He doesn't understand what is happening. She turns to CURTIS.

KRISTIE (cont'd)

Key.

He hands it to her.

CURTIS

Put it under the doormat when you leave.

She nods. Goes to the door, turns. He approaches. They look at each other. Both of them are breaking.

KRISTIE

Will you let me know how he's doing?

CURTIS

Yup. If you ask.

KRISTIE

Tell him good things about me, OK?

CURTIS

Sure. (beat) Kristie...

KRISTIE

Don't say anything nice. Please. I can tell you're about to say something nice. Please don't do it. *Please.*

CURTIS

I'm not going to say anything nice.

KRISTIE

Tell me something terrible so I can walk away.

CURTIS

I love you, Kristie.

She looks at him, dumbstruck.

KRISTIE

No, no, no. I said terrible, Curtis.

CURTIS

I know. That is terrible. Isn't it?

Beat.

KRISTIE

How can you love me?

CURTIS

You're my girl. You'll always be my girl.

Beat.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Are we ever going to see you again?

KRISTIE

I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing anymore. I'm just going to go. I...

She turns away quickly. He watches her a moment, then slowly closes the door. Destroyed, he turns back to his son, who is back at the carrier playing with the cat. CURTIS approaches.

CURTIS

Hey.

MITCHELL

Look, Dad, it's Twa-Twa pussy cat.

CURTIS

You OK, Mitch? (beat) You want a hug?

MITCHELL
(not understanding)

No.

CURTIS

Can I have one?

MITCHELL

I guess.

MITCHELL stands. CURTIS grips him hard. MITCHELL does not respond, keeping his arms to his sides. Then, slowly, he lifts one hand and places it on CURTIS'S arm.

MITCHELL (cont'd)

Don't worry. Twa-Twa's going to be OK, Dad. He's going to be OK. (beat) Is Twa-Twa going to be OK, Dad?

CURTIS

Yup. He's going to be fine.

Lights fade.

Scene Seven

A month later. Evening. Late fall. A Christmas tree glows beautifully. An unopened bottle of Stone's is on THELMA'S side table. Humming "Dream Angus," THELMA, in a robe, and sweats, and an eye shield over one eye, trims the palm plant with scissors. She's really hacking it. CURTIS enters, with a cane, from the hallway.

CURTIS

I think I overdid the melatonin. Mitch is out.

He notices what she's doing, but hesitates to say anything.

THELMA

You overdid the what?

CURTIS

(raising his voice)

Melatonin!

THELMA

You drugged him?

CURTIS

I always drug him. He won't sleep otherwise.

THELMA

He can relax in Marilyn's bed?

He grabs her Spiriva Handihaler from the kitchen counter.

CURTIS

Sure. We've been playing a little game all night. We're pretending we're in a hotel. He's loved it.

THELMA

The cats let him in the bed?

CURTIS

Twat didn't move. The new medication she's getting has no obvious effect.

THELMA

You can't fix old. What about Snatch?

CURTIS

Snatch passed away, Thelma. A few months ago.

THELMA
 Lord. No one tells me anything.

CURTIS
 (approaching)
 Let's do your Spiriva.

THELMA
 Whatever.

CURTIS
 OK, big breath in...now exhale. All the way.

She does. He puts the Spiriva in her mouth.

CURTIS (cont'd)
 Breathe in...in, in, in. Hold it.

She does. He pulls the Spiriva out of her mouth.

CURTIS (cont'd)
 Three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Exhale.

She does.

CURTIS (cont'd)
 Good.

He goes back to the kitchen. She goes back to trimming.

CURTIS (cont'd)
 Thanks for letting us stay over. Mitch needed a change of pace. I did, too.

THELMA
 Your back can manage Marilyn's lumpy bed?

CURTIS
 Won't matter. My back's shot.

THELMA
 That boy only has one daddy, so you best get that right.

CURTIS
 Surgery's in two weeks.

THELMA
 Would you speak up?

THELMA turns up her hearing aids and they squeal.

THELMA (cont'd)

I can't hear a goddamn thing...now what's in two weeks?

CURTIS

Surgery!

THELMA

You don't have to shout!

He goes to a backpack on one of the chairs at the table and starts pulling out paper, and a magazine.

CURTIS

I'm going to ask Ms. Newman two houses down to help out with Mitch while I'm laid up. She's an OT and has worked with him in the past.

THELMA

What about your wife?

CURTIS

My wife is in Chicago.

THELMA

Chicago? I lived there for years. What the hell's she doing there?

CURTIS

She lives there now. She left us.

THELMA

My word. When did she go?

CURTIS

A month ago.

THELMA

Holy crap. *No one tells me anything.* I'm sorry, Curtis. How are you coping?

CURTIS

I just worry about my boy. Tonight is the first time he's agreed to leave the house.

THELMA

Oh, my.

CURTIS

Most of the time he just waits by the living room window, looking for her.

THELMA

The saddest day will be when he stops looking.

CURTIS

But then what happens? He forgets her? Can you imagine forgetting your own mother? Or anyone you love? Wouldn't that be just...?

He stops himself. Realizes what he has said.

THELMA

How are you getting food if you don't leave the house?

CURTIS

I get it delivered. Sometimes the neighbors run errands for me. Marilyn does, Mrs. Valentine the gardener lady, the Clementes down the hill. A lot of good people around. Thelma, what are you doing?

