WEATHERING
by
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Originally Commissioned by Penumbra Theatre Company
Sarah Bellamy, President
“...but here we are, mourning.”
—Darnell Lamont Walker

“Is solace anywhere more comforting than in the arms of a sister?”
—Alice Walker
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.
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?
WOMAN

Am I...?

MAN

It's just... you seem-

WOMAN

Oh. Yeah. Yeah, I'm... I'm fine.

( 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.

MAN

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

WOMAN

No, I'm good.

( MAN hesitates. )

I mean it. I'm fine. Go to work.

Make the big bucks.

(WOMAN smiles at MAN. )

MAN

You're sure?

WOMAN

About the big bucks?

Oh yeah.

MAN

You know what I mean-

WOMAN

I do

And I'm sure.

Really.

Go.

Don't worry about me.

MAN

Well, okay...

Call me if you need anything, yeah?

WOMAN

I will.

MAN

I love you.
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.

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.

Nice?

Yeah, nice.

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

Um… yeah?

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

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

I’ll be happy once they’re on your bed.

Momma—

You asked. Now let’s go.

(MOTHER gathers up the sheets.)

I just changed the sheets yesterday.

So we’ll change them again.

That doesn’t make any sense.

It makes perfect sense.

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?

(MOTHER gives WOMAN a look.)

WOMAN
Mom?

MOTHER
Oh, I don’t know. You know me and time.

WOMAN
Why?

MOTHER
Why what?

(WOMAN gives MOTHER a look.)

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

(WOMAN gives MOTHER a look.)

WOMAN
What? I can’t call my son?

MOTHER
In law. Son-in-law—

WOMAN

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

WOMAN

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

WOMAN
I don’t have an—!

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

WOMAN
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
What else did Nathan say?

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?

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—

Mom—

WOMAN

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.

You will?

MOTHER

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.

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

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.

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.

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.”

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 chauffer.

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.

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.

Thanks for the tip.

WOMAN
You’re welcome.

CHURCH LADY
(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?

I like your attitude.

WOMAN

CHURCH LADY
And I like yours.
(beat)
You know, Lena, I’ve been watching you.

Me?

WOMAN

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.”

Oh, well...

WOMAN

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

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

WOMAN

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.

I don’t know about that.

WOMAN

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.”

Should I pour two?

WOMAN
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.)

Thank you.

FRIEND
No, thank you. It’s so good to see you.

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

FRIEND
To you. To your good news.

WOMAN
How about, to friendship?

FRIEND
Yes, to that, too.

(They clink glasses and drink.)

Mm, shit, that’s good.

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

(FRIEND 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.
Whatever that is.

FRIEND

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

WOMAN

Apologies are the worst.

FRIEND

Hello! Everybody’s so fucking sorry. “Lena, I’m sorry.” “I’m so so sorry.” “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—

NIGHB (loud)

I said, stop!

(NEIGHBOR is stunned.)

You wanna know the worst part of all of this?
It’s that.
The placating.

LEN (quiet)

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.

LEN (quiet)

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)

I mean, I can take them back.

(NEIGHBOR reaches for the flowers.)

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.

That sounds lovely.

WOMAN
I’ll send you an email.

CHURCH LADY
I’ll be on the lookout. Thank you for the meal.

WOMAN
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.

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.

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 Erin 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

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.

No thank you.

(beat)

SISTER

Look, I’m sorry about Nathan.

WOMAN

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

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.
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.

I know. And thank you.

I love you, Lena.

I love you, too.

I have something for you.

I thought these things might come in handy.

Oh...

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

I don’t know what to say.

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

Hey, what’s with the face?

Nothing. It’s nothing. I just...

What? What is it?

Are you sure you want to give these things away?

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.

Do you want honey?

WOMAN

SISTER
Yes, please. And milk if it’s not expired.

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

About what?

WOMAN

SISTER
Mom.

Seriously, Lena?

WOMAN

SISTER
I mean, she’s trying.

WOMAN

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

WOMAN

SISTER
But isn’t it the thought that counts?

WOMAN

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

SISTER
I do.

WOMAN

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.

I told you!

SISTER

You did, you did—

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.

Luz.

SISTER

Yeah.

(SISTER squeezes WOMAN.)

WOMAN

It’s a beautiful name.

(SISTER squeezes WOMAN.)

SISTER

(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?
That would be nice.

Coming right up.

(WOMAN prepares tea.)

So mom, what’s the deal with the sheets?

Nikko-

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

Nikko, I give you plenty.

Not anything this nice.

Seriously?

Nikko, just drop it.

Why should I?

Because.

Because isn’t a reason.

Yes, it is.

No, it’s not–

Stop it. Both of you.

Is it because she’s the oldest? The favorite–?

Oh for Christ sake, no. It’s because your sister’s not sleeping.
Wait, what?

SISTER

That’s why I gave her the sheets.

MOTHER

You’re not sleeping? You didn’t tell me that-

SISTER

I’m sleeping fine.

WOMAN

That’s not what Nathan said.

MOTHER

Oh.

SISTER

(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.

Nikko-

MOTHER

What? That shit’s expensive.

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
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.
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?

You’re her mother.

So?

So it’s different.

How? How is it different?

You’re a lot, mom.

Nikko-

What? She is.

How am I a lot?

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

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

She had a pickle—

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)

I need a minute.
Lena—

I said, I need a minute!

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

Not now, Nikko. Lena—

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

Nikko, I said—


(MOTHER looks from SISTER to WOMAN.)

It’s okay, mom. Please. Just go.

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.)

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.)
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.

And honey.

NEIGHBOR
And balsamic vinegar.

CHURCH LADY
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.

You mean, together?

NEIGHBOR

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.

Until the next day.

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

My breasts.

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

MOTHER
Nikko!

What? I did!

SISTER
It’s a legitimate question.

CHURCH LADY
See there!

SISTER
I asked my doctor.

NEIGHBOR
You didn’t!

MOTHER

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.
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
HEEEEEEY!!!

(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.

Jo is pregnant.  

(The women react.)

We just found out.

Congratulations, honey.

Thank you.

We should toast.

Yes, a toast! To Jo!

Oh, no, please—

To the miracle of life then.

That’s lovely.

To hope.

How about... to women.

Yes, to women.

(They go to drink.)

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—
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.)  
WOMAN

For this.  
FRIEND

Oh. No.  
WOMAN

I mean, it just happened.  
FRIEND

Jo—  
WOMAN

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.

WOMAN
Life’s not fair.

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

WOMAN
You didn’t do anything wrong.

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

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

(WOMAN embraces FRIEND.)

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

MOTHER
Amen.

FRIEND
Ugh, I’m a mess.

WOMAN
Me too.

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

MOTHER
Oh, I have some here!

(She goes into her purse.)

SISTER
Mom to the rescue.
(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.

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

7/12/2023
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.

Two tornados.

NATHAN
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.)

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-)

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

WOMAN
Do you?

(A moment and then-)

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?”

“Another, mommy / another.”

FRIEND
“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--