

WEATHERING
by
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Sarah Bellamy, President

PERSONAL USE ONLY

"...but here we are, mourning."
-Darnell Lamont Walker

"Is solace anywhere more comforting than in the arms of a sister?"
-Alice Walker

PERS,

CHARACTERS

(6W, 1M, 1CHILD)

WOMAN (LENA)

MAN (NATHAN)

MOTHER (EASTER)

NEIGHBOR (TURTLE)

CHURCH LADY (MARGARET WILSON)

FRIEND (JO)

SISTER (NIKKO)

LITTLE GIRL (LUZ)

SETTING

A kitchen in Minnesota.

TIME

Now.

But also, all the days.

PERSONAL USE ONLY

ACT 1

(Late morning.
 A kitchen with an island.
 White and stainless steel.
 Spotless.
 There is a view of the backyard through the sliding glass doors.
 A WOMAN sits on a pillow on the floor surrounded by baby things—
 baby clothes, baby toys, baby supplies—which she packs into a
 cardboard box.
 A lavender onesie and matching cap.
 A rainbow-colored rattle.
 She picks up a stuffed elephant.
 It is brand new.
 She holds it.)

WOMAN

"And what sound does an elephant make?"

(WOMAN makes an elephant trumpeting sound.
 She smiles to herself.
 She wiggles the elephant's ears.
 She brings the animal to her nose and inhales.
 It is a simple gesture
 That somehow
 Unexpectedly
 Loosens something inside of her.
 She breaks,
 Quietly,
 The stuffed elephant covering her face, absorbing her tears.
 MAN appears in the doorway.
 He sees WOMAN and stops.
 He watches her
 Unsure whether he should intervene
 Unsure if he should make his presence known.
 A moment passes and then—)

MAN

Lena?

(WOMAN turns quickly, lowering the stuffed animal from her face.)
 I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..
 I just wanted to let you to know that I'm heading out.

WOMAN

Okay.
 Have a good day.

(MAN turns to go, then turns back.)

MAN

Lena, are you alright?

Am I...?
WOMAN

It's just... you seem-
MAN

Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I'm... I'm fine.
WOMAN
(MAN has a look on his face.)
Really, I am, I just...
(Is she about to tell him the truth and then instead-)
It's just that this damn elephant's so fucking cute.
(He smiles slightly, but he still has the look.)
Honestly, Nathan... go. You don't want to be late.

I could stay if you want. No one at the office would care-
MAN

No, I'm good.
WOMAN
(MAN hesitates.)
I mean it. I'm fine. Go to work.
Make the big bucks.

(WOMAN smiles at MAN.)

You're sure?
MAN

About the big bucks?
WOMAN
Oh yeah.

You know what I mean-
MAN

I do
WOMAN
And I'm sure.
Really.
Go.
Don't worry about me.

Well, okay...
MAN
Call me if you need anything, yeah?

I will.
WOMAN

I love you.
MAN

WOMAN

I love you, too.

(MAN moves to WOMAN and kisses her cheek.)

MAN

Bye.

WOMAN

Bye.

(He exits.

We hear the sound of a door being unlocked and opened, then closed again.

WOMAN looks at the stuffed elephant in her hands.)

"And what sound does an elephant make?"

(She trumpets.

A tremor.

Slight, but felt.

The lights flicker.)

What the hell—?

MOTHER (O.S.)

Hello?

(The lights return to normal.)

Lena?

WOMAN

Aw shit.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Lena, honey, it's mom!

WOMAN

No, no, no, no, no.

(WOMAN slides the box out of the way.)

MOTHER (O.S.)

Girl, where are you?

(WOMAN takes a breath then—)

WOMAN

I'm in the kitchen!

(MOTHER appears. She carries shopping bags.)

MOTHER

Oh, here you are!

(WOMAN fixes her face.)

WOMAN

Hi, mom. What's up?

MOTHER

I've been shopping!

WOMAN

I can see that.

MOTHER

You know that little store downtown? The one that always does the window displays for the different holidays? You know, the really stylish one you love?

(Nothing from WOMAN. Or, at least, not enough.)

Okay, well anyway, they're having an end of season sale and I found you a few things.

WOMAN

You didn't have to do that.

MOTHER

Honey, please, it was a sale. A *sale*—

WOMAN

No, I get that it was a sale, mom, I just... I don't need anything.

MOTHER

Ain't no fun shopping for things you need. I wanted to spoil my little girl.

(MOTHER smiles at WOMAN then turns her attention to the bags.)

Now just look at what I found.

WOMAN

Mom—

MOTHER

I just know you're gonna love them.

WOMAN

Mom!

(MOTHER looks up.)

MOTHER

What?

(beat)

Lena, honey, what is it?

(WOMAN takes a breath.)

WOMAN

Nothing.

It's nothing.

Sorry.

(slight beat)

So what did you bring me?

MOTHER

(excited)

Sheets!

WOMAN

Sheets?

(MOTHER opens a package of sheets.)

MOTHER

They're Egyptian cotton and they're delicious.

WOMAN

Mom, I don't need sheets.

MOTHER

Nonsense.

WOMAN

I *have* sheets.

I have a linen closet full of sheets.

MOTHER

Not with a five hundred thread count you don't.

(WOMAN gives MOTHER a look.)

Don't give me that look.

WOMAN

I didn't give you a look.

MOTHER

Yes, you did. That look you do. The one where you stare at me like I'm crazy when I'm not crazy.

WOMAN

Mom—

MOTHER

Just feel them.

(She offers the sheets to her daughter.)

I said *feel*.

(A moment and then WOMAN does.)

See there?

Like a kitten.

Like butter.

What do you think?

(WOMAN concedes.)

They're nice. WOMAN

Nice? MOTHER

Yeah, nice. WOMAN

MOTHER
Five hundred thread count and all you have to say is that they're nice?

Um... yeah? WOMAN

MOTHER
Lena, these sheets are retailed at three hundred dollars.
(This doesn't get the reaction she was hoping for.)
Three hundred dollars!

WOMAN
Okay, fine mom, you win.
They're more than nice.
They're amazing, okay?
They're amazing sheets.
Happy now?

MOTHER
I'll be happy once they're on your bed.

WOMAN
Momma—

MOTHER
You asked. Now let's go.

(MOTHER gathers up the sheets.)

WOMAN
I just changed the sheets yesterday.

MOTHER
So we'll change them again.

WOMAN
That doesn't make any sense.

MOTHER
It makes perfect sense.

WOMAN
Momma, stop.

MOTHER

Listen, Lena, these are better than anything you have in your linen closet. And the sooner you put them on the sooner you can get a good night's sleep.

WOMAN

I'm sleeping fine.

MOTHER

Fine is not good and good is not great.

WOMAN

Mom, I'm sleeping.

MOTHER

Yeah, well, that's not what Nathan says.

(WOMAN takes in this information and then—)

WOMAN

You spoke to Nathan?

MOTHER

I um...

WOMAN

When?

(slight beat)

Mom?

MOTHER

Oh, I don't know. You know me and time.

WOMAN

Why?

MOTHER

Why what?

(WOMAN gives MOTHER a look.)

Baby, why does anyone call anyone? To say hi. To check in.

(WOMAN gives MOTHER a look.)

What? I can't call my son?

WOMAN

In law. Son-in-law—

MOTHER

Fine, son-in-law. But you weren't picking up your phone and I was worried.

WOMAN

You don't have to do that. To *be* that. You don't have to worry about me.

MOTHER

Lena, I'm your mother. I can't help it.

(She takes a breath.)

Look, I kept calling and calling and I kept getting your voicemail and leaving you messages and you never called me back so I called Nathan.

WOMAN

What did he say?

MOTHER

Lena...

WOMAN

Mom, what did my husband tell you?

(MOTHER takes a breath.)

MOTHER

He said that you weren't picking up because you were busy.

WOMAN

I was.

MOTHER

Yeah, well, that's what he said.

WOMAN

Because it was the truth.

MOTHER

I never said it wasn't.

(slight beat)

You know, you don't have to be so defensive.

WOMAN

I'm not defensive.

MOTHER

Uh-huh.

WOMAN

What? I'm not.

MOTHER

You know you look just like your three-year-old self when you do that.

WOMAN

When I do what?

MOTHER

Make that face.

WOMAN

I'm not making a face.

(MOTHER makes the face.)

I do not look like that.

MOTHER

Yeah, well, you're not looking at what I'm looking at.

(slight beat)

That's the one thing that you ain't never grown out of. Your attitude.

WOMAN

(knee jerk)

I don't have an—!

(MOTHER raises her eyebrows like "told you so." WOMAN fixes her face.)

Fine.

(slight beat)

I should have called you back. I'm sorry.

MOTHER

It's all right. You're carrying a lot right now. You both are.

(WOMAN gives MOTHER a look.)

You are. You just had a terrible thing happen to you and I'm just trying to be here for you. Why won't you let me be here for you?

WOMAN

What else did Nathan say?

(A moment and then WOMAN grabs the shopping bags and moves toward the exit.)

MOTHER

Lena? Lena, honey, where are you going?

WOMAN

Outside.

MOTHER

Outside? Why?

WOMAN

Cause the garbage man hasn't come by yet—

MOTHER

Lena, don't!

WOMAN

And I don't need new sheets—

MOTHER

Lena, stop. Lena! Okay, okay, fine!

(WOMAN stops.)

Lord, you trying to give me a heart attack?

WOMAN

What did he say?

(MOTHER takes a breath.)

MOTHER

He said you haven't been sleeping. He said that you're up more than half the night pacing around the house. Or sitting in here staring out the back door. Or standing in the yard looking up at the sky. That's why I bought you the sheets.

(beat)

I know you're not a child anymore, but you'll always be my child. Care doesn't shut off like a faucet. Once it's on, it's on. Forever and always whether you want it to be or not.

(beat)

I thought I was doing a nice thing.

WOMAN

You were. You did.

MOTHER

Yeah, well, it doesn't feel like it.

(slight beat)

Listen, if you want me to take them back, I'll take them back—

WOMAN

Mom—

MOTHER

Because the last thing I want to do is force you to accept something that you don't want.

WOMAN

Mom, stop, it's fine. I'll keep the sheets.