THELMA

Pruning. Plants need pruning. Don't you know anything about horticulture?

The palm is butchered. At the table, he notices her plate of pills.

CURTIS

You didn't take your pills.

THELMA

My what? Speak up!

CURTIS

Pills!

THELMA

Oh. Goodness. Bring them over. When am I going to stop taking pills? They're aggravating.

He brings the plate to her, as she puts down the scissors and grabs her walker and heads to her barcalounger.

THELMA (cont'd)

I need my dinner to take them.

CURTIS

You had dinner.

THELMA

I did?

CURTIS

Yes. Pesto Pasta Primavera. And a little stuffing leftover from Thanksgiving. You can take the pills with the Stone's.

THELMA

I like to take them with food. We had this housekeeper growing up, this Scottish lady, we called her Mrs. She believed that food carried the medicine with love and-

CURTIS

Thelma, can you take the pills with the Stone's?

She backs herself into her chair and sits.

THELMA

If I goddamn have to, I suppose. Can you get me one?

CURTIS

I already did. It's right there on your side table.

THELMA

(looking)

My God, you can be annoyingly prompt.

She grabs one of the pills and the ginger beer and tosses the pill in her mouth. She starts to drink, tipping the bottle end into her mouth. She struggles. Nothing seems to be coming out.

THELMA (cont'd)

What the hell's wrong with this thing?!

CURTIS gently pulls the bottle from her mouth.

CURTIS

Let me get the bottle cap for you.

Seeing the cap still on, THELMA laughs out loud.

THELMA

Oh, my goodness! I promise you I am not completely non compos mentis.

CURTIS twists off the cap.

CURTIS

(handing her the bottle)

Now try it.

She does. He goes back to the table to grab the paper and the magazine.

He hides the paper inside the magazine
and walks back. She takes her pills.
All this as:

THELMA

Where's Marilyn?

CURTIS

Wilmington. She'll be home tomorrow morning.

THELMA

Wilmington? What the hell's she doing there?

CURTIS

She has a boyfriend there.

THELMA

She has a boyfriend? Have I met him?

CURTIS

I don't think so.

THELMA

Why are you lurking?

CURTIS

You asked me to read to you.

THELMA

I did?

CURTIS

Yes, you get headaches trying to read. I like reading to
you. I read to my son, too.

THELMA

I'm being read to, like a child now, I guess. What are we
reading? Dr. Seuss?

CURTIS

You wanted me to read the latest short story in the *New
Yorker*.

THELMA

The *New Yorker*? Pretentious tripe.

CURTIS

We don't have to do this. We could do a puzzle.

THELMA

No more puzzles. Half of them have missing pieces.

CURTIS

What do you want to do?

THELMA

You're here. You're ready. Read the story.

CURTIS

I'll read it quickly, OK? Besides I should get to bed. I don't want to leave Mitch in there alone for too long, in case he wakes up and gets confused about where he is.

THELMA

I hear better out of my right ear. Speak into that. But, goddammit, speak up. These hearing aids are useless.

CURTIS

You want your afghan? Are you cold?

THELMA

Always.

He pulls it from behind her and wraps it around her.

CURTIS

You know, you don't have to wear your eye shield anymore.

THELMA

My what?

CURTIS

You keep putting on your eye shield. From the cataract surgery. You're healed. You don't need to wear that thing.

THELMA

Oh. Thank Christ.

She takes it off as he pulls up a chair from the table and puts it next to her. Sits.

CURTIS

This story is called "Man and Boy."

THELMA

"Man and Boy?" Stupid title. Who wrote the thing?

CURTIS

Uh...Hemingway. Yup. They found a another lost story.

THELMA

Why don't people realize there's a reason these things are buried in a drawer? OK, I'm ready. Go ahead. Let it rip. But, please, I beg you, speak up.

CURTIS holds up the magazine.

CURTIS

(reading, loudly)

"The man and the boy sat on the hardwood floor of the living room and made origami snowflakes.

Each time they finished a new snowflake, the boy hopped excitedly in place, and then ran the length of the house.

It was May. But the boy, nine-years old, enjoyed Christmas all year long.

They worked until they had a dozen snowflakes. Grabbing Scotch tape from a kitchen drawer, they dangled the snowflakes at various lengths from the ceiling. The boy clapped happily below them, and the man clapped with him.

'It's snowing, Dad!' the boy shouted.

'I know!'

It was Tuesday afternoon, and they'd finished their school lessons for the day.

'You want to celebrate our successful snowflakes by going to get pizza?'

He thought the boy would instead suggest frozen pizza at home and watching *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* on video.

'Can we play basketball first?' The boy asked.

'Of course,' the man replied. 'Where do you want to go?'

The boy thought about it.

'The Community Center,' he said.

The boy went to get their worn leather ball, which smelled of rain, and they met at their faded green Forerunner.

'When you grow up,' the man said, 'maybe you'll be a basketball player. Dad used to be good at basketball.'

They piled into their seats and strapped in, the man in front and the boy in back, and the man fired up the engine.

'Dad, when I grow up, I don't want to be anything.'

The man looked at his son in the rearview mirror.

'What do you mean?'

'I mean, when I grow up, I just want to be with you. My whole life, I just want to be with you.'

The man smiled.

'Where I go, you go,' the man said. 'Where you go, I go.'

The boy had heard his father say this many times before.

