

*NATIONAL NEW PLAY NETWORK
ROLLING WORLD PREMIERE, 2017*

WINTER

a play by

Julie Jensen

inspired by the story "Robeck" by Margaret Pabst Battin

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CHARACTERS:

ANNIS....A woman of advanced age, a retired college English professor and poet, she is slipping mentally. She has spent most of her life “in her head” and has some difficulty with other people. She is wistful, otherworldly, enjoys her own imagination. She might speak haltingly, as suggested in the text by ellipses (...) with odd inflections.

ROBECK....A man of advanced age, her husband, a retired research biologist. He is absorbed by his work, not adept at interpersonal things. Sometimes addled because he’s preoccupied. Seems almost always focused elsewhere.

RODDY....Their older son, in his late 40s, a business man.

EVAN....Their younger son, in his 40s, a barista at Starbucks.

LD....Their granddaughter, in her 20s, a free spirit.

SETTING:

The cluttered living room of an upper middleclass home, over-crowded now with boxes. The set should reflect Annis’ mental state and if possible “deteriorate” during the course of the play, particularly during her “episodes.”

EPISODES:

The “episodes” are theatrical representations of Annis’ state of mind, mini-strokes or TIAs, if you will. Something happens to her that no one else notices. In other words, we are experiencing things from her point of view.

TIME:

The present, around Thanksgiving.

RUNNING TIME:

About 80 minutes.

NOTE:

Characters in this play represent no one living or dead. It is a work of fiction, both as a story and as a play.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

This play was inspired by Peggy Battin’s story and was written for the actress Anne Cullimore Decker. I appreciate the work of both of them in the writing process. I am also grateful to Ann Kimble Loux, who contributed immeasurably throughout. Appreciation also goes to David Kranes, Tom Markus, and Chuck Morey for thoughtful, intelligent reading.

The play had a three-day workshop, directed by Tracy Callahan, dramaturged by Char Nelson, with Anne Cullimore Decker as Annis, Ron Frederickson as Robeck, Dan Beecher as Roddy, Cragun Foulger as Evan, and Anne Brings as LD.

It also had a reading at Plan-B Theatre's Playwrights Lab in Salt Lake City, with Bob Nelson as Robeck and otherwise the same cast. It had an additional reading with the same cast at Salt Lake Writing Company and at Salt Lake Acting Company.

WINTER was presented as a National New Play Network Rolling World Premiere in association with Salt Lake Acting Company (Utah), Rivendell Theatre (Illinois) and Central Works (California).

WINTERby **Julie Jensen**

We are in the cluttered living room of an upper middleclass home. A half dozen boxes litter the floor. It is night.

ANNIS, older, appears in the doorway, she looks frightened, confused. She checks the windows and moves across the room to the study where she finds ROBECK, also older, ensconced behind a wall of books, strangely lit by a small lamp. She watches him for a moment. Nothing. She moves back into the living room.

ANNIS

I had that terrible...dream again.

ROBECK

Huh? Oh. Sorry. I'll be right with you.

ANNIS

It's actually clearer to me now than experiences from my life. Frightening.

ROBECK

(Preoccupied.) Just let me finish this...one thing.

ANNIS

You know what it's about, don't you?

ROBECK

(Preoccupied.) Mmmm?

ANNIS

Having to find a new place...to live.

ROBECK

What's that?

ANNIS

One should not have to find a new house...in old age.

ROBECK

You do not have to find a new house in old age.

ANNIS

I do, if we do not get out first.

ROBECK

You're just obsessing, Annis.

ANNIS

Obsessing, compressing, distressing, regressing.

ROBECK

It's a dream, for god sake. A figment. A nothing.

ANNIS

Then explain why the boys...are coming.

ROBECK

(Lecturing.) They come every year for Thanksgiving, dear. They've been doing it for twenty-two years.

ANNIS

They don't stay a full week.

ROBECK

I think it's nice of them.

ANNIS

They've got work to do this time.

ROBECK

(Returning to his work.) They're busy with their own lives. They don't have time to worry about us.

ANNIS

They're...worried about me. I know Roddy is. He asks questions.

ROBECK

What kinds of questions?

ANNIS

Leading.

ROBECK

Such as?

ANNIS

"Mother. Why don't you take up golf?"

ROBECK

(Lecturing.) That's not a leading question. That's an idle question. Leading, idle, two different--

ANNIS

He's thinking about that damn Crown Princess Palace place. With the golf course and the goose poop on the patio. I am not...moving there.

ROBECK

Well, neither am I.

ANNIS

Good. We can both...refuse together.

ROBECK

Whatever you say....

ANNIS

Because we will be...making our own way out.

ROBECK

Of course we will, one day.

She moves to a box, making sure the tape is sticking.

ANNIS

I have boxed up everything from my desk.

ROBECK

That's good, very responsible.

ANNIS

And I've taped up all the boxes. I don't...want anyone in my drawers.

ROBECK

(Chuckling.) I should hope not!

ANNIS

(Oh-him look.) I don't want them going through my notes, my papers. It's a vindication. Violation. Validation. (Smiling.) One of the above.

ROBECK

They would never be interested in your notes, your papers.

ANNIS

Roddy's wife would be interested.

ROBECK

Maybe if you had less to hide, you'd be less worried.

ANNIS

Everyone has something to hide. It's our God-given right...to have something to hide.

ROBECK

I have nothing to hide.

ANNIS

That makes you less interesting. It does not make you...morally superior.