MOTHER

You will?

WOMAN

I will.

MOTHER
You're sure?

WOMAN
Don't push it.
(A shared smile.)
It's a nice color.

MOTHER
They match the walls in your bedroom.

WOMAN
Do they?
(She looks more closely.)
Oh, they do. I didn't notice before.
Thank you.

MOTHER
You're welcome.
(A moment and then—)
I didn't see Nathan's car outside.

WOMAN
He's at work.

MOTHER
Just like your father. Workaholics, both of them. I suppose that's
part of their charm.
(slight beat)
He loves you, you know.

WOMAN
Yeah, I know.

MOTHER
He loves you a lot and that ain't no small thing.
(beat)
How about some tea? Some chamomile maybe? It'll soothe you.

(MOTHER searches the cabinets.)

WOMAN
Mom. I don't want tea.

MOTHER
Where do you keep the bags?

WOMAN

Mom, I said no.

MOTHER

Lena—

WOMAN

I'm fine, okay? I just don't want...
I'm fine.

MOTHER

You know, you say that a lot. Fine.

(A moment and then —

MOTHER gathers up the set of sheets she opened.)

I'm just going to take these upstairs.

WOMAN

Mom...

(Suddenly, something hits the back door with a SMACK!)

Shit!

(WOMAN moves to the sliding door to investigate the source of the noise.

She opens the door and looks out.

She steps out into the yard and disappears.

A moment and then she returns holding a soccer ball.

She drops it.

Dribbles it a bit.

She juggles the ball from knee to knee.

She chuckles to herself.

NEIGHBOR appears at the door.)

NEIGHBOR

Lena? Lena, hi.

WOMAN

Hey. This must be yours.

(She offers NEIGHBOR the ball.)

NEIGHBOR

Yeah, sorry about that. Billy's warming up. He's got a game in an hour. One more win and his team is in the championships. Woo-hoo!

WOMAN

Well, with a leg like that I'm sure he'll do great.

NEIGHBOR

I don't know a thing about soccer, but apparently, he's very good.

WOMAN

I'm not surprised.

NEIGHBOR

I can barely stand to watch. All that male aggression. Matt says, "at least he's not playing football." *American* football. And I suppose he's right. At least there's no full body tackling in soccer.

(slight beat)

He didn't break anything did he? With the ball?

WOMAN

Oh, no, this window's built tough.

NEIGHBOR

Thank, God. You know, I wish someone had told me before we started having kids how expensive they are. And boys. God, boys are the worst. They break everything. Absolutely everything. Things I didn't even know you *could* break, they do. Windows. Doorknobs. Lucas tore the handle off the upstairs toilet the other day.

WOMAN

What?

NEIGHBOR

Ripped it clean off. He comes up to me, "mommy, I'm sorry." And I'm like, "sorry for what, baby?" And he holds out his hand and there's the flusher. Just sitting there in his palm. I was like, "what were you doing up there that the handle came off in your hand?" And he looks up at me, his eyes wide, and he says, "you told me to flush."

WOMAN

Bless his heart.

NEIGHBOR

We had to replace the whole toilet.

WOMAN

No!

NEIGHBOR

The whole thing. Cause of that one little part. Matt almost lost his mind. He was like, "how the fuck-!" Well, I'm sure you can imagine. And he's the calm one.

(She chuckles to herself.)

Don't have boys. Whatever you do, don't have-

(A realization.)

Oh. Oh shit, Lena, I'm / so sorry-

WOMAN

It's okay.

NEIGHBOR

I can't believe I just said that.

WOMAN

It's fine.

NEIGHBOR

God, I'm such an idiot!

WOMAN

You're not. Really. It's okay.

NEIGHBOR

Fuck. And I was trying to be so careful.

WOMAN

You don't have to be. Sorry or careful. Really. I'm okay.

(She changes the subject.)

Would you like some tea?

NEIGHBOR

Oh, no. Thank you, but I should probably be getting back. Gotta go play chauffeur.

WOMAN

Sure.

(beat)

NEIGHBOR

I really am sorry.

WOMAN

I know.

NEIGHBOR

Talk soon?

WOMAN

Sure. Wish Billy good luck from me.

NEIGHBOR

I will. One more win!

WOMAN

(fake)

Woo-hoo!

(NEIGHBOR disappears.)

A moment and then—

WOMAN opens her mouth to scream, but no sound comes out.

CHURCH LADY appears with a casserole.)

CHURCH LADY

So what you do is you put it in the oven for forty five minutes at three hundred and fifty degrees. I like to keep it in the foil so that it bakes up nice and crispy, but... it's up to you.

WOMAN

That sounds like good advice.

CHURCH LADY

Oh, and I always sprinkle a little bit of cheese on the top because, well, cheese makes everything better.

WOMAN

I agree. I love cheese.

CHURCH LADY

I knew it. I just knew you were a fellow dairy lover!

(A shared smile.)

You know, my husband proposed to me with cheese.

WOMAN

He what?

CHURCH LADY

You know that stuff that comes in the can? Yeah, well he wrote, "will you marry me," question mark on fifteen Ritz crackers and set them out on a plate. I even like the fake stuff. That was thirty years ago.

WOMAN

Wow. Thirty years.

CHURCH LADY

Cheese. It's the secret.

WOMAN

Thanks for the tip.

CHURCH LADY

You're welcome.

(The phone rings. A landline. WOMAN turns to look at it. After a few rings-)

Did you want to answer that?

(WOMAN considers and then-)

WOMAN

No.

(The answering machine picks up.)

PRE-RECORDED WOMAN'S VOICE

This is Lena.

PRE-RECORDED MAN'S VOICE

And this is Nathan.

PRE-RECORDED WOMAN'S VOICE

And you have reached the Hylton's.

PRE-RECORDED MAN'S VOICE

We're not in right now...

PRE-RECORDED WOMAN'S VOICE

...but leave us a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we are able.

PRE-RECORDED BOTH

Bye now!

(And then a beep.)

PRE-RECORDED NATHAN'S VOICE

Lena, it's Nathan. Just calling to see how your morning is going. Everything's fine here. Same old, same old. Ooh, except... there's gonna be a potluck today. Which is great since I didn't bring lunch. I let myself get all excited and then...Susan stopped by my desk. Told me I just have to, HAVE to try her potato salad. Said something about a secret ingredient. Now, how much do you wanna bet that that secret ingredient is raisins. I just KNOW it got raisins in it. Okay, well, that's all I've got. See you tonight.

(Another beep and then-)

CHURCH LADY

Well, isn't he sweet?

WOMAN

Yes, ma'am. He is.

(And then-)

So three hundred and fifty degrees-

CHURCH LADY

Oh, yes.

(They return their focus to the casserole.)

Now this one is vegetarian. It's got mushrooms and broccoli. Onion. A little bit of garlic. I generally find that vegetables are safer.

WOMAN

Safer?

CHURCH LADY

Oh, yes. Everybody has so many dietary restrictions these days. Vegan, gluten-free and I don't know what all else. It useta be, back in the old days, that everybody ate everything, but now? Nobody eats anything.

WOMAN

Well, my husband is the least picky eater on the planet so you don't have to worry about that. He will love this.

CHURCH LADY

Oh, good. You know, my Landry'll eat anything too. We complement each other that way. I just find eating to be so much fun. Trying new things. New recipes. New food combinations. I just want to try everything at least once, don't you?

WOMAN

I like your attitude.

CHURCH LADY

And I like yours.

(beat)

You know, Lena, I've been watching you.

WOMAN

Me?

CHURCH LADY

Mm-hm. Ever since your first Sunday at the church. What was that – a year ago? You and your husband walked in, and I remember saying to my Landry, "that one looks nice."

WOMAN

Oh, well...

CHURCH LADY

And then we chatted after the service and it turns out that you were.

WOMAN

Well, thank you. I think you're nice, too.

CHURCH LADY

The way you volunteered to help out in the nursery your very first visit. The pastor announced that they were short-staffed and you hopped right up. You saw a need and you filled it. Not many people would do that.

WOMAN

I don't know about that.

CHURCH LADY

Well, I do. I've been around for a long time and seen a lot of things. You have a generous spirit. I bet those children miss you. I bet they wonder when you're coming back.

WOMAN

I'm pretty sure I was just another grown-up to them. Another pair of hands to help build block towers. Another lap to sit in.

CHURCH LADY

Nonsense. Children remember. And they're the best judges of character.

(FRIEND appears, brandishing bottles of alcohol.)

FRIEND

Girl, I hope you're not opposed to a little day drinking because I brought wine *and* gin and you get to choose which one we drink.

WOMAN

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.

(She points to the gin.)

FRIEND

"You have chosen wisely."

WOMAN

Should I pour two?

FRIEND

Yes, but just a splash for me.

(WOMAN collects glasses. FRIEND opens the bottle.)

Ugh, I love the smell of juniper in the morning.

WOMAN

Right! It's the nectar of the Gods!

(WOMAN pours.)

Here we go... A normal amount for me and a responsible amount for you...

(She hands FRIEND a glass.)

FRIEND

Thank you.

WOMAN

No, thank you. It's so good to see you.

FRIEND

And you. So... what should we toast to?

WOMAN

To you. To your good news.

FRIEND

How about, to friendship?

WOMAN

Yes, to that, too.

(They clink glasses and drink.)

Mm, shit, that's good.

FRIEND

Right! Bracing. I can literally feel the hair growing on my chest.

(WOMAN laughs at this.)

There you are! I'd know that laugh anywhere.

(A moment and then—)

So, tell me. What's up?

WOMAN

Uh-uh, you first.

FRIEND

Lena, I did not come all this way to talk about me. Spill.

WOMAN

Honestly, I don't even know what to say.

FRIEND

Words are your livelihood. Find some.

WOMAN

Okay, damn!

(Laughter.)

I feel like...

(A breath.)

I feel like the days are all just sort of blending together. Like Monday used to be one thing and Tuesday used to be another thing and Thursday used to be a whole other thing. But now—

FRIEND

They're all the same.

WOMAN

Indistinguishable. Saturday might as well be Sunday might as well be... The fact is, I don't even know what day it is today.

FRIEND

It's Friday.

WOMAN

See? No idea.