'Where I go, you go,' the boy repeated. 'Where you go, I go.'

CURTIS hesitates for a moment,
emotional.

CURTIS (cont'd)

It had been a good day. The boy had not asked about his mother, and the man was glad, because the man had grown too heartsick to consider, again, how much he missed her, and how much his boy needed her.

CURTIS hesitates again.

CURTIS (cont'd)

'Let's go play some basketball,' the man said.

The boy bounced himself, and the ball, in his seat and the man and the boy started down the driveway in the--

Just then, MARILYN bursts through the door. Her nice clothes are disheveled, and her makeup is smeared. She's been crying. Startled, CURTIS lets slip the papers behind the magazine. CURTIS has been reading from the paper, and not the magazine. MARILYN drops her overnight bag on the floor and goes into the kitchen. She puts her cell on the counter and grabs a ginger beer from the fridge.

THELMA

Marilyn? I thought you were in Delaware. And those beers are mine.

MARILYN opens the beer and chugs it.
CURTIS picks up the stray papers.

CURTIS

Everything OK?

MARILYN

Bruce broke up with me.

THELMA

Who's Bruce?

CURTIS

Her boyfriend.

THELMA

You have a boyfriend? Hooray!

MARILYN

No, not hooray, Mom. The opposite of hooray. He dumped me. He said I was making something out of nothing.

THELMA

Gosh, you're not a magician, honey.

MARILYN

Six months together is not making something out of nothing. I'm too plain-looking, that's what it is. Plain Jane.

THELMA

Your name isn't Jane, it's Marilyn. Your sister is Jane. You know, your father named you after Marilyn Monroe and your sister after Jayne Mansfield.

MARILYN

I know, Mom. (beat) I think Bruce has got a thing for the pretty farmer girl who brings him fresh eggs. I hope she fucking ruins him.

MARILYN laughs, then breaks.

MARILYN (cont'd)

I thought he loved me. I really did. I'm so stupid.

THELMA

(grabbing her walker)

Start the Bug, Marilyn. Come on, Curtis. Let's find this man and mess him up.

THELMA pulls herself into a standing position.

MARILYN

Sit down, Mom.

THELMA

Do we own a sledgehammer?

MARILYN

Mom.

THELMA

Nobody hurts my daughter! You're beautiful! Now where are my car keys?

THELMA starts searching the room.

CURTIS

Marilyn, I am so sorry.

MARILYN

Go home, Curtis.

She goes down the hallway, suddenly.

CURTIS

Marilyn, hold on. Before you go into your bedroom-

CURTIS follows fast. There is a scream. From MARILYN. Then the thump of a body on the floor. TWAT screeches. Off stage:

CURTIS (cont'd)

Marilyn-

MARILYN

What is *he* doing in here?

CURTIS

You said in a text we could stay here tonight.

MARILYN

I don't want him in my bed!

CURTIS

Got it, OK. We'll grab our stuff and-

MARILYN

This isn't your home!

CURTIS

I know that-

MARILYN

Get out! Get out! Get out of here!

CURTIS

OK, OK, OK, just hold on a moment, I have to...Mitch, we have to go. (beat) Yes, right now.

Just then, CURTIS enters with a night bag under his arm. He's guiding, with his other arm, MITCHELL, who wears Thomas the Train pajamas (or something similarly themed). MITCHELL is confused and near tears. He hums nervously, and he is covering his ears. MITCHELL turns himself around. He doesn't know which way to exit. MARILYN enters.

MARILYN
Get out of my house!

MARILYN'S voice has MITCHELL in a
panic.

CURTIS
OK, Marilyn, we hear you. Everyone in the neighborhood can
hear you.

CURTIS grabs his son by the arm to
redirect him to the door.

CURTIS (cont'd)
This way, Mitch.

MARILYN steps in to push them out.

MARILYN
Why is this taking so long?!

CURTIS
GET YOUR HANDS OFF MY SON!

She does. Everything stops. MITCHELL
shakes his head, as if something hurts
inside. He bolts under the table,
hiding. He rocks back and forth.
Dropping his night bag, CURTIS goes
over and gets down on the floor with
MITCHELL. MARILYN goes back to her
bedroom. THELMA watches helplessly.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Hey, pal, I'm sorry I yelled. I shouldn't have done that.
I'm so sorry. (beat) I made a mistake, OK? (beat) Mitch?

MITCHELL
You...you yelled.

CURTIS
I know. I'm sorry.

MITCHELL
You yelled.

CURTIS
I'm sorry I upset you.

MITCHELL
Am I upset because I'm different, Dad? Am I upset because
I'm different?

CURTIS

No, Mitch, it's an upsetting moment. What you feel is completely normal.

MITCHELL

That lady at the park with the coffee said I get upset because I'm different.

CURTIS

Son, you have to do your best to forget about what that lady said. That was last summer.

MITCHELL

Am I...am I different, Dad?

CURTIS

Everyone's different, son. Everyone. We all have things that make us who we are. And you, you just feel things really deeply. I'll bet there are a lot of people that wish they could feel what you feel, because some people don't feel anything at all. Not heartache, not love, not laughter. And what would life be like if we couldn't feel those things?

MITCHELL

I...I don't know.

CURTIS

It would be very lonely. Give me your hand.

He does. CURTIS squeezes.

CURTIS (cont'd)

You feel that?

MITCHELL nods.