ROBECK

You're prickly tonight. Cactus in winter.

Pause.

ANNIS

When will the boys be here?

ROBECK

(Back at his work.) I don't know.

ANNIS

But it's tonight?

ROBECK

Yes, it's tonight.

ANNIS

I wish Leah were coming. She would keep her brothers from driving into the ditch on...this subject.

ROBECK

Maybe so--

ANNIS

She was a sure and settled person.

ROBECK

Sure and settled?

ANNIS

I could tell that when she was a child. She was a sure and settled...child. She was a comfort to me.

ROBECK

(Absorbed in something else.) I guess she was.

ANNIS

When she died, I understood death...as the other half of a breath.

ROBECK

Ummm.

ANNIS

How long, I wonder...how long does it take...to get over such things?

ROBECK

Forever, my dear, forever.

ANNIS

Forever....

She crosses to the fireplace.

You've never had one of these, have you?

ROBECK

(Absorbed elsewhere.) One of what?

ANNIS

Repeated dreams.

ROBECK

No. I don't think so.

ANNIS

Roddy's wife meets me in a big driveway...and tells me to go into this very large house....

ROBECK

Wait. What does this have to do with Roddy's wife?

ANNIS

In the dream, Grace meets me in the driveway and tells me to go into this...very large house and figure out where to live in it. I go in. There are people in cages. Shivering, huddled together...moaning. And I cannot figure out...where to live.

ROBECK

Oh yes, the dog pound dream. (Chuckling.)

ANNIS

It's very cold. Snow blowing under the doors. And I have no shoes.

ROBECK

You're just an anxious ant tonight. Take a Xanax, why don't you?

ANNIS

I don't need a Xanax.

She moves to the door of the study.

What are you doing there? It's very...late.

ROBECK

One of the mice is dead.

She's playing with him during this scene.

ANNIS

Did one mouse kill another? Cain kill Abel?

ROBECK

Looks that way.

ANNIS

Did one mouse eat another?

ROBECK

Eviscerate.

ANNIS

Eviscerate, obliterate, regurgitate. (Playing with stuff on the mantel.) Regurgitate, abdicate, depopulate!

ROBECK

Something like that.

ANNIS

What does that mean about the generous gene?

ROBECK

Too early to tell.

ANNIS

It could mean there is no generous gene.

ROBECK

It does not mean that.

ANNIS

I think it does.

ROBECK

But you don't know what you're talking about.

ANNIS

I do know what I'm talking about. (Reciting by rote.) "There is a behavior in all species, that when faced with over-crowding, will exhibit generous behavior."

ROBECK

Yes.

ANNIS

(Smiling.) The Jesus gene!

ROBECK

This is not a joke, Annis.

ANNIS

Well, mice are not generous; I can tell you that.

ROBECK

It can also be called self-sacrificing behavior.

ANNIS

Self-sacrificing behavior. I like that. Let us now discuss self-sacrifice.

ROBECK

Annis, please. An end to this.

ANNIS

Yes, right: an end to this.

ROBECK

Hush now.

ANNIS

The mice died in that other study. What's his name? That other...studier?

ROBECK

(Back to his work now.) Calhoun.

ANNIS

Calhoun, balloon, baboon, buffoon.

ROBECK

This is not Calhoun!

ANNIS

In the Calhoun study, didn't the mice...die?

ROBECK

They did.

ANNIS

And didn't they eat one another?

ROBECK

They did.

ANNIS

Disproving the theory...of the generous gene.

ROBECK

Calhoun was reinterpreted and disproved. This is not Calhoun.

ANNIS

Of course not.

ROBECK

This is not a replication of Calhoun.

ANNIS

Whatever you say. Calhoun, harpoon, lampoon, raccoon.

Pause.

Can I see it?

ROBECK

See what?

ANNIS

The dead mouse.

ROBECK

What for?

ANNIS

I find I am more compelled...of late...by dead things.

ROBECK brings out a dead mouse on a board.

This is a cheese board.

ROBECK

Now it's a mouse board.

ANNIS studies the mouse for several moments, then wraps the mouse in a fabric coaster.

Pause.

ANNIS

What...is the reason we're not already gone?

ROBECK

Annie, I don't want to keep repeating this.

ANNIS

You don't understand what's going on with me.

ROBECK

Of course I do.

ANNIS

You are not inside my head. You don't know.

ROBECK

It's just the holidays. They always upset you.

ANNIS

I am losing my moorings, Robeck. I could end up like my mother. I will not end up like my mother.

ROBECK

You will not end up like your mother.

ANNIS

She was violent at the end....

ROBECK

You are not violent, please....

ANNIS

(Singing.) "Threatened a nurse with a paring knife."

ROBECK

She was long gone by then.

ANNIS

I do not want to be...long gone.

ROBECK

Please, Annie, think about something else.

ANNIS

You promised, Ro. We'd go out together. Help...one another.

ROBECK

And I'll keep that promise.

ANNIS

You said a year ago we'd go on Solstice, then you postponed it to Equinox. It's winter now. You keep moving...the goal posts.

ROBECK

I want to finish the study.

ANNIS

Just so you know...I'm waiting, Dr. Godot.

ROBECK

Hush now, please.

He pats her and returns to his study.

ANNIS

I'm making a list of all the things I'll be happy...not to do again. Getting on the scale, I'll be happy not to do that again. Doing the income tax, I'll be happy not to do that again. Listening to the tales of the mice, I'll be happy not to do that again.