FRIEND

Are you getting out?

WOMAN

Define out?

FRIEND

Do you leave the house?

WOMAN

Does standing in the backyard count?

(FRIEND gives WOMAN a look.)

No, I know, I should get out, I should, I know, it's just... It's just the idea of seeing people. Of running into "friends" or whatever, whomever, out there in the real world.

FRIEND

Whatever that is.

WOMAN

Right. And the hugs. And the cheek kisses. And the smiles. And the elbow touches. And the fucking apologies.

FRIEND

Apologies are the worst.

WOMAN

Hello! Everybody's so fucking sorry. "Lena, I'm sorry." "I'm so so sorry."

FRIEND

"Condolences."

WOMAN

What the fuck is a condolence anyway? It should be stricken from the English language. Or is it struck? Whatever. The fact is, I just don't have the bandwidth, you know? Like I don't have the bandwidth to stand there smiling and nodding.

FRIEND

Absolving.

WOMAN

Exactly. Like I'm the fucking pope! Like I'm responsible for making you feel better about feeling bad about this horrible thing that happened to me. To ME! Not you! And it's like, what kind of bullshit is that?

FRIEND

Complete and utter.

WOMAN

Yes! Complete. And. Utter.

(beat)

You know, if I'm being truly honest—

FRIEND

And why the hell wouldn't you be?

WOMAN

I don't trust myself. I don't. At all. Like I don't fully trust myself to do what is expected of me. To do what society expects. What "Minnesota nice" expects. I don't trust myself NOT to scream in response to yet another sorry. I don't trust myself NOT to punch someone in the face the next time they look at me with pity eyes. So I stay home because home is safe. Well, safer, for all involved.

FRIEND

I don't know... Maybe you *should* punch someone?

WOMAN

That's what my mother said.

FRIEND

Well, maybe you should listen to her.

(NEIGHBOR appears at the sliding door holding a bouquet of flowers.

She knocks.

WOMAN moves to the door and opens it.)

WOMAN

Hey. What's all this?

NEIGHBOR

These are for you.

(She hands WOMAN the flowers.)

For before.

WOMAN

Before...?

NEIGHBOR

The other day with the...?

(She gestures vaguely.)

I'm so sorry. I'm a complete dunce sometimes.

WOMAN

Oh.

NEIGHBOR

I know they don't make up for...

But I thought, well...

They're pretty at least.

WOMAN

They are.

NEIGHBOR

I saw them and I thought, *those*. Those are apology flowers.

WOMAN

Apology flowers?

(While they talk, WOMAN retrieves a vase and fills it with water.

She finds a pair of scissors and begins to cut the stems. When she's done, she places the flowers in the water.)

NEIGHBOR

That's what my mom used to call them. Whenever my dad did something awful, or my grandfather, God, he was the worst. He'd backhand my grandmother then send her roses by the dozens. They'd cover the counters.

(slight beat)
 Sorry. That was probably too much information.

WOMAN

No...

NEIGHBOR

And completely unrelated to our present situation. I mean, it's not like I hit you. I mean, fuck. Sorry.

WOMAN

It's okay.

NEIGHBOR

No, it isn't!
 (slight beat)
 Sorry, it's just...
 Shit, why am I so nervous?

WOMAN

Turtle-

NEIGHBOR

It's just, we used to be pals, didn't we?

WOMAN

Pals?

NEIGHBOR

You know what I mean.
 We used to...
 I mean, I would come over here
 Or you would come to mine
 And we'd have tea
 And we'd bitch about our husbands
 And our mothers
 And the fucking Lululemon mafia
 And...
 We were close, right?
 There was a closeness between us?
 I didn't imagine it?

WOMAN

No, you didn't imagine it.

NEIGHBOR

Because I've been feeling like maybe I did.
 (beat)
 I'm sorry.

WOMAN

Turtle, stop.

NEIGHBOR

Dumping all of this on you. Making this about me. About my neuroses.

WOMAN

It's okay.

NEIGHBOR

Jesus, Lena, would you stop saying that.

WOMAN

Excuse me?

NEIGHBOR

"It's okay."

"It's okay."

It's like all you say to me anymore.

You keep saying it's okay when it's clearly not okay!

Fuck!

(She takes a breath.)

I should have been here for you

And I wasn't.

I wasn't and I should have been.

And I'm sorry.

WOMAN

Turtle-

NEIGHBOR

And don't say it's okay because it's not.

Because it doesn't feel okay.

It feels fucking awful.

All of it.

And I know that I can't possibly understand what you're going through-

WOMAN

Don't.

NEIGHBOR

I can't and I know that, I know.

WOMAN

Please don't do that.

NEIGHBOR

But I'm trying, Lena.

WOMAN

Stop it.

NEIGHBOR

I really am.

Turtle- WOMAN

And I just- NEIGHBOR

WOMAN
 (loud)
 I said, stop!
 (NEIGHBOR is stunned.)
 You wanna know the worst part of all of this?
 It's that.
 The placating.

NEIGHBOR
 Lena, I wasn't-

WOMAN
 You were.
 And I know you didn't mean to
 Nobody ever means to
 But everybody does it.
 Talking to me, at me, like I'm about to jump off a cliff.
 Like I'm a ticking time bomb that could go off at any moment.
 Everybody tiptoeing around me
 Or avoiding me all together
 Because they don't want to be the one to push me over the edge.
 Don't bring it up,
 Don't bring it up,
 Because she might crack.

NEIGHBOR
 Lena-

WOMAN
 And so what if I do, huh?
 At the very least haven't I earned that right?
 The right to-
 The last thing I need are sorrys.
 Or pity.
 Or fucking apology flowers.
 Even though they're pretty...

(beat)

NEIGHBOR
 I mean, I can take them back.

(NEIGHBOR reaches for the flowers.)

WOMAN
 Don't you dare.

CHURCH LADY

There's something I've been wanting to tell you... I hope it's okay if I share something a bit personal.

WOMAN

Of course.

CHURCH LADY

It's just that I have a daughter around your age. Joannie. You remind me of her.

WOMAN

I do?

CHURCH LADY

Mm-hm. Smart. Kind. Very pretty. Look at you blush!

WOMAN

Sorry, I've never been very good with compliments.

CHURCH LADY

Well, I've always been good at giving them. It's my gifting. "Words of affirmation."

WOMAN

That's a good one.

CHURCH LADY

It has certainly brought me a tremendous amount of joy. Anyway, what I wanted to say is that Joannie and her husband had a difficult time conceiving.

WOMAN

Oh.

CHURCH LADY

If you'd like me to stop...

WOMAN

No, it's all right. Please. Go on.

CHURCH LADY

Well, she miscarried a number of times. It was awful. Just... And it almost broke them. They almost gave up trying. But then, they had Sean. My grandson. A miracle if there ever was one. And it gave them new life! Now I don't know the particulars of your situation, but I do know that God provides. That he hears our prayers and that he answers them. And I know that if you continue to have faith, that if you keep on praying, God will hear you and give you the desires of your heart. Cause after all, he promised, didn't he? I mean, right there in Psalms 37!

(A moment and then—)

LENA

Thank you. That's definitely something to... hm.

WOMAN

Do you remember whack-a-mole?

FRIEND

That arcade game at Chuck E. Cheese?

WOMAN

Yeah. I wish I could whack every person who looked at me the wrong way with a foam mallet. Just... wham. Bam. Thank you, ma'am.

FRIEND

And you'd get points for every hit!

WOMAN

That's right!

FRIEND

And you'd win tickets, redeemable for a prize at the end of the night!

WOMAN

Shit, I'd be good at that game.

FRIEND

I bet we both would.

(Laughter and then-)

WOMAN

Sometimes... and Jo please don't get mad at me for saying this-

FRIEND

I won't.

WOMAN

I don't know, you might.

FRIEND

Lena, I'm your best friend. You can tell me anything.

(beat)

WOMAN

Sometimes I wish I was dead, too.

FRIEND

Lena...

WOMAN

You said you wouldn't get mad.

FRIEND

I'm not. I'm not... I'm just...
 (beat)
 You don't wish that.
 (slight beat)
 Lena, you don't.

WOMAN

No. You're right.
 (WOMAN takes a breath.)
 I don't.

CHURCH LADY

You know, you and that sweet husband of yours should come over sometime. Landry would love to get to know Nathan better. And we love to entertain.

WOMAN

That sounds lovely.

CHURCH LADY

I'll send you an email.

WOMAN

I'll be on the lookout. Thank you for the meal.

CHURCH LADY

Oh, honey, it ain't nothing but a little old casserole. I can make 'em in my sleep. I'll bring another one by next week.

WOMAN

Mrs. Wilson, you really don't have to do that.

CHURCH LADY

Please, call me Margaret. And it's really no trouble. Besides, no one should have to cook when they're grieving. Grief makes simple things hard. It makes even the simplest things hard.

(The oven beeps.

WOMAN moves to the appliance and opens the door.

She slides in the casserole and sets the timer.

It ticks.

She breathes

And breathes

And breathes.

Gradually,

Almost imperceptibly,

The ticking grows louder.

Louder

And louder

And louder

Until the sound of the timer overwhelms the room.

Until the volume is almost unbearable

And then—
 WOMAN breaks a dish in the sink.
 Quiet is restored, but WOMAN doesn't feel any better.
 She breaks another plate.
 And then another.
 (SISTER appears.)

SISTER

So it turns out Erinn's allergic to wheat. Can you believe that?

WOMAN

Is she okay?

SISTER

Well, she is now. She kept getting this rash, like on the regular, and at first, we thought it was just like a pollen allergy or something, but then the Claritin wasn't working so we went to the doctor and he ran some tests and it turns out its fucking wheat.

WOMAN

I'm sorry.

SISTER

You're sorry? You know I love me some bread.

(A shared smile then SISTER gestures toward the flowers.)
 These are pretty.

(WOMAN puts the kettle on.)

WOMAN

Thanks.

SISTER

And they smell amazing.

WOMAN

Mm-hm.

SISTER

I didn't realize that people were still sending flowers.

WOMAN

They're not. My neighbor brought them over.

SISTER

Your neighbor?

WOMAN

Uh-huh.

SISTER

Just because?