CURTIS

I feel it, too. You know what it is?

MITCHELL shakes his head "no."

CURTIS (cont'd)

It's you and me, together, forever.

MITCHELL

Where I go, you go. Where you go, I go.

CURTIS

That's right. Where I go, you go. Where you go, I go.

MITCHELL

I want to go home.

CURTIS
Yeah, me, too. Let's go home.

MITCHELL comes out from under the table.

MITCHELL
Can we watch videos of people falling on YouTube?

CURTIS
Absolutely.

They walk hand-in-hand to the door.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Hey, remember that time we were at the grocery store, and you knocked over those blueberries and I slipped?

CURTIS starts laughing. MITCHELL starts to laugh a little, too.

CURTIS (cont'd)
I ended up on my back all covered in blueberries.

They are laughing a lot now. CURTIS grabs the night bag.

MITCHELL
You were...you were all covered in blueberries, Dad!

CURTIS
I could have been on YouTube!

They exit. Seeing, on the floor, the *New Yorker* magazine that CURTIS has accidentally left, THELMA gets it. She turns to the door, and sees CURTIS and MITCHELL gone. She grabs her walker and goes out the front door, leaving it open. After about ten seconds, MARILYN'S cell, which is still on the kitchen counter, rings. MARILYN comes down, grabs it, answers.

MARILYN
Oh, my God, Jayne, this is the worst time possible. (beat) No, it's not always the worst time possible. A lot of times, though, it is. You have a genius for it. (beat) You want to talk to Mom? Awesome.

MARILYN looks up, but doesn't see her mother.

Scene Eight

February, the following year. The house is dark. The playing area is now down stage with three separate spots where KRISTIE is in a car, MARILYN and THELMA are together in a different car, and CURTIS and MITCHELL are together in another car. At the moment, only the lights are on KRISTIE, who is bundled in winter clothes. She is on her cell. She looks terrible. Fast food garbage, and her purse, is on the seat next to her.

KRISTIE

I know you said noon. I'm sorry. (beat) Mom, you and Dad said you wanted to have lunch at McGillie's. I never actually said I want to. (beat) I do like McGillie's. (beat) Yes, I've liked it since I was a kid, but, come on, enough with the lunches at McGillie's- (beat) No, I'm not going by the old house later. (beat) I don't want to go by the old house again. I don't want to hear anymore stories from those people about the changes they've made. (beat) I'm not upset about anything. (beat) Look, I just don't want to go to McGillie's anymore, all right, or see the old house or go to Riverwalk or- (beat) I'll be home tonight, yes. (beat) Yes, Mom, for the fiftieth time, I have a key.

Lights down. Lights up on CURTIS and MITCHELL in winter jackets. MITCHELL is in the driver seat. CURTIS is in the passenger seat next to him.

CURTIS

First thing you do is put the key in the ignition right here.

MITCHELL

I need the key.

CURTIS

I told you, we're not using the real key. We're not really going to drive. You're nine. We're staying right here in the driveway. We'll just pretend.

MITCHELL

Dad, I can't drive without a key. I can't.

CURTIS pulls ChapStick out of his pocket.

CURTIS

Here's your key.

MITCHELL

Dad, you know you can't start a car with ChapStick.

CURTIS

Yes, I know that. We're pretending.

MITCHELL

Dad, you can't start a car with ChapStick. You can't.

CURTIS puts away the ChapStick and digs out an imaginary key.

CURTIS

Here's your key.

MITCHELL

Dad. You're not...you're not holding anything, Dad.

CURTIS

We are pretending I am holding a key.

MITCHELL

I don't like that key. I want a different key.

CURTIS

What's wrong with this key?

MITCHELL

It's green. I want a...I want...Dad, I want an orange one.

This amuses CURTIS, who stuffs the imaginary key into his pocket and fishes out another imaginary one from another pocket.

CURTIS

Here you go. One orange key.

MITCHELL takes it and shoves it into the ignition, and "starts" the car. They both make car noises. Lights down. Lights up on THELMA and MARILYN in heavy coats. MARILYN drives. She is revving up the engine.

THELMA

Why are you gunning it? The car is plenty warmed up.

MARILYN

The alternator is sticking.

THELMA

What?

MARILYN

We need a new alternator!

THELMA

It's not the alternator! We go through this every winter!
It's cold out! Car engines get cold!

MARILYN

It's not that cold!

THELMA

It's five below, are you kidding? With the wind blowing off
the lake it feels twenty below.

MARILYN

What?

THELMA

Lay off the gas pedal!

MARILYN

FINE!!

MARILYN lets off the gas pedal. The
car idles.

THELMA

Goodness. Thank you. Lord.

MARILYN puts it in drive and they go.

MARILYN

Sorry for yelling. I know I've been irritable lately. I'm
sorry. (beat) Can we stop by Harris Teeter on the way home?

THELMA

What's Harris Teeter?

MARILYN

It's a grocery store. There's one just off 40. We need to
get a few more things for the Super Bowl party tomorrow.

THELMA

What Super Bowl party?

MARILYN

I'll just take you home, OK? I'll go out later. Maybe you
can take a nap.

THELMA

I hate naps.

MARILYN

You don't hate naps.

THELMA

Stop telling me what I do and don't hate. I hate naps.

Lights out. Lights up on KRISTIE.
Still on the phone.