ROBECK

I thought you liked the stories of the mice.

ANNIS

It's an impossible notion, marriage: put two people together...to see the same movies, read the same books, listen to the same music, and then ask them to remain interested in one another....

ROBECK

The mice are compelling, I think.

ANNIS

...Little wonder marriages don't last.

ANNIS picks up the cheeseboard with the wrapped mouse on it, and moves to the fireplace.

Cremation: the act of making something into cream.

She lets the mouse slide into the fire.

"Ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

She hums "Taps." Then she stops abruptly, the board slips from her hand. She stands frozen. It's one of her "episodes." Something in the house might change. Maybe there's snow. Maybe something moves. When it's over, she looks confused, frightened. Pause.

I want...to put our plans in writing, Ro.

ROBECK

(Involved in his work again.) Not yet. We don't have to do that yet.

ANNIS

I think we do.

ROBECK

Then you put it in writing. You're the writing person.

ANNIS

I can't remember how to type!

ROBECK

Then I'll write it. When the experiment is done, I'll write it all down.

ANNIS

This matters to me, Ro.

ROBECK

It matters to both of us.

He comes out of his study to comfort her.

ANNIS

When...are the boys coming?

ROBECK

For Thanksgiving.

ANNIS

*They're not coming **for** Thanksgiving. They're coming for to go through our things...**on** Thanksgiving.*

ROBECK

Hush now. (He sits on the arm of the couch.) Listen to this, they called me from the lab today. Wanted to drop off thirteen boxes of books. I said, "I don't have room for thirteen boxes of books," and they said, "What about your garage? We can leave them anywhere." "Very well," I said, "leave them where they are."

He laughs. She laughs.

ANNIS

And they did not find that funny.

ROBECK

They don't have room for my books!

ANNIS

We are living in the post-book era. Libraries are...becoming extinct.

ROBECK

It's barbarous.

ANNIS

It's necessary.

ROBECK returns to his study.

ANNIS moves to mantle, grabs four books, takes them to a window, opens it.

It is the end...of the written word, as we know it.

ROBECK

Do you think it means something?

ANNIS

Everything...means something.

She drops the books out the window.

ROBECK

But do you think they're trying to tell me something?

ANNIS

I expect they are.

ROBECK

*But I am not a has-been. I am still a productive member of the team! An active member of the of the of the scientific community. I am **not** a has-been!*

ANNIS

It's the end of life...as it "has been."

ROBECK

*I am **not** a has-been!*

ROBECK moves out of his study.

Do we have any more stamps?

ANNIS

Kitchen drawer, I think....

ROBECK moves off to the kitchen.

Are the boys...coming tonight?

ROBECK

Yes. How many times do I have to tell you?

ANNIS

When?

ROBECK

Whenever they arrive.

ANNIS

But they are coming tonight, yes?

ROBECK

Tonight, yes.

ROBECK re-enters, putting yellow legal pages in a large envelope. Then he notes the mantle. Stops.

Wait just a minute! Where are my books?

ANNIS

What books?

ROBECK

My three books. They're gone.

ANNIS

I dropped them. In the fire. Down the drain. Out the door. One of the above.

ROBECK

Those are my books. My copies. They're out of print. Goddamnit!

ANNIS

*(Quietly, smiling.) "My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair."*

ROBECK

*You tossed **my** books out the door?*

ANNIS

And mine, too. It's a metaphor.

ROBECK

It's crazy. Besides which, they are mine. I wrote them and I own them.

ANNIS

And all of that is over. Don't you feel lighter?

ROBECK

I feel under siege. I won't have it.

He moves to the front door. Gets on his winter gear.

ANNIS

Where are you going?

ROBECK

I'm going to put this in the mailbox. Maxine will feed it into the computer. Then I'm going to get my books from the yard.

ANNIS

Yes. And then?

ROBECK

And then we'll talk about this.

ANNIS

Good. Because I think...it's time.

ROBECK

I know what you think.

He exits with a large envelope. Fade down.

Fade up. It's later that night. RODDY, in his 40s, is quietly searching drawers. Someone outside knocks, then rattles the doorknob, and rings the doorbell. RODDY answers the door. It's EVAN, his younger brother, also in his 40s, who stands there holding a large bag of popcorn.

EVAN

(Loudly.) Who the hell's got the place on lock-down?

RODDY

Quiet, man, everyone's asleep! It was Grace locked us up. She likes things safe.

EVAN

The warden-woman. (Entering.) Well, welcome home, big bro.

RODDY

Welcome home, little bro.

They bump fists.

EVAN

I didn't have time to pack.

RODDY

So instead you just brought everything you own?

EVAN

(He chuckles.) Pretty much.

He plops on the couch and bounces.

This is a good couch. I forget how much I like this couch.

RODDY

Do you even own a couch?

EVAN

Yes. It makes out into a bed. I sleep on it. You want some of these?

RODDY

What are they?

EVAN

Einstein popcorn.

RODDY takes a couple.

They make you smart.

They both chew.

You look older.

RODDY

So do you.

EVAN

When's the last time you got carded?

RODDY

Ten, twelve years ago. Grad school, I guess. You?

EVAN

Three months ago. Damn record!

EVAN musses RODDY's head.

RODDY

If looking like an adolescent is your goal.

RODDY punches EVAN, then moves over to the desk.

So...what's your schedule for the next few weeks?

EVAN

I go to work. Why?

RODDY

I mean, do you have anything big?

EVAN

What's big?

RODDY

Don't be an asshole, all right? I just want to know if you can give me some time.