WOMAN

Sure.

(slight beat)

SISTER

Well, that was nice of her.

(WOMAN gives SISTER a look.)

Or not?

WOMAN

No, it was. It was nice. She's nice. The flowers are nice.

SISTER

You're a terrible liar, you know that?

WOMAN

Yeah, unlike you, Miss fact is fiction and vice versa?

SISTER

You know, you could just say, I hate the fucking flowers.

WOMAN

I don't hate the fucking flowers.

SISTER

Uh-huh.

WOMAN

I don't, I just...

(slight beat)

I don't.

SISTER

Well, I'd be happy to take them off your hands.

WOMAN

Get your ass away from my flowers.

(slight beat)

SISTER

You got anything to eat?

(SISTER moves to the refrigerator.)

WOMAN

There's a casserole in the oven.

SISTER

What kind?

WOMAN
Broccoli and mushroom.

SISTER
You made it?

WOMAN
Oh, um... no. Someone brought it over.

SISTER
A church lady?
(WOMAN'S face confirms.)
Yeah, Ima pass.
(SISTER continues to rummage in the refrigerator.)
When's the last time you went to the store?

WOMAN
I don't know, last week? The week before that? Time has been a bit...
I haven't had much of an appetite.

(SISTER pulls out a jar of pickles.)

SISTER
How long have these been in here?

WOMAN
I don't know, but I don't think pickles go bad.

(SISTER opens the jar.)

SISTER
I remember when I was pregnant with Riley I would send Erinn to the
supermarket for whipped cream and pickles on the regular. All I wanted
was whipped cream and pickles.

WOMAN
That's gross.

SISTER
It's a craving. And cravings are natural. You didn't have cravings?

WOMAN
Chocolate and bacon.

SISTER
See there?

(WOMAN watches SISTER eat pickles.)

WOMAN
I don't know how you can eat those things.

SISTER

BuzzFeed says that pickles are the world's most perfect food.

(WOMAN gives SISTER a look.)

What? The reporters there know things. They're trend-setters!

WOMAN

(skeptical)

Sure.

SISTER

Why do you even have pickles in your fridge if you don't like them?

WOMAN

Because Nathan does. I think they remind him of his childhood. Baloney sandwiches with Kraft singles. Kool-aide. And dill pickles.

SISTER

(treading carefully)

How's he doing?

WOMAN

Nathan? He's good. He's fine.

SISTER

Those sound like diminishing returns...

WOMAN

He's working a lot. Always. He's always working.

SISTER

Just like dad.

WOMAN

Just like dad.

SISTER

They say we marry our fathers.

WOMAN

You didn't.

SISTER

No, I married mom, which is like ten times worse.

(A shared smile and then-)

WOMAN

Sometimes I think that Nathan would rather work than be here with me.

SISTER

Well, that can't be true cause you're awesome.

(A moment and then WOMAN moves to the freezer. She pulls out a container of Cool Whip.)

No way.

WOMAN

Don't say I never gave you nothing.

(SISTER opens the container. She dips her pickle in the whipped cream and eats. She melts.)

SISTER

Oh my god. Oh my fucking god!

WOMAN

That is literally the most disgusting thing I have ever seen in my entire life.

SISTER

Hey, don't knock it 'til you've tried it.

WOMAN

No thank you.

(beat)

SISTER

Look, I'm sorry about Nathan.

WOMAN

I don't know why I said what I said before.

SISTER

About-?

WOMAN

He asked if I wanted him to stay. This morning. He asks every day and every day I say no. And I don't know why.

SISTER

(a gentle joke)

Well, you have always been a little bit crazy.

(WOMAN smiles.)

WOMAN

I have, haven't I?

SISTER

Mm-hm.

FRIEND

Listen, all I want, and you know this already, but it bears repeating—all I want is for you to be okay. To be happy and okay. Whatever that means to you. And whatever it takes. That's all I want.

WOMAN

I know. And thank you.

FRIEND

I love you, Lena.

WOMAN

I love you, too.

(beat)

I have something for you.

(WOMAN retrieves the cardboard box.)

I thought these things might come in handy.

(FRIEND opens the box.)

FRIEND

Oh...

WOMAN

Babies are expensive, even before they arrive. Hopefully this will save you and Jeff a little money.

FRIEND

I don't know what to say.

WOMAN

Say you'll take them and use them. All the things.

(beat)

Hey, what's with the face?

(beat)

Jo—

FRIEND

Nothing. It's nothing.

I just...

WOMAN

What? What is it?

FRIEND

(gentle)

Are you sure you want to give these things away?

(Before WOMAN can reply.)

It's just—and don't snap my head off when I say this—and please, please, don't think that I'm anything but totally and completely grateful, because I am, but... but, well... aren't you and Nathan going to try again? I mean, won't you? Not like now obviously, but... Don't you want to hold onto these things? Just in case?

(A tremor.
Slight, but felt.
The lights flicker.
Something on the counter topples.
The WOMEN appear.)

CHURCH LADY

Did you feel that?

MOTHER

Did anyone else feel something move?

NEIGHBOR

Was that an earthquake?

FRIEND

Lena?

NEIGHBOR

I hope that wasn't an earthquake.

FRIEND

Lena, are you okay?

WOMAN

I don't know.

SISTER

You don't know if you felt that? Cause, girl, I'm telling you, you did.

WOMAN

No, not the...

(WOMAN takes a breath.)

I don't know if we're going to try again.

It's just...

It's not something that we're talking about right now.

We're not really talking in general.

I mean, "hello" and "goodbye" and "have a nice day," but real talk?

Future talk?

(slight beat)

And if I'm honest, it's probably me.

The one who can't...

It's probably me.

FRIEND

But you still want a baby?

WOMAN

Of course, I still...

But Nathan...
 But me and Nathan...
 I just don't know.
 (WOMAN turns to FRIEND.)
 Please take the box.
 Take it.
 And use the things inside.

(The kettle whistles.)

ALL OF THE WOMEN

I'll get it.

WOMAN

Thanks, but I can do it.

(WOMAN moves to the kettle and takes it off the burner.
 SISTER finds the sheets.)

SISTER

Oh my God. Are these from that shop downtown? The one that always has the displays in the window for the different holidays? You know, the bougie one?

(SISTER opens a package.)

Shit, these are nice.

WOMAN

Mom brought them over.

SISTER

Really?

WOMAN

Mm-hm.

SISTER

She never brings me sheets. Come to think of it, she never brings me anything.

WOMAN

You want them, they're yours.

SISTER

For real?

WOMAN

I told her, I didn't need sheets.

SISTER

Yeah, but these are fucking delicious.

WOMAN

I have sheets.

SISTER

Girl, we all have sheets, but we don't all have five hundred thread count sheets. And this color. It matches the walls in your bedroom.

WOMAN

Do you want honey?

SISTER

Yes, please. And milk if it's not expired.

WOMAN

Let me check.

(WOMAN goes to the refrigerator. She removes a carton of milk.)
You know, I actually feel kind of bad.

SISTER

About what?

WOMAN

Mom.

SISTER

Seriously, Lena?

WOMAN

I mean, she's trying.

SISTER

Yeah, *her* way. She's supportive *her* way, which is almost never what anybody actually needs.

WOMAN

But isn't it the thought that counts?

SISTER

You and I both know that that's some bullshit. Good thoughts don't dry tears or save lives. The thing is, if mom ever asked anyone what they *actually* needed from her instead of insisting that the support she's giving *is* what they need, she *might* actually do some good. Maybe then we might actually pick up the phone when she calls.

(WOMAN is filled with appreciation for her sister. She moves to the island and fishes a pickle out of the jar.)

Um... what do you think you're doing?

(WOMAN takes a bite.)

I thought you hated pickles.

WOMAN

I do.

SISTER

And yet you just...

WOMAN

Yep.

(A moment and then SISTER slides the whipped cream toward WOMAN. They look at each other.)

SISTER

I mean, you might as well, right?

WOMAN

Go big or go home.

(WOMAN dips her pickle in the topping. She takes a bite.)

SISTER

What do you think?

(beat)

WOMAN

It's actually... not bad.

SISTER

I told you!

WOMAN

You did, you did—

SISTER

My recommendations be on point!

(WOMAN and SISTER laugh together. Eventually, it subsides.)
Hey, sis, you good?

WOMAN

He wanted a girl.

(WOMAN turns to SISTER.)

Nathan. He couldn't wait to spoil her. Drape her in bows and lace and pink.

SISTER

You hate pink. You've always hated pink.

WOMAN

I know! But it didn't even matter. It didn't even matter because he was so fucking excited. And I was excited because he was excited. And his excitement made even pink seem okay.

(beat)

We'd decided on a name, but we hadn't said anything. Just in case, you know. Just in case things didn't work out... And then they didn't...

(SISTER moves to WOMAN.)

SISTER

You wanna tell me?

(WOMAN looks at SISTER. She smiles.)

WOMAN

Luz.

(beat)

Her name was Luz.

For light.

SISTER

Luz.

WOMAN

Yeah.

(SISTER squeezes WOMAN.)

SISTER

It's a beautiful name.

(A moment and then—
MOTHER appears.)

MOTHER

Okay, the sheets are on!

(MOTHER looks at her daughters.)

What? What did I miss?

WOMAN

Nothing, mom. You didn't miss a thing.

SISTER

You never do. That's your superpower.

(MOTHER spies the pickles and the Cool Whip.)

MOTHER

I know y'all aren't eating pickles and... what is that... whipped cream?

WOMAN

It's actually not as bad as you'd think.

MOTHER

No shade, but no thank you.

(WOMAN and SISTER exchange a look.)

Is this water hot?

WOMAN

It is. Do you want tea?

MOTHER
That would be nice.

WOMAN
Coming right up.

(WOMAN prepares tea.)

SISTER
So mom, what's the deal with the sheets?

WOMAN
Nikko-

SISTER
What? She's up in here bringing you presents. What about me?

MOTHER
Nikko, I give you plenty.

SISTER
Not anything this nice.

MOTHER
Seriously?

WOMAN
Nikko, just drop it.

SISTER
Why should I?

WOMAN
Because.

SISTER
Because isn't a reason.

WOMAN
Yes, it is.