KRISTIE

Well, if Dad wouldn't take five naps a day, he wouldn't be up at three in the morning worrying about me. (beat) He's seventy-three, Mom, not a hundred and three. (beat) No, I'm not coming with you two to the Art Institute tomorrow. (beat) Because I don't want to. (beat) No. No. You haven't said or done anything to- (beat) Nothing is going on. (beat) *Nothing!* (beat) Have I showered today? What do you care whether I've- (beat) Yes, I slept last night. Please just leave me alone. Please? Please?! (beat) PLEASE?!

Lights down. Lights up on CURTIS and MITCHELL. CURTIS is showing MITCHELL parts of the car.

CURTIS

Steering wheel. Which turns the car. Blinker. Which tells other drivers that you're turning left or right.

MITCHELL flips it up and down. CURTIS stops him, gently.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Easy. Lights.

MITCHELL turns the lights on and off. CURTIS stops him.

MITCHELL

Is this the horn?

MITCHELL pushes on the horn, in the steering wheel. It blares. He pushes it over and over. CURTIS stops him.

CURTIS

Yes, that is the horn.

CURTIS points to the gear shift.

CURTIS (cont'd)

This knob here shifts the car. P is for park. N is neutral, which is essentially no position. D is for drive, which is what you want when you want to go forward. And R is for reverse when you want to go backward.

MITCHELL

Where...where is...where is the S for sideways?

CURTIS

The car can't go sideways.

MITCHELL

Cars go sideways all the time on fail videos on YouTube, Dad.

CURTIS

Yes, but by mistake. There's no gear for sideways. Someone has to make a bad decision for the car to go sideways.

MITCHELL

Russian drivers are the worst, Dad. They're the worst.

CURTIS

I know. Now down there on the right is the gas pedal, which makes the car move. On the left is the brake pedal, which slows the car down.

MITCHELL hits the horn happily,
bouncing in his seat, growing excited.
Lights down. Lights up on MARILYN and
THELMA. MARILYN is honking her horn.

MARILYN

(to a car in front of her)

This is the fast lane, sweetheart! Life is passing you by!

MARILYN turns to her mother.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Other than you wandering off twice, I thought we had a nice time at the museum. Did you have a nice time, Mom?

THELMA

It's changed.

MARILYN

Well, sure, they have new art all the time.

THELMA

Where are you taking me?

MARILYN

Home.

THELMA

This doesn't look like the way home.

MARILYN

It is.

THELMA

Then why are we on the freeway? We always take Michigan Avenue to get home.

MARILYN

Michigan Avenue? Mom...

THELMA

To Randolph.

MARILYN

Mom-

THELMA

We don't need to get on the freeway to get home from the Art Institute. That I know! I know how to get home! You talk to me like I don't know things! I know things!

Lights down. Lights up on KRISTIE.
Still on the phone.

KRISTIE

I know you're still my mother, but I'm not five-years old!
(looking through windshield,
then over her shoulder)

Great! Now I've missed the turn! Now I have to circle around! Driving in circles I am today! (beat) Yes, I've been drinking. And I'm going to drink some more, very soon. (beat) I like to drink, Mom! It makes me goddamn happy! It might be the only thing in the whole world that makes me happy! That and my Lorazepam, which I plan to get right now, if I don't miss the entrance to the pharmacy again!

(getting emotional)

No, there's nothing wrong. (beat) No. No. No. No, there's nothing wrong! There is NOTHING WRONG! Stop asking me that! I am absolutely fine! It's just that this place doesn't feel like home anymore!!

Lights out. Lights up on CURTIS and MITCHELL. MITCHELL is bouncing and clapping.

CURTIS

OK, are you ready?

MITCHELL

I'm ready! I'm ready! I'm ready! I'm ready!

CURTIS

I think you're ready. You can drive anywhere in the world. Where do you want to go?

MITCHELL slowly loses his enthusiasm.
The bouncing and the clapping
disappear.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Anywhere. The community center, Carrboro Pizza Oven, the
North Pole, where?

MITCHELL
I-I...I don't know, Dad.

MITCHELL starts to rock, distressed.

CURTIS
You can't think of one place you want to go?

MITCHELL
I don't know!

CURTIS
What's wrong? Why are you getting upset?

MITCHELL covers his ears, rocks, hums.

CURTIS (cont'd)
OK. OK. You don't have to tell me. We don't have to do
this. You want to go back in the house?

MITCHELL
(quickly, suddenly)
Chicago!

He uncovers his ears.

MITCHELL (cont'd)
I want...I want to...I want to go to Chicago.

CURTIS can't respond.

MITCHELL (cont'd)
Mom didn't come home for Christmas. Mom said she was coming
home for Christmas. I made her a present.

CURTIS
I know you did, pal.

MITCHELL
I made her a present. I wrapped it in bright red paper.

CURTIS
I know-

MITCHELL
I want to go to Chicago to give Mom her present.

CURTIS

I already mailed it.

MITCHELL collects his thoughts.

MITCHELL

Why did you mail it, Dad? Why did you mail it? (beat) Is Mom ever going to come home, Dad?

CURTIS

(emotional)

She's going to come home. She's going to come home. She's going to come home.

Lights down. Lights up on MARILYN and THELMA.

MARILYN

Mom! We're not in Chicago!

THELMA

What are you talking about?!

MARILYN

We're in Durham, North Carolina and we're headed home!

THELMA

North Carolina?! You're just trying to confuse me!