EVAN

Yeah, I can give you some time. Only how come I'm giving it to you?

RODDY

Don't. Be. An. Asshole.

EVAN moves to the window and looks out at the cityscape.

EVAN

There was this wreck on the freeway coming into the city. Traffic backed up. That's why I'm late. Look at that. Nothing moving northbound. I came in on surface streets. LD here yet?

RODDY

Not yet.

EVAN

Cop cars always associated with Leah for me. Brings the whole thing back. Does that happen to you?

RODDY

No. Not really.

EVAN

The snow. The flashing lights, the orange tape. You don't remember that?

RODDY

Of course I remember it.

EVAN

But it doesn't all come flooding back?

RODDY

No.

EVAN

That's because you didn't care enough.

RODDY

Please, Ev. Civil behavior here, what say?

EVAN

I actually believed Leah died because after the accident you didn't wish hard enough for her to live.

RODDY

A kid's version of how the world works.

EVAN

My own version of how powerful you were.

RODDY

Look, Evan, there are some things I need to talk to you about.

EVAN twirls around on the desk chair.

EVAN

Speak, Kemo Sabe.

RODDY

Well, Mother's not doing well. She's getting worse.

EVAN

And....

RODDY

And...I have run onto some disturbing--

EVAN

Oh god, Roddy, you've been going through their stuff again.

RODDY

I'm worried about her. I think she's planning something. She's got all these boxes with our names on them.

EVAN

So what?

RODDY

Stuff in them like old watches and photographs.

EVAN

How do you know?

RODDY

How do you think?

EVAN

Roddy, that's out of line.

RODDY

Didn't you get the call: "Do you want the car or the timeshare?"

EVAN

Everything's not a damn international emergency.

RODDY

They gave away the Andrew Wyeth. To guess who?

EVAN

Who?

RODDY

The cleaning lady!

EVAN

Good idea. She should have the Andrew Wyeth.

RODDY

She knows nothing about a damn Andrew Wyeth.

EVAN

She's been cleaning "a damn Andrew Wyeth" for 25 years. Spent more time with "a damn Andrew Wyeth" than anyone in the family.

RODDY

It's worth thirty thou, you know. Charcoal drawing. Doesn't matter. Still worth major money.

EVAN

Good. I hope she sells it and buys something that pleases her. And while she's at it, a house to put it in.

RODDY

You just insist on being a damned idiot, don't you?

RODDY pulls out a drawer from the coffee table.

EVAN

And get out of those drawers!

RODDY

I'm worried about them, Ev. They really need to move out of here.

EVAN

If you move them, you'll destroy the only order they've ever known.

RODDY shows him the drawer.

RODDY

This is not order!

EVAN

There's more than one kind of order.

RODDY replaces the drawer with a loud thud.

Shhhh! (Quieter.) Don't you remember how hard it was to move? Like throwing up, only it lasts for months. You didn't move as much as I did.

RODDY

No, I did not.

EVAN

It takes three weeks to find the scissors. And there's never any Scotch tape.

RODDY

Our mother is seriously losing it.

EVAN

And if you move her, she'll never find it.

RODDY

So you don't think they're ready?

EVAN

I don't think they should be moved yet.

RODDY

"Yet." Then you agree that it's just a matter of time?

EVAN

Everything's just a matter of time, Rodmel. Between birth and death is "just a matter of time."

RODDY

You're trying my patience here, bub.

EVAN

Look man, I've been doing all of it up to now.

RODDY

All of what?

EVAN

All of caring for the Ps.

RODDY

Yes, I know you have. But I'm gonna help you now.

EVAN

Your idea of helping is to run things.

RODDY

Most things need running, I've found.

EVAN

I'm sure you think so.

RODDY

Besides, I can't just come flying across the country at a moment's notice to take care of things.

EVAN

Meaning that you have time now in your otherwise busy schedule to put your parents away. But a month from now or a year from now, your schedule may not permit it?

RODDY

I have a responsible position.

EVAN

Shut the hell up.

RODDY

It's not my fault you live in one room of an old hotel.

EVAN

I don't give a shit where I live. I don't give a shit where you live. I give a shit that you're such a shit!

RODDY

Calm down! (Quieter.) You and I piss each other off. There's nothing we can do about that.

EVAN

Except kill each other.

RODDY shrugs.

I always knew you wanted me dead. That's the thing about being a younger brother: you're aware at all times that someone out there wants you dead.

RODDY

Poor pitiful you. Poor pitiful Pooh.

EVAN kicks RODDY. RODDY pushes him back.

EVAN

By the way, Mom hated that stupid Crown Royal place.

RODDY

Crown Properties.

EVAN

That's your idea of where they ought to live?

RODDY

How do you know she hated it?

EVAN

She looked at the sky the whole time.

RODDY

Her mind wanders.

EVAN

Her mind wanders when she wants it to wander.

RODDY

That place is spectacular.

EVAN

Mom doesn't like sliding doors.

RODDY

Backs up on a golf course, for Christ sake.

EVAN

She doesn't want to live there.

RODDY

I don't want to go to work every day either.

EVAN

Not quite the same thing. What the hell is the big rush, anyway?

RODDY

Hell, if you were in charge, the great pyramids would be a pile of three stones in the desert.

EVAN flips a piece of popcorn at RODDY.

EVAN

You make my teeth ache.

RODDY

I'm worried about them, Ev. Look at this place.

EVAN

It's how they like it.