SISTER
No, it's not-

MOTHER
Stop it. Both of you.

SISTER
Is it because she's the oldest? The favorite-?

MOTHER
Oh for Christ sake, no. It's *because* your sister's not sleeping.

SISTER
 Wait, what?

MOTHER
 That's why I gave her the sheets.

SISTER
 You're not sleeping? You didn't tell me that-

WOMAN
 I'm sleeping fine.

MOTHER
 That's not what Nathan said.

SISTER
 Oh.
 (to WOMAN)
 She heard it from Nathan.

WOMAN
 She beat it out of him.

MOTHER
 I did what I had to do to get answers.
 (to SISTER)
 Your sister wasn't answering her phone.

SISTER
 So you called Nathan?

MOTHER
 What else was I supposed to do?
 (WOMAN sets a cup of tea in front of MOTHER.)

WOMAN
 Drink your tea.

MOTHER
 Why am I always the bad guy?

WOMAN
 You're not, mom.

SISTER
 Not always anyway.

MOTHER
 It's like I'm being punished for caring.

WOMAN
 No one's punishing you.

SISTER

If anything, it's more like you're punishing us. You *and* dad.
Suffocating us with love.

WOMAN

Nikko!

MOTHER

How unlucky for you!

WOMAN

Okay, y'all, stop!
(to SISTER)
You stop winding her up.
(to MOTHER)
And you stop taking offense.

(The phone rings. A landline. WOMAN turns to look at it. After a few rings-)

SISTER

You gonna answer that?

MOTHER

I told you, she doesn't answer her phone.
(The answering machine picks up.)

PRE-RECORDED WOMAN'S VOICE

This is Lena.

PRE-RECORDED MAN'S VOICE

And this is Nathan.

PRE-RECORDED WOMAN'S VOICE

And you have reached the Hylton's.

PRE-RECORDED MAN'S VOICE

We're not in right now...

PRE-RECORDED WOMAN'S VOICE

...but leave us a message and we'll get back to you as soon as we are able.

PRE-RECORDED BOTH

Bye now!

(And then a beep.)

PRE-RECORDED NATHAN'S VOICE

Hey, it's me. What would you think about going out tonight? Just the two of us? Somewhere nice? Maybe Giovanni's? Let me know and I'll make a reservation. I love you. Talk soon.

(Another beep. MOTHER and SISTER look at WOMAN.)

WOMAN
What?

SISTER
Giovanni's? Girl, he must really love you.

MOTHER
Nikko-

SISTER
What? That shit's expensive.

MOTHER
What's going on, Lena?

WOMAN
Nothing.
(MOTHER gives WOMAN a look.)
Nothing's going on.

MOTHER
Your husband calls to ask you to dinner-

SISTER
A nice dinner-

MOTHER
A nice dinner and you don't pick up the phone?
Come on now. You can talk to us.

SISTER
Yeah, sis. We're family.

(beat)

WOMAN
He hasn't said her name.
When we talk about her
He just...
He won't say her name.

(MOTHER looks at SISTER.)

SISTER
I'll tell you later.

WOMAN

Anyway, let's talk about something else. Please, let's talk about something else. How's daddy? Mom, please. How's dad?

MOTHER

Oh, he's fine. He's busy with work. He sends his love to you both.

SISTER

Love you too, dad. Retire already!

WOMAN

Is he at least thinking about it?

MOTHER

Honestly, I think the idea scares him.

SISTER

Wait, he's scared of *not* working? How can you be scared of not working?

WOMAN

Remember, he had his first job at eleven. The paper route?

SISTER

How could I forget? It taught him—

SISTER & WOMAN

"Responsibility!"

(They laugh.)

MOTHER

That's right, laugh it up, but he's always been a good provider.

WOMAN

We know, mom.

MOTHER

Paid for your lessons.

SISTER

Mom, we know.

MOTHER

Piano. Violin. Flute, was it?

SISTER

Clarinet.

MOTHER

Right, clarinet. Ballet. Tap.

Jazz. WOMAN

God, I loved jazz. SISTER

You hated jazz. *I* loved jazz. WOMAN

Tennis. Traveling soccer. Sleep away camp every summer. And all those vacations. MOTHER

England. SISTER

Italia. WOMAN

That Christmas in... where was that? The place with the holiday market and the hot chocolate? SISTER

Prague. MOTHER

Yes, Prague! Oh and— SISTER

Greece! SISTER/MOTHER/WOMAN

Fucking Syphnos. Can we go back there again, please? SISTER

And he put you both through school. MOTHER

Mom, you don't have to pitch dad to us. WOMAN

He's a good man. MOTHER

No one said otherwise. SISTER

You know, all I ever wanted for you girls was to find partners as solid and caring as your father. A good partner can make all the difference. Especially when things get hard. Your father and I got through some tough times. Times that would have broken other marriages. Times that *did* break other marriages. Friends. Family. MOTHER

I'm grateful that you have Erinn, Nikko.

(to WOMAN)

And that you have Nathan. This life is no joke. No one should navigate it alone. There. I've said my piece.

WOMAN

It was lovely, mom. Thank you.

MOTHER

You're welcome. At least one of my daughters appreciates me.

SISTER

I appreciate you, mom. It's just that someone has to play devil's advocate and I'm the best at it so...

WOMAN/MOTHER

Uh-huh...

(They laugh together and then—)

MOTHER

He just needs more time. That's all he needs. A little more time.

(beat)

Well! something sure smells good.

WOMAN

There's a casserole in the oven.

SISTER

From the church ladies.

MOTHER

They're still bringing food?

SISTER

Yep.

WOMAN

It's just one. One church lady.

MOTHER

They do know that you're basically a chef, right?

WOMAN

I'm not basically a chef.

MOTHER

Lena, anything they can do with a whisk you can do better.

WOMAN

I think they're sweet. It feels nice to be taken care of.

MOTHER

So you'll let them take care of you, but not me?

SISTER

You're her mother.

MOTHER

So?

WOMAN

So it's different.

MOTHER

How? How is it different?

SISTER

You're a lot, mom.

WOMAN

Nikko-

SISTER

What? She is.

MOTHER

How am I a lot?

WOMAN

You're fine, mom. You're fine. Nikko's fine. I'm fine. We're all fine.

MOTHER

You know how I know you're not fine?
When's the last time you washed your hair?
Or that shirt?
Or eaten?

SISTER

She had a pickle-

MOTHER

I mean, *real* food.
(slight beat)

Baby, the house looks great. It does. It's immaculate.
But all the mopping and dusting and polishing and scrubbing and
vacuuming... All the elbow grease in the world isn't going to make your
hurt go away.

(beat)

WOMAN

I need a minute.

MOTHER

Lena—

WOMAN

I said, I need a minute!

SISTER

You know what? I think I want to see those sheets.

MOTHER

Not now, Nikko. Lena—

SISTER

I want to see them and I want you to show them to me.

MOTHER

Nikko, I said—

SISTER

(forceful)

Mom. Upstairs. Now.

(MOTHER looks from SISTER to WOMAN.)

WOMAN

It's okay, mom. Please. Just go.

SISTER

Let's give sister a break. Come on. Last one up is a rotten egg.

(A long moment.

WOMAN processes.

She breathes.

She breathes.

She breathes.

And then—

She destroys the kitchen.

She breaks

And dumps

And scatters

And dirties every surface.

At some point,

All of the WOMEN return.

They watch WOMAN.

They watch her let go of everything.

Eventually, WOMAN stops.

She breathes.

At some point, MOTHER takes her daughter's hand.

She sits her down on her pillow.

The women gather around her.)

WOMAN

I keep thinking about college.

About senior year.
About Cameron.

FRIEND
(to the group)

Her boyfriend.

SISTER
(clarification)

Ex-boyfriend.

FRIEND

Ex-ex-boyfriend.

WOMAN

And clearly this has nothing to do with anything..

(The WOMEN interject.)

But he said "obviously."

"Obviously, we can't have a kid."

I remember that most of all

That obviously.

It was obvious to him,

But not to me.

It wasn't obvious to me.

I went along with it,

With the plan.

I did.

But it was never obvious.

We'd been together since first year orientation.

We'd played a "getting to know you" game in our small group

Our upper-class leader had posed a question

And we'd both responded with the same answer at the same time

Cameron had said "jinx"

Three years later

I got pregnant.

We got drunk at a party

And forgot the condom

And..

If I'd had it

He, she, they'd be fifteen now.

(beat)

I think about that a lot.

The fact that I'd have a freshman.

(beat)

He has two now.

Kids.

ALL

How do you know?

WOMAN

Facebook.

ALL, ad lib

Of course / Oh, right / Sure / Fuck Facebook

SISTER

Good for one thing and one thing only.

ALL

Stalking.

SISTER

There you go.

WOMAN

And like I said,

None of this has anything to do with anything...

(The WOMEN interject again.)

Just because fifteen years ago

A man I thought I loved

Didn't want to have a baby with me

And so I got rid of it

And now fifteen years later I meet a man who *does*

Who *does* want a baby with me

Who I love.

Who I love

And I lose it...

Just because both of those things are true

Doesn't mean they have anything to do with each other, right?

Cause sometimes

Sometimes I feel like I'm being punished

That this thing that happened to me now

Happened because of that thing that happened to me then

And I know that that's not

That that doesn't...

That that feeling isn't helpful or...

But I still...

(beat)

He's married.

Cameron.

To Emma.

She's a doctor of some kind.

Pretty.

MOTHER

You're pretty.

WOMAN

That's not the...

SISTER

She knows, mom.

WOMAN

They climbed a mountain together.

FRIEND

Excuse me?

WOMAN

Mount fucking Shasta.

CHURCH LADY

Lord, Jesus.

WOMAN

She changed his life.

Apparently.

She...

(beat)

When we were together.

He couldn't imagine being a father.

We talked about it,

About the future,

And he couldn't imagine it.

He couldn't...

And senior year we obviously couldn't have a kid.

But three years later,

With Emma,

He could.

Fuck,

He did.

Three years later he has a kid.

MOTHER

Lena...

WOMAN

And he looks happy in his photos.

That's the thing that kills me.