MARILYN

Mom, calm down!

THELMA

You calm down! Don't tell me to calm down when you're clearly trying to drive me to God knows where!

MARILYN

I'm taking you home!

THELMA

This is not the way home!

THELMA fumbles for the door handle.

MARILYN

What are you doing?!

THELMA

I'm getting out of the car!

MARILYN

Mom, we're on the freeway!

MARILYN grabs her mother.

Let go of my arm! THELMA

Mom! MARILYN

I want out of the car! THELMA

THELMA gets the "door" open and is part of the way out.

Stop! Please! MARILYN

I'm not a child! I can do what I want! THELMA

Have you lost your mind?! STOP!! MARILYN

Lights out. There is the sound of screeching tires, and the crunching of metal. Lights up on KRISTIE in the aftermath of a crash. She is stunned, and hurt. After a moment, she bends down and grabs her spilled purse, and some of the spilled items, stuffing them inside. She stops at one item. A present in bright red wrapping. It's MITCHELL'S gift. She opens it. It's is one of MITCHELL'S origami snowflakes. Holding it up, she stares at it, overcome. She cries. We can hear muffled shouting coming from her phone, which is also on the floor. She picks it up.

Hey. (beat) I'm OK. KRISTIE I'm OK.

It's starts to snow. She looks up.

It's snowing. KRISTIE (cont'd)

Lights out.

(The snow should stop falling, but remain visible downstage.)

Scene Nine

November. Later that year. Late morning. The house is cleared of notes and water bowls. The Woodstock School photo is down. There is a suitcase, THELMA'S boom box, two boxes (one is open), and the palm plant (the other two house plants are gone) nearby. THELMA'S barcalounger is gone. On an iPhone on the table a Celtic lullaby plays. Also on the table are two saucers, with crumbs, and two forks. THELMA sits in a wheelchair at the table with MARILYN. THELMA looks very proper in a nice dress. She is far more inward, less demonstrative. She and MARILYN are doing a puzzle.

MARILYN

(gesturing to the piece in
Thelma's hand)

Ooh, that looks like the edge of the veranda.

MARILYN'S voice is raised and clear so her mother can hear and understand her. THELMA puts her piece into the puzzle, and, feeling triumphant, exclaims:

THELMA

You betcha.

They work.

MARILYN

(gesturing to the piece in
Thelma's hand)

What's that one? Maybe the French doors? See the tiny bit of glass?

THELMA tries to put in the piece.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Nope. Try there.

MARILYN points. THELMA tries.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Nope. Try there.

THELMA

You're leading me astray.

MARILYN

I'm *helping*. I know you're not completely non compos mentis.

THELMA

You talk in riddles. Wait!

THELMA zeroes in with her piece. Gets it.

THELMA (cont'd)

You betcha.

MARILYN

Where'd you get that expression?

THELMA grabs another piece. MARILYN puts her hand on her mother's hand, to get her attention.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Mom? Where did you get that expression?

THELMA

What expression?

THELMA puts in another piece.

THELMA (cont'd)

You betcha.

MARILYN

That expression.

THELMA

I don't know.

MARILYN

Never heard you say it before.

THELMA

So?

MARILYN

You going to say it every time you put in a piece?

THELMA

Why not? I'm feeling triumphant.

MARILYN

Great, but this puzzle is *three hundred pieces*. That's a lot of you betchas.

THELMA

Can we connect the colored bulbs above the doors?

MARILYN

Not yet. The doors aren't done. Why don't we finish the sky and work our way down the roof first?

THELMA

You do the sky. It all looks the same to me. I'm going back to the flower pots along the picket fence.

MARILYN

It's a beautiful puzzle, isn't it?

THELMA

Yup.

There is a knock at the door. Shutting off the iPhone, MARILYN opens the door.

MARILYN

Hi, Curtis, come on in.

CURTIS, magazine in hand, enters stomping his feet. He doesn't have his cane.

CURTIS

How about that snow? In November? Crazy.

MARILYN

I know. Thanks for coming over.

CURTIS

Thanks for calling. Good to see you.

MARILYN

You, too. Mom? Curtis is here.

THELMA keeps working.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Mom?

CURTIS

Thelma, you look beautiful.

CURTIS approaches THELMA. She looks at him. It's a blank look of nothing.

THELMA

Hello.

CURTIS is shocked at the look on her face. It takes him a moment to respond to her.

CURTIS
 Uh...hi. Hi, Thelma. How are you? Fine as frog's hair?

THELMA
What? Who are you?

MARILYN
 This is Curtis, Mom. He lives across the street.

THELMA
 Well, we all have to live somewhere.

CURTIS
 (adopting Marilyn's raised,
 direct, and clear speech
 pattern)
 What're you working on, Thelma? Looks like a puzzle.

THELMA
 You're clever.

CURTIS peers in.

CURTIS
 That your home in Key West?

THELMA
 Oh, goodness, I never lived in Key West. I grew up in India.

MARILYN
 Right, Mom. But you eventually lived in Key West. I was living in Miami at the time, and you moved to Key West from Chicago after Dad died.

THELMA
 I wish you would stop contradicting me, Jayne.

MARILYN and CURTIS look at each other.

MARILYN
 I had the puzzle specially made. Her birthday was a couple days ago.

CURTIS
 I know. Eighty-eight-years old. Happy birthday, Thelma.