RODDY

They need help. Can't you see that?

EVAN shrugs.

Listen. I've got this idea. I want to talk to you about it.

EVAN

You want me to take them in. The answer is no.

RODDY

Just let me explore this idea with you.

EVAN

I live in one room. You've got a house the size of a public park.

RODDY

I have nice things. I work hard.

EVAN

And no one else does.

RODDY

I do not want to argue with you about money.

EVAN

Your house has five bathrooms.

RODDY

And yours has one, or is that shared? God, you don't even have a yard.

EVAN

Does your yard bring you joy?

RODDY

*Bring me what? Did you just say "joy"? You **are** gay, aren't you?*

EVAN

It's a theory of possessions. Does it bring you joy? It's a question you ask yourself about each of your possessions. Those possessions that do not bring you joy, you pass them on. It's in a book. People talk about it.

RODDY

We don't talk about it.

EVAN

No, you talk about the big issues, like whether to buy a Lexus or an Escalade.

RODDY

We don't talk about "joy," I can tell you that.

EVAN

Well if you did, you would have to look at your...garden hose and ask yourself, "Does this garden hose bring me joy?" It would be taxing for you. Those of us with fewer possessions, we can ask that question.

RODDY

God, Evan, you sound so crazy sometimes.

EVAN

*I **am** crazy but only half the time. And you don't know which half.*

EVAN throws some popcorn in his mouth.

RODDY

All right, now listen to this, Ev. And pay attention. This is a great idea. Grace and I worked it out on the way here. You listening?

EVAN

Yes.

RODDY

Why don't you move out of your place, "your room," and move in here?

EVAN

No.

RODDY

You could have the whole upstairs--

EVAN

I said no, Roddy.

RODDY

You could set it up like you want. Have a whole apartment up there. I don't care, they wouldn't care.

EVAN

I care, Bronco. I don't want to move into the bedrooms upstairs.

RODDY

You could look in on them now and then. In exchange for free housing!

EVAN

The answer's no.

RODDY

They have Starbucks here. You could get on there--

EVAN

A thousand times no!

RODDY

Maybe you could just think about it.

EVAN

I don't have a house, Roddy. That does not mean I don't have a life.

RODDY grabs another drawer and is rifling through it.

And. Stay. Out. Of. Their. Damn. Drawers!

EVAN grabs RODDY, pushes him away, and closes the drawer.

I mean it.

RODDY

She's got a little book with all her passwords in it. Where is it?

EVAN

She doesn't use that anymore.

RODDY

Then where are they?

EVAN

I don't know.

RODDY

Well, can you find out?

EVAN

No.

RODDY

We have to have them, Evan. Their bank account could be overdrawn.

EVAN

(Trying to change the subject.) So what are all these boxes doing here?

RODDY

*That's what I'm telling you. Some of them have our names on them. Here's one for you.
"For my little guy Evan."*

EVAN

What's yours say?

RODDY

"For my big boy Roddy."

EVAN

They're downsizing.

RODDY

This is beyond downsizing.

EVAN

Why don't you just let them do it the way they want?

RODDY

Do what?

EVAN

Get out of here.

RODDY

Meaning what?

EVAN

Meaning "get out of here."

RODDY

They have been thinking about suicide, haven't they?

EVAN

It's called something else. Self-deliverance, I think.

RODDY

And you let them?

EVAN

How do you stop someone's thoughts?

RODDY

You tell them, "You can't think about that!"

EVAN

Oh. Let me write that on my hand.

RODDY

Well, we can't have that going on. That kind of thinking.

EVAN

*You don't have to think about it. It's something **they** think about.*

RODDY

And you participate in it? In these discussions?

EVAN

It's something we talk about, yes.

RODDY

Jesus, you could go to jail for this!

EVAN

It's something older people talk about. They want to make a good end.

RODDY

*This will **not** happen on my watch!*

EVAN

(Quieter.) Calm down, please.

RODDY picks up his mother's purse. Goes through it.

And stay out of their stuff!

RODDY

All right.....take a look at this.

RODDY holds up a sheet of paper. EVAN swipes at it. RODDY pulls it out of reach.

Airline ticket.

EVAN

Put it back.

RODDY

Did you know this was in there?

EVAN

No.

RODDY

Gatwick.

EVAN

So?

RODDY

So, what's she gonna do in England?

EVAN

Look at it, I guess.

RODDY

She's never been to England.

EVAN

And she's always wanted to go.

RODDY

One.

EVAN

One what?

RODDY

One ticket.

EVAN

Well, Dad's busy with the mice.

RODDY

She can't go off to England by herself.

EVAN

Why the hell not?

RODDY

What if something happens to her there?

EVAN

They'll ship her home.

RODDY

Jeeze, talking to you is like trying to drill a hole in cement.

RODDY throws the purse at EVAN but misses.

EVAN

Then why don't you take them in?

RODDY

That's not on the table.

EVAN

Hell, they could live in "the bathroom suite" on the second floor.

RODDY

We cannot take them in. Grace would have to quit work. I'm not going to do that to her. She deserves a chance to work.

EVAN

Because you need more money?

RODDY

Because she's good at it. Besides, she doesn't get along with Mother. They're totally different people. You look at people who've taken in their parents. And who is it that suffers? It's the women.

EVAN

Who told you that?

RODDY

Grace. And she's right. Isn't she right?

EVAN

She's right.

RODDY

Damn right she's right. She's like that, really smart sometimes....

EVAN

But not as smart as you....