The fact that he couldn't imagine before,

And now,

Now it's like he couldn't imagine *not* being a dad.

(slight beat)

Fucking Facebook.

SISTER

Good for one thing and one thing only.

NEIGHBOR

Regret.

CHURCH LADY

Resentment.

MOTHER

Self-pity.

FRIEND

Malice.

WOMAN

And I'm like, what changed, you know?

Besides time.

Besides me.

(And then—)

Fuck.

(And then—)

Fuck!

(And then—

WOMAN roars.

The WOMEN join her.

It is primal.

The earth moves.

It quakes.

It roils.

Something cracks open.

A piece of ceiling falls.

THE WOMEN look.)

Shit.

(Blackout.)

PERSONAL USE ONLY

ACT 2

(Everything is as it was at the end of ACT 1.
During WOMAN'S monologue, the WOMEN will work together to
distribute forks and serve the casserole.)

WOMAN

At first it was like everyone I had ever known
High school friends
College friends
Work friends
Friends of friends
Friends from Girl Scouts
Traveling soccer
Youth orchestra
Yoga class
Everyone
Called
Or texted.
They sent cards
And emails
And flowers.
God,
We had so many flowers.
The house smelled like flowers for weeks after we threw them out.
The air
Perfumed with the smell of lilies and roses.
And it felt
Nice.
To know that people
Cared
That they cared enough
To reach out
And to send things.
Because it wasn't the things themselves
It was the fact
That they sent them.
The sending,
Not the sent.
It felt nice to know
That people understood that something terrible had happened
Truly terrible
The worst possible thing
And that they were thinking of us.
It felt nice
To be thought of.
And then...
It stopped.
All of it.
The calls.
The emails.
The texts.
The letters.

The visits.
 Everything, but the casseroles.
 The casseroles keep right on coming.
 And coming
 And coming
 And coming...

(WOMAN is handed a plate.)

Thank you.

(slight beat)

It's funny,
 I have a refrigerator full of casserole.
 A freezer full of casserole.
 I have more casserole than I know what to do with.

(The WOMEN begin to eat.)

SISTER

This actually isn't half bad.

WOMAN

I told you.
 "My recommendations be on point!"

FRIEND

The cheese on top is a nice touch.

CHURCH LADY

That was my suggestion.

MOTHER

Is this mushroom?

CHURCH LADY

Mm-hm and broccoli.

NEIGHBOR

I love broccoli. Even as a little girl, I always loved broccoli.
 I liked that they looked like little trees.

WOMAN

I always loved peas.

SISTER

Me too. I used to flick them across the table.

WOMAN

At me. Yeah, I remember.

SISTER

And corn. I could never get enough corn.

MOTHER

I've always loved brussels sprouts. And this was before we knew to buy them fresh. Before they sold them on stalks at the supermarket. Before we knew to season them liberally. With salt and pepper.

WOMAN

And a little bit of cayenne.

MOTHER

To sauté them with onion and garlic.

FRIEND

And bake them with parmesan cheese.

NEIGHBOR

And honey.

CHURCH LADY

And balsamic vinegar.

MOTHER

And butter. Sticks and sticks of butter. And not the unsalted kind. No, that rich European butter. You know what I'm talking about. The kind they serve in Paris with thick slices of French bread.

FRIEND

All this food talk, I'm gonna need seconds.

WOMAN

Girl, me too!

MOTHER

Back before all that. Back before we knew better. Before we knew better, I loved brussels sprouts even then.

SISTER

(a joke)

Weird.

WOMAN

Nah, what's weird is pickles and whipped cream.

NEIGHBOR

You mean, together?

WOMAN

(gesturing to SISTER)

This one loves the combo.

SISTER

When I was pregnant. When I was pregnant!

WOMAN

Still.

CHURCH LADY

For me, it was Cheese Whiz on steak.

MOTHER

French fries.

NEIGHBOR

Brownie mix straight from the bowl.

WOMAN

Anything spicy.

ALL EXCEPT FRIEND

And ice cream.

WOMAN

Any flavor. But especially coffee.

SISTER

I ate dirt once.

(The WOMEN look at her.)

Pika, you know?

(slight beat)

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

NEIGHBOR

I became obsessed with the smell of Gain liquid detergent.

(to WOMAN)

You know this. I was constantly doing laundry.

WOMAN

I remember you came over one day and asked if I had any clothes that needed to be washed.

NEIGHBOR

I had washed everything in the house and needed more. And I have boys!

(Laughter.)

I was desperate.

CHURCH LADY

I haven't been pregnant for twenty-seven years, but I still remember it like it was yesterday. And my memory is not what it used to be.

SISTER

I remember the feeling right after I had Riley. Elation. Moments before I'd been screaming. No, cursing in pain.

WOMAN

Just ask her wife.

SISTER

The things I called her. The names!

WOMAN

Some of them aren't even in the English dictionary.

MOTHER

Nor should they be.

SISTER

Right! But they handed my little boy to me, they placed him in my arms, and all of that hurt just... fell away. And I was left with euphoria.

NEIGHBOR

Until the next day.

SISTER

Oh my God, the next day. My lower back.

NEIGHBOR

My breasts.

SISTER

I remember wondering, how long until my you-know-what goes back to normal.

MOTHER

Nikko!

SISTER

What? I did!

CHURCH LADY

It's a legitimate question.

SISTER

See there!

NEIGHBOR

I asked my doctor.

MOTHER

You didn't!

NEIGHBOR

Flat out. I said, "all right, doc, give it to me straight, when will my—"

ALL

Vagina!

NEIGHBOR

Yes, my vagina, return to normal? And do you know what she said to me?

ALL EXCEPT FRIEND

Never!

NEIGHBOR

Yeah, pretty much! Pretty much!

(Laughter.)

SISTER

All my doctor said was, "Kegel."

FRIEND

As in...?

SISTER

The exercises!

WOMAN

Oh, there was a pamphlet. Remember the pamphlet?

WOMAN/SISTER

"Locating your pelvic floor."

SISTER

We laughed so fucking hard about that shit.

WOMAN

We'd be in public, at the grocery store or something, the Whole Foods, in the checkout line, and this one

(she points to SISTER)

would be like, "guess what I'm doing right now."

SISTER

Hey, "once you pop, you can't stop."

WOMAN

And I would lose it! I'm sure the cashier thought we were crazy. It's a wonder she didn't report us!

SISTER

(to WOMAN)

Show them your Kegel face.

WOMAN

Oh my God, Nikko, no!

SISTER

Yes! Show them! Show them!

(to the WOMEN)

Y'all have to see this.

WOMAN

Nikko...

SISTER

Come on!

Pretty please?

Pretty please with a cherry on top...?

(A moment and then WOMAN makes her Kegel face. The WOMEN laugh.)
Ahhh! That shit kills me every time!

(More laughter.)

MOTHER

(wiping tears from her eyes)

Lord Jesus, how did we get here?

SISTER

(with a smile)

You mean, to vaginas?

WOMAN

(with a smile)

Girl, you need to stop.

NEIGHBOR

Here's a question, and I'm sorry to change subjects, but... why is this casserole so freaking good?

FRIEND

Oh my God, honestly, I was thinking the exact same thing! It's really, truly delicious.

MOTHER

You know, I used to make them all the time. Casseroles. Now I can't remember the last time I did.

NEIGHBOR

They've fallen out of fashion.

SISTER

Because they're old-fashioned. Finger-licking good, obviously, but old-fashioned.

CHURCH LADY

We've lost so many of the old ways that way.

Thinking of them as outdated.

Not hip enough for our modern sensibilities.

So many things.

Beautiful things.

Soul nurturing things.

Lost.

Handwritten love letters.

Recipe cards.

Dressing up.

Hats.

Oh, I miss hats.

WOMAN

Memorizing phone numbers.

FRIEND

Saying "sir" and "ma'am."

NEIGHBOR

And "please" and "thank you."

MOTHER

Modesty.

CHURCH LADY

"Back in the day"
 As the kids say now
 "Back in the day"
 Women gave birth at home.
 Especially black women
 Cause hospitals were few and far between
 And we weren't welcome in most of them.
 My grandmother was born a midwife.
 Same as her mother before her
 And hers before her.
 My grandmother, Sally, was born "in the caul"
 Or as some people say
 "Born in the veil"
 With the amniotic membrane intact
 Still covering her face.
 Back then,
 People believed that babies who were born in the caul
 Inherited spiritual gifts.
 Clairvoyance, for one.
 Immortality.
 And they were believed to have healing abilities.
 For forty years
 My grandmother delivered almost every baby within a ten-mile radius of
 Newton, Georgia
 White and black.
 In beds
 And on tables
 And floors.
 In a field or two.
 And only four of those babies died.
 Four in forty years.
 Now...?
 Huh.

MOTHER

Huh, is right.
 Nowadays the doctor's office is about the scariest place on Earth.

WOMAN

And that's *with* insurance.

FRIEND

Ain't that the truth—

NEIGHBOR

I read this statistic somewhere that said that the racial disparity between Black and white infant death is actually wider now than it was in eighteen fifty.

SISTER

Weren't we still considered three-fifths human in eighteen fifty?

NEIGHBOR

Some might say that we still are.

(The women react.)

NEIGHBOR (CONT'D)

I mean, we're talking about a system that has historically treated Black women like animals. Like Black pain isn't the same as white pain.

SISTER

Well, it isn't.

NEIGHBOR

Well, it is and it isn't.

WOMAN

Listen, I'm not interested in a doctor treating my metaphorical pain. I want her to treat my actual pain.

(The WOMEN agree.)

CHURCH LADY

And see, that's why we've got to go back.
You know?
Back to the old ways.
Cause they worked.
My daughter, Joannie?
She had a doula *and* a midwife.
And they were both Black.

SISTER

That reminds me, a girlfriend of mine posted something on Facebook last week, a study maybe? About death rates for Black newborns—

FRIEND

Oh, I saw that.

SISTER

I'm probably gonna get this wrong, but it was saying that Black babies in the U.S. die at three times the rate of white babies-

FRIEND

When they have a white doctor-

SISTER

Right, but when they have a Black doctor, the rate is a third lower. A third!

CHURCH LADY

How about that?

NEIGHBOR

I believe it.