THELMA
 Happy birthday to you, too.

Looking at the puzzle, CURTIS leans in and puts in a piece.

CURTIS
 You betcha.

MARILYN grins.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Thelma, I know you like to read, so I brought over a magazine. There's a story in it that I wrote.

MARILYN

Really?

CURTIS

Broke a dry spell. Story is called "Man and Woman and Boy."

He puts the magazine down on the table. He notices in the open box on the floor, on top of the Woodstock photo, another, smaller framed photo, which he grabs.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Who is this?

MARILYN

It's Mrs. And my mother.

CURTIS

Wow. Look how cute you are, Thelma. (beat) Mrs. seems very...*stout*.

THELMA

She can break you in half, young man.

CURTIS laughs.

CURTIS

You ever meet her, Marilyn?

MARILYN

Margot Angus? She lived with us until I was about six.

CURTIS

Really? What was she like?

MARILYN

Dedicated. To my mother. To the end.

CURTIS

My brother just cleaned out our parents' house and mailed me an old photo of the two of us. I think we're maybe ten and twelve in the picture. We're in matching E.T. t-shirts and our arms are draped across each other and we are grinning like happy idiots. I wish I could remember that moment.

THELMA

You're very talkative.

MARILYN
You sold your parents' house?

CURTIS
Yeah. My brother took care of everything.

CURTIS puts back the photo.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Hey, Thelma, I got you a birthday present.

He pulls from his back pocket a small, wrapped gift and puts it down in front of THELMA.

MARILYN
Curtis you didn't have to do this. Open it, Mom.

She does. It's a frame with...

THELMA
Four-leaf clovers?

CURTIS
Yup. One representing you, one Marilyn. My son and I made this. We pressed the leaves into wax.

MARILYN
They're beautiful. Don't they look beautiful, Mom?

THELMA
They look fake.

CURTIS
They're from your yard. My son's been in love with four-leaf clovers since he found one out there over a year ago.

MARILYN
I talked to Mitch not too long ago. He spoke back to me. It was nice.

CURTIS
Yup, he's really been coming along.

MARILYN
Kristie was with him.

CURTIS
Yup. She's back from Naperville. Been back.

MARILYN
They were on your porch. Having a grilled cheese. She was clapping with him.

CURTIS

My son has taught me to never, ever give up on people.
(beat) Forgiveness helps, right, Thelma?

THELMA ignores him.

MARILYN

I find forgiveness to be very, very hard. How did you do it?

CURTIS

It was weird. Kristie just showed up at the house. I had all this resentment built up, and heartache, and anger, and I had it in my head all the terrible things I was going to say to her, if I saw her again, but it all just went away when she was actually standing in front of me. It was raining, and she was soaking wet and sallow and crying, but all I could see was that beautiful twenty-four-year-old grad student with the long hair who used to make me these amazing vanilla frappuccinos whenever I came into the cafe where she worked. What could I do? I invited her into the house and she made me a vanilla frappuccino!

MARILYN and CURTIS chuckle.

CURTIS (cont'd)

She apologized with all her heart. And I did, too. For not making a place for her. Mitch came out of his bedroom and saw her. He said "Mom. Mom. Mom. You're home."

MARILYN smiles.

CURTIS (cont'd)

We're going to open a bookstore.

MARILYN

Really?

CURTIS

Yup. Right on Franklin Street. We're thinking of calling it Mitch's Books because he just learned how to read.

THELMA

Who are you again?

MARILYN

It's Curtis, Mom. From across the street.

(to Curtis)

You look good by the way. Moving well.

CURTIS

Back's better, yes. Long road after surgery. I was sorry to hear about Twat.

MARILYN

Well, you can't fix old.

CURTIS

And I heard you quit the Arts Council.

MARILYN

Just trying to sell my art online. Just to be home. So I could be here, for Mom, all the time.

CURTIS

Of course.

MARILYN

But I can't be the person Mom needs. (beat) Hey, Curtis, I wanted to tell you something. I'm really sorry about what I did. About the way I behaved that night. When I found your son in my bed.

CURTIS

Your heart was breaking.

MARILYN

That doesn't make what I did right. You want to sit down with us and have a piece of pie?

CURTIS

No. Thank you.

MARILYN

It's cardamom. It's Indian.

CURTIS

Would love to, but Kristie has me on this new macrobiotic diet. Supposed to help my stomach. And if I come back with pie on my breath, she's going to feel betrayed.

CURTIS'S attention is pulled to the window.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Hey, there she is. With Mitch.

He waves to her, points towards the front door. He crosses. Opens it.

CURTIS (cont'd)

Come in, come in.

MITCHELL enters. KRISTIE lingers apprehensively. Her hair is short, in a pixie cut, and she looks quite cute.

CURTIS (cont'd)
Come on in, sweetie. It's OK.

She enters. CURTIS kisses her.

KRISTIE
Sorry to bother everyone.

CURTIS
You're not bothering anyone. We're all friends here.

He puts his arm around her waist and walks her to them. MITCHELL hides behind them.

MARILYN
Hey, Mitch. Enjoying the snow?

He stays hidden.

MARILYN (cont'd)
Hi, Kristie.
(Kristie's short hair)
I love the new look.

KRISTIE
Oh, thanks. Got tired of the same ol' me.

CURTIS
I think you look absolutely adorable.