RODDY

...She'll drive you crazy nine days out of ten. Then on the tenth day, she'll say something so smart, it blows your head back.

EVAN

Yeah, she's smart. She's not as hot as she used to be. But I think she's smart.

RODDY

You thought she was hot?

EVAN

When I was in the seventh grade, I thought she was hot. Of course, in the seventh grade raw fruit was hot.

RODDY moves one of the boxes and stands on it, checking a bookshelf.

RODDY

Where's that coin collection that used to belong to Granddad?

EVAN

How many times do I have to tell you? Stay out of their stuff.

EVAN pushes RODDY but does not get him off the box.

RODDY

Where is it?

EVAN

Dad had it.

RODDY

I know Dad had it. Where is it now?

EVAN

Safe deposit box?

RODDY

And where's the key to that?

EVAN

Bank, maybe?

RODDY

Hell, you're no better than they are.

RODDY runs onto a bottle, takes a look at it.

(Sotto voce.) Good god. Do you know what this is?

EVAN swipes at the bottle. RODDY pulls it out of reach.

EVAN

Give me that.

RODDY

Do you know what it is?

EVAN

None of your business, you nosey shit.

RODDY

It's Pentobarbital. From Mexico. (He shakes it.) Liquid form. Put you out in two and a half minutes.

EVAN

Give me that.

He swipes at it again. RODDY pulls it out of the way.

RODDY

It's what they use to euthanize animals.

EVAN

And it is none of your goddamn business. Give it to me.

RODDY

You know what this means?

EVAN

She's having trouble sleeping.

RODDY

She is a danger to herself and others, that is what it means.

EVAN grabs the bottle. They both struggle, moving toward the couch. EVAN gets the bottle away from RODDY as RODDY pushes EVAN down on the couch. EVAN puts the bottle down his pants.

EVAN

Come get it, come get it.

RODDY

I'm not having it. I'm not having it!

RODDY gets up.

And get your junk out of here.

RODDY picks up the bag of popcorn and drops it on EVAN.

This is a holiday, god damn it, this is a goddamn holiday!

RODDY stomps out. EVAN lies breathless on the couch. He gets up, sighs in frustration, and throws a dismissive gesture in RODDY's direction. He puts the bottle in his mother's purse and moves off with his bag of popcorn. Fade down.

Music bridge.

Fade up. It's later that night. We hear the doorbell ring twice and then several "code" knocks. ANNIS runs in, disheveled, confused. She stands still for a moment, getting her bearings. She's wearing nightclothes and a robe. The doorbell rings twice more. She opens the door. It is snowing. A woman, 20-something, is standing there, snow-covered. This is LD, her granddaughter.

ANNIS

It's the Little Match Girl!

LD

(A burst of laughter. She charges in. She's been drinking.) Oh hell, what time is it?

ANNIS is not pleased with her condition.

ANNIS

It's late.

LD

(Calling to them.) And where the hell are those uncles of mine?

ANNIS

Sleeping.

LD

Oh-oh! Shhhhhh.

She laughs.

Oops, you wanted to talk to me about something. Have I screwed that up?

ANNIS

You haven't screwed it up, but you'll need your senses.

ANNIS takes her coat.

LD

A couple of old friends from the U showed up at the bar. We stayed after closing for a drink or two.

She picks up a bottle and a glass to pour a drink. ANNIS takes the bottle from her.

But I got me a job. Easy peasy. Bar X, you know where that is.

ANNIS

Can't you do better than that?

LD

They do a good business. I'd rather be at the Red Door. But I'll probably make more money at Bar-X.

ANNIS

And your house?

LD

*A fucking mess. I'll show it to you from the outside sometime. It looks cool **that** way. And...I might go to Afghanistan.*

ANNIS

You might what?

LD

Jonas, the film guy at the U? He needs a couple of good women to help him shoot a film about girls' education in Afghanistan. He thinks I'm a good woman.

ANNIS

And so you are.

LD

And so we agree! Besides, he's got a big...grant.

ANNIS

When?

LD

Not till next year.

ANNIS

Promise me something before you agree to this. Promise me you'll read six books on Afghanistan first.

LD

Six books?

ANNIS

I don't want you to go over there an American idiot.

LD

(Attitude.) All right. I'll read six books.

She notes the boxes.

Looks like you're getting rid of stuff.

ANNIS

A box for each of your uncles. But most of this is your Pop's library from the university. They're making room for the new guy.

LD

They're still letting him do his mouse stuff, though?

ANNIS

They took his lab away....Then he got so despondent, we devised a way to bring the mice home. He's still testing, but the data is compromised. I'm sure you can see why.

LD

Poor ole popping Pop.

She reaches for a glass. ANNIS takes it from her.

ANNIS

You need to sober up. I'm making you some tea.

ANNIS goes off. LD picks up her grandmother's purse.

ANNIS

(Off.) You know, I've decided to go to England.

LD

(Calling.) Good for you.

ANNIS

(Off.) My grandmother was born there. Leeds.

LD

(Calling.) There's a castle in Leeds. I know all about it.

LD takes \$20 from the purse, puts it in her pocket.

(Calling off.) I wrote a report on it in fifth grade.

ANNIS re-enters with a tray, a pot, two cups and some sliced lemons.

ANNIS

I thought maybe you'd like to go with me.

LD

To England....

ANNIS

You've never been, have you?

LD

If you didn't take me, I didn't go.

ANNIS

Move your feet. (from the coffee table.)