SISTER

That's why we gotta be taking care of each other. Looking out for each other.

MOTHER

Old ways.

SISTER

Right!

ALL

Old ways.

NEIGHBOR

Now if that doesn't merit a drink, I don't know what does.

FRIEND

Oh! I have wine!

(FRIEND locates the bottle of wine from earlier.)

No sense in this going to waste. Lena?

WOMAN

I couldn't agree more.

FRIEND

Who wants a glass?

SISTER

Me, definitely me.

FRIEND

Easter?

MOTHER

I'll get the bottle opener.

(She does, while NEIGHBOR gets wine glasses.)

CHURCH LADY

Isn't this nice? I love an impromptu party.

NEIGHBOR

All we need now are streamers and balloons.

SISTER

And chocolate cake!

NEIGHBOR

Who's DJ-ing?

WOMAN

My house, my choice.

(WOMAN produces her phone. She attaches it to a deck.
Music begins to play.

Approval.

The WOMEN dance.

At some point,

Their individual movements coalesce into something synchronized.

It is joyous.

Eventually, the wine is uncorked with a pop.)

ALL

HEEEY!!!

(FRIEND pours wine.)

SISTER

What is this?

FRIEND

It's a blend.

MOTHER

Oh, I love a good blend.

WOMAN

Mom!

MOTHER

What? I do!

NEIGHBOR

Smells like... what is that? Blackberries?

CHURCH LADY

Ooo and peppercorns!

FRIEND

Oh yes, the man at the wine store mentioned a peppery aftertaste.

SISTER

(a joke)

I love a peppery aftertaste.

WOMAN

Why do you have to make everything sound so nasty?

SISTER

It's a gift!

FRIEND

Is that everyone?

CHURCH LADY

I think so...

FRIEND

Lena?

WOMAN

All set.

FRIEND

Nikko?

SISTER

Ready to drink.

FRIEND

Easter?

MOTHER

I wouldn't mind a little more...

WOMAN

Mom!

MOTHER

Well, you said it was a party!

(FRIEND pours more wine into MOTHER'S glass.)

CHURCH LADY

My God, isn't this wonderful? All of us here together like this? It truly is a blessing.

NEIGHBOR

(to FRIEND)

You didn't pour any for yourself.

FRIEND

Oh, that's all right.

WOMAN

Jo is pregnant.

(The women react.)

FRIEND

We just found out.

MOTHER

Congratulations, honey.

FRIEND

Thank you.

NEIGHBOR

We should toast.

SISTER

Yes, a toast! To Jo!

FRIEND

Oh, no, please-

CHURCH LADY

To the miracle of life then.

WOMAN

That's lovely.

MOTHER

To hope.

NEIGHBOR

How about... to women.

ALL EXCEPT FRIEND

Yes, to women.

(They go to drink.)

FRIEND

Actually

I'm sorry, but before we drink...

May I say something?

(The WOMEN concede graciously.)

Um so something has been weighing on my heart

And I feel like if I don't say something

If I don't say it

To you

Lena-

WOMAN

To me?

FRIEND

Then I'm just going to burst.

MOTHER

Well, we don't want that.

WOMAN

Jo, what's going on?

FRIEND

Lena.

Shit this is um...

It's just

I feel like I owe you an apology.

WOMAN

An apology? For what?

(FRIEND gestures to her belly.)

FRIEND

For this.

WOMAN

Oh. No.

FRIEND

I mean, it just happened.

WOMAN

Jo—

FRIEND

I started vomiting the other day

So I went to the doctor

And he was like,

Surprise.

WOMAN

I think it's wonderful.

FRIEND

You don't have to say that.

WOMAN

I know I don't *have* to say it. I *want* to say it. I mean it.

Jo, you're my best friend. I'm happy for you.

FRIEND

It feels like if it didn't work out for you, it shouldn't work out for me.

(slight beat)
It's not fair.

Life's not fair. WOMAN

Still. FRIEND

(beat)
I feel guilty. Is it awful of me to say that?

You didn't do anything wrong. WOMAN

Is it awful of me to make this about me? FRIEND

It *is* about you. WOMAN
You're pregnant.
You're bringing a human being into the world.
It *is* about you.

(WOMAN embraces FRIEND.)

I love that. CHURCH LADY
I love seeing that.
Women loving up on other women.
It's a beautiful thing.

Amen. MOTHER

Ugh, I'm a mess. FRIEND

Me too. WOMAN

There's never any Kleenex around when you need it. FRIEND

Oh, I have some here! MOTHER

(She goes into her purse.)

Mom to the rescue. SISTER

(MOTHER produces a pack of tissue and passes it to FRIEND.)

MOTHER

Just call me Mary Poppins.

FRIEND

Thank you.

(FRIEND pulls out a tissue and dabs at her eyes.)

Good thing I skipped makeup this morning.

(Laughter.)

Anyone else need one?

(Tissues are distributed. Faces are wiped and noses are blown.)

NEIGHBOR

Should we try the toast again?

Now that we're dry?

CHURCH LADY

What did we decide on?

SISTER

To women, I think.

WOMAN

A perfect toast for the moment we're in.

NEIGHBOR

I agree. One more time. To women.

ALL EXCEPT FOR MOTHER

To women!

(They go to drink.)

MOTHER

Before we drink...

Sorry

But may I say a few words?

(The WOMEN concede graciously.)

Thank you.

Now I'm not one for speeches.

SISTER

Really, momma-?

WOMAN

Nikko, hush-

MOTHER

But there's something I've been wanting

Well

Not really wanting

But needing
 Needing to say.
 It's something I've never said before
 Because it didn't seem like anyone else needed to know.
 It was personal.
 And when I was growing up
 Personal meant private.
 In my time.

(to CHURCH LADY)

Our time.
 We didn't go around sharing our innermost thoughts or feelings with
 the world.
 There was no Facebook or Twitter or Instagram.
 There was only word of mouth.
 And the worst thing you could do
 Was be talked about.
 And so things that probably should have been said went unsaid.
 Wrongdoings and such
 Went unreported
 Because no one wanted to make trouble.
 Because if it wasn't your business
 It wasn't your business.
 And some of that
 I suppose
 Was about protection.
 It was about information.
 How much is too much
 And how much is not enough?
 Because you're trying to keep your children safe
 But really
 What does that even mean?
 Safe.
 So I'm sharing this thing because
 I feel like,
 Well,
 I hope that it will be helpful to you.
 (slight beat)
 What I want to say is... you girls almost had a brother.
 (WOMAN and SISTER react.)

MOTHER

This was years ago.
 Lena, you were,
 I don't know,
 Three years old?
 Three and a half?
 And I got pregnant.
 I got pregnant with a boy. And I lost him.

WOMAN

Oh, mom.

MOTHER

It was early in the process,

But we knew it was a boy.
Well, I knew it was a boy.
I just knew.
The way he sat in my belly.

(slight beat)

After I lost him,
The doctor said we should wait.
He said that I should take some time to rest.
To recuperate.
Because your birth, Lena...
Shit, it wasn't a picnic.

(The women react.)

MOTHER

Nearly put me off pregnancy all together
But your father and I had always talked about having two children
And I had set my mind on having two children
And you know me—

WOMAN/SISTER

Stubborn—

MOTHER

As a mule
And so we tried again right away
And we got you,
Nikko.

CHURCH LADY

A little miracle.

MOTHER

And you were so beautiful we decided to keep you.

(Laughter.)

And you've been such a gift to us.

To your dad and me.

You both have.

So much of a gift that the child I lost...

(slight beat)

Well, over time it didn't seem like quite so much of a loss.

(beat)

That said, not a day goes by that I don't think about your brother.

(She remembers.)

For the longest time

I dreamed about him

As I'm sure all mother's dream about their son's-to-be.

I dreamed a son

Whose countenance and interests mirrored my own.

I dreamed a pal

A confidant

More than a son, really, a friend.

He grew up in my dreams

From tottering baby

To toddler
 To boy
 To young adult
 To man
 Poised
 And confident
 And bright
 With a full head of hair
 And straight teeth
 Unaided by orthodontia.
 He was polite
 And kind.
 A gentleman.
 Well mannered.
 Sweet.

SISTER

Gay.

MOTHER

Yes, probably.
 Probably gay.
 (Laughter.)
 Unimpeachable.
 (beat)
 He was a dream.
 (A moment.)
 Eventually, he stopped visiting me.
 His smile faded.
 His face.
 He was never gone, not completely
 But he became more of an outline
 An idea of a thing
 Rather than the thing itself.
 (beat)
 I miss him sometimes.
 The him of him.
 The possibility of him.
 I miss what I never knew.
 The boy I never met.
 (beat)
 And I guess
 I wanted to say
 That that's how it will be for you, Lena.
 For you *and* Nathan.
 You will never stop loving her.
 Little Luz.
 Never.
 But the pain of losing her will lessen.
 It will.
 I know it seems impossible now
 But the memory of that tragedy
 Will soften.

And eventually
There will be space in your heart for someone new.

WOMAN

Oh, mom.

I didn't know.

We didn't know.

(WOMAN embraces MOTHER.)

Get in here.

(WOMAN pulls SISTER into the embrace.)

CHURCH LADY

Would you look at God?

FRIEND

This makes me want to call my mother.

(beat)

Actually, I think I might. Excuse me.

(FRIEND exits.)

A long moment and then MOTHER and her daughters pull apart.)

MOTHER

Good thing you brought out the tissues.

SISTER

Right! Cause you know I'd be using my sleeve.

MOTHER

Nikko!

SISTER

What?

MOTHER

Don't be saying things like that. Folks'll think you were raised by wolves.

WOMAN

Mom-!

MOTHER

Well, they might! And she wasn't!

(SISTER blows her nose, loudly.)

Nikko!

SISTER

What? I can't blow my nose!

WOMAN

Okay, okay, do you remember, mom, how when we were kids you would hold the tissue up to our noses and say, "blow like an elephant?"

SISTER

See there, *that's* why I'm as loud as I am. Because you told me to trumpet!

(FRIEND re-enters.)

CHURCH LADY

Any luck, dear?

FRIEND

Voicemail. But I left a message.

CHURCH LADY

Is she excited to be a grandma?