THELMA
It's gotten very busy in here all of a sudden. Are we having a party? No strippers, please.

CURTIS
Thelma, this is Kristie, my wife.

KRISTIE
Hi, Thelma.

THELMA
Are you a stripper?

MARILYN
Oh, Mom. I like your necklace, Kristie. *Big.*

KRISTIE is wearing around her neck the huge origami snowflake, the one from her purse in Chicago.

KRISTIE
Mitch made this snowflake for me. For Christmas last year.

MITCHELL

It's a magical snowflake, Mom.

KRISTIE

It sure is.

CURTIS

We'd better head out. Got plans this afternoon.

MITCHELL

Swimming!

KRISTIE

(nervous)

Yes, Mitty, you and I are going swimming.

MITCHELL

Swimming!

KRISTIE

Oh, boy. The Homestead pool better be extra toasty.

CURTIS

It's like a sauna. You'll love it. Hey. You're going to do great. Just join his world. He'll be thrilled.

MARILYN

You're not going, Curtis?

CURTIS

I am going to a cafe to write.

MARILYN

Good for you.

They all turn to MITCHELL, who has wandered into the living room, and is dancing. It's reminiscent of THELMA'S Isadora Duncan routine earlier.

THELMA

What's he doing?

CURTIS

He's imitating you.

THELMA

Me?

CURTIS

Yeah, the first time I came over here, you did this amazing Isadora Duncan routine.

THELMA

I don't remember that.

CURTIS

I told Mitch all about it, and then showed him a video of her on the internet, and he can't stop doing it.

They all watch MITCHELL for a bit. CURTIS claps, then MARILYN and KRISTIE follow suit. Then MITCHELL stops dancing and starts clapping and bouncing.

KRISTIE

OK, Mitty, OK.

MITCHELL rushes and hugs her. She hesitates and then hugs him back.

THELMA

Wow, that was something, young man. What's your name?

MITCHELL doesn't say anything.

KRISTIE

You can answer her.

MITCHELL comes out from behind KRISTIE. He and THELMA look at each other.

MITCHELL

My name is Mitchell. Your name is Thelma.

THELMA

Yes it is. My name is Thelma. How old are you, Mitchell?

MITCHELL

Ten.

THELMA

Ten-years-old. I don't know how old I am, but I do know you're a lot younger than me.

MITCHELL

Probably.

THELMA

I predict you are going to have a happy life.

MITCHELL

(not understanding)

OK.

THELMA
But only if you smile. A lot. Let me see your smile.

MITCHELL smiles.

THELMA (cont'd)
Ah. That's beautiful.

The moment sits. Then...

CURTIS
Hey, Thelma. We're going now. It was good to see you. Take care of yourself.

THELMA
What?

CURTIS
I wanted to say goodbye.

THELMA
Bye. Don't be a stranger.

He kisses her on the cheek.

THELMA (cont'd)
Careful. I'm a married woman.

CURTIS
Bye, Marilyn.

MARILYN
Bye, Curtis. Bye, Kristie. Bye, Mitch. See you all around the neighborhood.

KRISTIE smiles and she and CURTIS exit with MITCHELL, hand-in-hand. As they do:

MITCHELL
Swimming! Swimming! Swimming!

After a moment, MARILYN waves to the window, to CURTIS, KRISTIE and MITCHELL, unseen. She watches them. Turns to her mother.

MARILYN (cont'd)
Are you OK, Mom? Is there anything you need? Bananas and milk? Granola? Stone's? You want another piece of pie? It's your birthday pie.

THELMA
It's my birthday?

MARILYN

Do you want another piece?

THELMA

Can't we save some for Mrs.? She made it.

MARILYN

Right. (beat) You like your new dress? I think you look pretty.

THELMA

So what time is church?

MARILYN

There is no church. You haven't been to church in a long time, Mom.

MARILYN sits. THELMA keeps working.

MARILYN (cont'd)

Will you hold my hand, Mom?

THELMA

If it's important to you.

MARILYN grabs her mother's hand, holds tight, treasures it. Then looks out through the windows.

MARILYN

The snow is beautiful, isn't it? Makes everything look new.

THELMA

What's the suitcase for?

MARILYN

I'm taking you home, Mom.

THELMA

To India?

MARILYN

No. To your new home here. In North Carolina.

THELMA

What?

MARILYN

It's a nice home, Mom. You'll like it. It has your barcalounger already there. All your clothes, too.

THELMA

Well, if I'm going home, where are you going?

MARILYN

Let's just keep working on the puzzle. For as long as we can. OK?

They work. Through an open window, a distant roar of a crowd is heard.

MARILYN (cont'd)

(looking up)

Hey, you can hear the football game from campus.

THELMA pays no mind.

MARILYN (cont'd)

We must have scored.

The roar dies. MARILYN hits the iPhone and up comes "Dream Angus." After a moment, THELMA hums along. Then she sings the song, softly. THELMA keeps working as she sings, but MARILYN stops and watches her mother with love and affection.

THELMA

(singing)

*Can ye no hush your weepin'
All the wee lambs are sleepin'
Birdies are nestlin', nestlin' together
Dream Angus is hirplin' o'er the heather*

*Dreams to sell, fine dreams to sell
Angus is here wi' dreams to sell
Hush ye my baby and sleep without fear
Dream Angus has brought you a dream my dear.*

The lights slowly fade out as the song continues.

THE END