LD

England. That would be way cool. Remember I read a bunch of books by those English dudes. That was right after my mother died, and I wouldn't go to school. Remember that?

ANNIS

How could I forget?

LD

You were home schooling me, and you said, "If you'll read, just read, we'll get you through." And I says, "Hell, I can read!" It's like you thought I couldn't read. So I started on the A's in the library and worked my way through. I tell you this, you can grow up a little twisted if that's how you spend your adolescence.

ANNIS

My ticket is in my purse there. Get it, please. And make yourself a reservation to match it.

LD hands the purse to her grandmother. ANNIS hands it back.

Take my credit card. And take some cash from the side pocket.

LD

I already did.

ANNIS

You did?

LD

Yeah.

ANNIS

Good. Take all the money you need. Just don't take...more than you need.

LD

What if they fire my ass? And you know they will....

ANNIS

Then you'll get a job more suited to your education.

LD takes the credit card, puts it in her pocket.

What happened to that Asian boy? What was his name?

LD

Leo?

ANNIS

Leo. Yes. What happened to Leo?

LD

Good in bed, a bore otherwise.

ANNIS

Well, such men have a place in the world. You just don't have to marry them.

LD

I think marriage needs to be rethought.

ANNIS

(Toasting with their tea.) I couldn't agree with you more.

LD

So why did you want me to come over?

ANNIS moves to the desk and picks up a box.

ANNIS

I wanted to give you this.

ANNIS hands LD a box.

Your mother's...things.

LD

Oh, yeah? Cool.

She's wary of it. Doesn't pick it up.

ANNIS

It's hard for me to give away her things. But now they're yours....

She sets it on the couch.

LD

Thank you, Gram. That's very cool. Wait, will this stuff creep me out?

ANNIS

I don't think so.

LD

Why are you giving it to me now?

ANNIS

(Referring to the contents of the box.) Everything's marked. All I know about whatever it is, I wrote it all down.

LD

I will take really good care of this, Gram, even if I move a lot.

ANNIS

Thank you.

LD

But I don't think I'll open it now. Might be a downer.

ANNIS

(Disappointed.) No, don't open it now.

LD

You know, what she did still pisses me off.

ANNIS

Me too.

LD

Not a damn thing to do about it.

ANNIS

Except to remember that she was tormented.

LD

So she decided to torment us?

ANNIS

She was haunted.

LD

She was selfish.

ANNIS

She was fine when you were born. Happy for a while. But she was too young and so alone. By the time she came back here when you were....

LD

Twelve.

ANNIS

Twelve. There was a vacant look in her eyes.

LD

She did it on purpose.

ANNIS

I don't think she had a choice.

LD

She walked out of the house with a blanket. We're in there watching Dark Victory. She walks out of the house, around the corner, and straight out in front of that guy's van.

ANNIS

She always said she felt doomed. And I believe she was.

LD

She didn't even leave a note.

ANNIS

She was already gone, long gone before that night.

LD

She knew what she was doing. And she did it on purpose.

ANNIS

It's more complicated than that.

LD

Bullshit!

Pause.

ANNIS

(Quieter.) I had been waiting for it to happen. I knew it would.

LD

You were waiting for it?

ANNIS

It was only a matter of time.

LD

Why didn't you stop her?

ANNIS

*I tried. God knows, I tried. But finally...I could only **try** to understand.*

LD

(Under her breath.) She had no right.

ANNIS

No right?

LD

To leave me.

LD falls into her grandmother's arms.

ANNIS

We must understand it from her point of view.

LD

I don't know how.

ANNIS

It's our job.

LD

What is?

ANNIS

To understand things from a point of view...other than our own.

LD

Did you just make that up?

ANNIS

No. It's what you tell freshman about reading fiction.

They both laugh.

I like hearing your....

ANNIS has an episode. The boys change something with the set, dismantle something. She watches them. LD watches her grandmother, confused.

LD

Gram....

Pause as ANNIS gets her bearings.

ANNIS

(Dazed.) Do you need money?

LD

No. What just happened to you?

Pause.

Tell me. What the hell is wrong with you?

Pause.

ANNIS

I'm losing it.

LD

Losing what?

ANNIS taps her head.

No....

ANNIS

Get my phone number and Social Security numbers mixed up.

LD

That could happen to anyone.

ANNIS

Yesterday I forgot my own sister's name. And what about the damned alphabet?

LD

What about it?

ANNIS

Can't get through it. Big chunks of my mind fall away, like an avalanche. Again and again. They get worse, I get worse. Forever.

LD

Friend of mine, her grandmother had them.

ANNIS

Then you know.

LD

Except everyone's different.

ANNIS

Horseshit.

LD laughs in spite of herself.

You know what this is like? It's like walking up to a fence, your face...touching the wire.

LD

What's like that?

ANNIS

Your mother used to say she had barbed wire wrapped around her eyes.

LD

I am not following you, Gram.

ANNIS

(Another way of explaining it.) Nursing homes are full of mindless people who all said at some point, "I will not live like that." And yet they are...living like that.

LD

You're not in a nursing home.

ANNIS

But it's approaching like the Four Horsemen of the Apostrophe.

LD

Apocalypse.

ANNIS

My face is against the wire. I can glimpse the future.

LD

And it is....

ANNIS

...It is unacceptable.

LD

Oh god.

ANNIS

Your Pop and I had a pact. But it has been...impossible for him to keep it.

LD

Because of the mice.

ANNIS

Because of the mice.

LD

And you ain't got no mice.