FRIEND

You know, I didn't think she would be, but she is.

MOTHER

It's the best. Being a grandmother. All the benefits of motherhood—

CHURCH LADY

Without any of the day-to-day responsibilities.

MOTHER

Exactly. You get to love on 'em then hand 'em back at the end of the day.

CHURCH LADY

It's heaven.

NEIGHBOR

I don't know what I would've done if my mom hadn't lived nearby after I had Billy. There were days where she would come over and I would practically throw him at her. I was like, "take him!"

MOTHER

Grandmothers are good for that, too.

FRIEND

Should we try the toast again?

SISTER

We ain't toasted yet?

NEIGHBORHOOD

They say the third times a charm.

FRIEND

Any ideas?

CHURCH LADY

I've got one, how about... to making space in your heart.

MOTHER

That's perfect.

(FRIEND raises her glass.)

FRIEND

To making space.

(The WOMEN raise their glasses.)

ALL EXCEPT FOR WOMAN

To making space.

(MOTHER, SISTER, FRIEND, NEIGHBOR and CHURCH LADY clink glasses and drink.

A tremor.

Slight, but felt.

The lights flicker.

WOMAN looks out.

The WOMEN notice.)

MOTHER

Lena?

(The WOMEN look at each other.)

FRIEND

Lena, are you okay?

(beat)

SISTER

Hey—

WOMAN

The thing is...

I knew something was wrong.

(beat)

We'd been in for a check-up the day before

And everything had been fine.

Everything had been fine.

The whole thing had been smooth.

Everything.

And you know

I loved it.

Being pregnant.

I loved how it felt.

My body.

Carrying her.
 The way it transformed my body.
 It felt like the most natural thing.
 I found myself thinking,
 This is so easy.
 So easy.

(slight beat)

I was so stupid.
 And then I couldn't feel her.
 Not a shift.
 Or a kick.
 Or an elbow.
 None of the dozens of little
 "Understandings"
 That we'd come to in our many months together.
 And I got a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach.
 And so we hopped in the car
 And went back to the doctor
 Whose face told me everything I needed to know.
 And they rushed us to the hospital
 Where I delivered her.
 Stillborn.

(beat)

She'd been strangled by her umbilical cord between the time we'd
 received a clean bill of health the day before
 And then.
 It had wrapped twice around her neck.
 Twice.

(beat)

She didn't have a chance.

(beat)

It was the hardest thing I've ever done
 Giving birth to my little girl
 My little Luz
 Knowing that she...

(beat)

It was so easy
 And then it was hard.
 Almost unbearably hard.
 And I...

(beat)

And Nathan couldn't stop crying.

(to SISTER)

You were there.
 You remember.

SISTER

I do.

WOMAN

He couldn't stop and I couldn't make it better.
 I couldn't make it better.
 And that's what I do.

I make things better.
 I cook.
 And I clean.
 And I polish.
 And I scour
 And decorate
 And none of that...
 None of it makes anything better.
 And I think that what I don't understand...
 Or no, not *not* understand...
 The part that I don't...
 That I can't quite...
 It's the randomness.
 It's the chance of it.
 The "no one to blameness" of it.
 The "there was nothing to be doneness" of it.
 It's the fact that there is no one to be angry at
 Not legitimately anyway
 Though I *am* angry.
 I'm angry as fuck.

SISTER

It's okay to be angry.

CHURCH LADY

You have every right to be.

WOMAN

Yeah, but what do I do with it?
 Like I get that it's okay
 That it's a valid thing for me to feel
 But where do I put it?
 Like literally where?
 And who do I blame?
 Who do I blame when there is no one to blame?
 Who can I rage against?

MOTHER

Rage against the sky, baby.

NEIGHBOR

The sun, the moon and the stars.

CHURCH LADY

Trust me. The universe is big enough to take it.

WOMAN

Cause it would be a whole lot easier if I knew the answer to that
 question. The who.

MOTHER

Ain't nothing easy about losing a child.

CHURCH LADY

Nothing easy at all.

WOMAN

Sometimes I stand in the backyard
And I want to scream.
I don't, cause somebody'd call the cops, but I think about it.

SISTER

Long and deep.

FRIEND

The kind of scream that starts in your toes and travels up through
your body gaining momentum.

SISTER

The opposite of gravity.

WOMAN

I want to scream and scream and scream.

FRIEND

The kind of scream that topples things.

NEIGHBOR

That breaks shit.

WOMAN

Until someone or something tells me why.
Why me.
Why her.
Why us.

(NATHAN has appeared.)

NATHAN

Lena?

(WOMAN turns quickly.)

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..

(NATHAN looks around the kitchen.)

What happened here?

(WOMAN looks around the kitchen.)

WOMAN

Oh, um..

I was just..

Sorry, is it..?

Is it already five o'clock-?

NATHAN

No, I um..

I left work early.

I thought..

I couldn't stop thinking about earlier.
 About the way I left you this morning.
 About how you said you were fine and how I heard that and thought, are
 you really? Cause you didn't sound fine...

WOMAN

Nathan-

NATHAN

And cause I don't think I am.
 Fine.
 I don't think I'm fine.

(beat)

And I'm sitting at work and I keep having this feeling like maybe you
 wanted me to stay. Like maybe you've been wanting me to stay home this
 whole time only you wanted me to know that you wanted me to stay
 without having to say the words. And how I only left because, well,
 because I didn't know what else to do. Because I wasn't sure what you
 wanted or what I wanted even... except... when I got to work, I knew I
 didn't want to be there. And I realized that I've been feeling that
 way since...

(beat)

So I came home.

(beat)

I hope that's okay.

WOMAN

It's fine.

NATHAN

Fine or good?

WOMAN

Good. Sorry, it's good.

(NATHAN moves to the stuffed elephant. He holds it.)

NATHAN

Remember the day we picked this out?

WOMAN

"What sound does an elephant make?"

(They both trumpet. They smile at their synchronicity.)

NATHAN

Are you giving this away?

(beat)

Lena, I think we need to talk.

And I know that's not... that that's not my strong suit, but...

It's just...

Um...

It's just I'm scared I'm losing you.
I'm scared I'm losing you the same way we—
The same way we lost—

WOMAN

You can say her name.

NATHAN

When I came in, I heard what you were saying.
About being angry?
I know I wasn't supposed to
That I wasn't meant to hear it, but
But, well
I'm angry, too.
I don't know why it's so hard to talk about how angry I am.

(And then—)

WOMAN

You're not gonna lose me.

NATHAN

You promise?
(A long moment and then—)
It looks like a tornado blew through here.

WOMAN

It kind of did.
(He gives her a look.)
My mom was here.
And Nikko.

NATHAN

Two tornados.

WOMAN

And a hurricane.
And an earthquake.
(They laugh and then—)
She told me she lost a baby.
(A look.)
My mom.

NATHAN

Did you know?

WOMAN

I had no idea.
It was after me and before Nikko.

NATHAN

And your parents—

WOMAN

Never said anything.

NATHAN

Well, it's a hard thing to talk about.
I mean, look at us.

WOMAN

Look at us.

(A slight smile and then-)
She said that he visited her after.
She said that for years after
He visited her.

(beat)

Do you think...

(beat)

Do you think that Luz might...?

(NATHAN picks up the thread.)

NATHAN

Do I think that our daughter—

WOMAN

Luz, Nathan.
Her name is Luz.
You have to say it.
I need for you to say it.

(NATHAN takes a breath and then-)

NATHAN

Do I think that one day... Luz... that she might visit us?

WOMAN

Do you?

(A moment and then-)

NATHAN

I sure hope so.

(NATHAN takes WOMAN'S hand.

A tremor.

More violent this time.

The lights flicker and then go black.)

WOMAN

Nathan?

NATHAN

Hold on.

(We hear movement. A drawer being opened. Rummaging. And then the
sound of a match striking.

We see a flame.

NATHAN is illuminated.

He lights a candle
 And the kitchen is transformed.
 A moment of magic.)

MOTHER

"Mommy, want to know what I learned in school / today?"

SISTER

"Daddy, I can't find my sweater./ Will you help me look?"

CHURCH LADY

"Mommy, will you read this to me?"

FRIEND

"Another, mommy / another."

NEIGHBOR

"Mommy, I've decided that my favorite color is purple."

MOTHER

"No yellow!"

SISTER

"No aquamarine!"

FRIEND

"Daddy, how far away is the sun? / Can we go there someday?"

MOTHER

"Mommy, why is the sky blue and not orange? / Cause I think it should be orange."

CHURCH LADY

"Daddy, can we order a pizza? / With extra cheese?"

FRIEND

"Mommy, how did you and daddy meet?"

NEIGHBOR

"Daddy, I want to be an astronaut when I grow up."

MOTHER

"No, a teacher."

SISTER

"No, an artist!"

CHURCH LADY

"Daddy, what does a broken heart feel like?"

FRIEND

"Mommy, where do babies come from?"

SISTER

"Mommy, how much do you love me?"

(And then —

A LITTLE GIRL appears. She is holding a soccer ball.)

LITTLE GIRL

Mommy?

(WOMAN turns to LITTLE GIRL.)

Why do people die?

(A moment and then—)

WOMAN

Well, I don't know exactly.

But I think

Um...

(She looks to her husband.)

Nathan?

(He nods encouragingly.)

NATHAN

Go on.

(WOMAN looks back at LITTLE GIRL.)

WOMAN

Well,

I think it has something to do with available space

And the passage of time

And luck

A lot of it has to do with luck

And unknowable things.

People die because

They do.

Because it's a thing that people do

Eventually.

Eventually

Every one of us

Whether we are old or young

Ready

Or not

We will come to an end.

But the end...

(A moment and then a realization.)

The end is just the beginning.

LITTLE GIRL

The beginning of what?

WOMAN

Oh, honey...
It's the beginning of everything.

(NATHAN moves to LITTLE GIRL.)

NATHAN

Hey. How about I trade you?

(He offers LITTLE GIRL the stuffed elephant. She hands him the soccer ball.)

WOMAN

What sound does an elephant make?

(LITTLE GIRL looks at WOMAN and NATHAN
Then trumpets
As the lights fade to BLACK.)

--END OF PLAY--

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