ANNIS

No mice.

LD

So why are you telling me this?

ANNIS takes her to the couch.

ANNIS

So you won't be taken by surprise.

LD

But you're still good. Still funny....

ANNIS

One must leave before the last possible minute. Or else the time slips by...when you can make it happen.

LD

But we need you, Gram.

ANNIS

Don't be silly.

LD

Okay, we love you.

ANNIS

Nothing wrong with that.

LD

I can't stand the thought...that there will be no more of you.

ANNIS

There will be no more of me anyway.

LD

Oh, please, Gram....

They cuddle up on the couch.

ANNIS

There are moments, of course, when I feel young again. Laughing, waiting for the world to open so I can step in. But then it closes, because I'm old and I do not belong. I am old. I belong over there. Separate and apart.

LD

I do not agree.

ANNIS moves to the window.

ANNIS

Now then, I need some advice. When the times comes, I need someone to help drive me up the mountain. I must follow someone else's car. I could drive there myself. But I get...lost now.

She speaks rapidly now, having prepared this list.

I thought about getting a taxi, but they'd drive back down and report me to the police. Then there's Evan. But he would cry and break my heart. And Roddy. Roddy would drive me to the hospital first—

LD

They lead you up the mountain, then what?

ANNIS

Then they drive back.

LD

Without you?

ANNIS

The rest...is all planned. Nothing to do with anyone else. There will be a signed letter in my coat, explaining it all to all, especially the police. This is all my doing.

LD

But not now.

ANNIS

No. Not now.

LD

Then when?

ANNIS

When it's time.

LD

But not now....

ANNIS

No, when it's time.

LD

Maybe I can do that, Gram. I need to think.

ANNIS

No, it is not a job for you, sweetheart.

LD

What about Pop?

ANNIS

Yes, it should be him. But no.

LD

I think I can do it. I want to help you.

ANNIS

You want to help me? No.

LD

Gram, I get it. I understand. I know why you're doing it.

ANNIS

You do?.

LD

I'll talk to Evan. But let me be the one.

ANNIS reaches for LD's hand.

ANNIS

Oh my god.

LD

I'm an adult. Don't forget it.

ANNIS

Thank you. My dear LD.

She hugs LD.

LD

By the way, now that I'm back here, you think I could go by my real name?

ANNIS

You've always been LD.

LD

It's not my name.

ANNIS

Leah and Leah's Daughter--LD. I always liked it.

LD

I am not my mother. A friend of mine got tired of her childhood name. So now she's Obsidian.

ANNIS

Is that a threat?

LD

Could be.

ANNIS

I'll try and remember. But no promises.

ANNIS taps her head.

Then there's one more thing. And you must remember it. If I tell you we must go to the grocery store for...lemons, we are both to drop whatever we're doing, and go off...to get lemons. Are you with me?

LD

Go off to get lemons.

ANNIS

Together.

LD

Go off to get lemons together.

ANNIS

That's all there is. Does that make sense?

LD

I guess so.

They could go on. They don't.

ANNIS

Thank you, dear.

Beat. Brand new subject.

Are you staying here tonight?

LD

No, I'll come over tomorrow. Are you cooking?

ANNIS

Grace is taking over.

LD

Wonderful idea.

ANNIS

You and I will have to set the table.

LD

And so we will try very hard to get the forks right.

ANNIS

Left.

LD

And not succeed.

ANNIS

If at first we don't succeed....

LD

We go off to England instead. (Pronounced in-STEED.)

ANNIS

Yes, by god!

LD laughs, grabs her coat, kisses her grandmother, and runs out the door. After she has gone, ANNIS notices the box is still there. She picks it up and sets it on the desk. She sighs. She is worried about this girl. She picks up the tea tray and exits. Fade to black.

Fade up. It's the next day, late afternoon. People off-stage are watching a football game. We hear eruptions of cheering throughout the rest of the play. EVAN is sitting on the window seat, throwing pieces of popcorn into a cup. RODDY enters to make a drink.

RODDY

You don't stop eating those things, they give you the shits.

EVAN

Anything I do today will give me the shits.

RODDY

(Holding up a glass.) You want another one of these?

EVAN

Why not?

RODDY

Pretty good, aren't they?

RODDY is mixing two drinks.

Now listen, I got everything planned.

EVAN

I don't want to hear about it.

RODDY

You don't have to, but everything's set. And here's the deal: all things will remain absolutely normal for the rest of the day, all day.

EVAN

Except no turkey.

RODDY

The plan will be implemented tomorrow morning.

EVAN

I swear if you were a farmer, you'd have all the animals giving birth on the same warm, sunny day at noon. How does Grace put up with you?

RODDY

We operate in separate spheres. Shopping, food, and taxes, that's her sphere; mine is yard, car, and insurance.

EVAN

And that's it. The sum total of human life.

RODDY

There are other models, I'm sure.

RODDY hands EVAN a drink.

EVAN

Thanks. (For the drink.)

RODDY

Listen Ev, I can't let you fuck this up. At 7:30 tomorrow morning the movers come. By noon, they'll have everything moved out of here. Then over to Crown Properties and all moved in by 5:30. One day: all out and all in. How does that sound?

EVAN

When did you arrange all this?

RODDY

Just since I got here.

EVAN

All that in just a couple of days?

RODDY

Mother is losing it. We have to do something before she has a diagnosis. They don't allow dementia patients in there.

EVAN

What do they do with them?

RODDY

Move them into Assisted Living.

EVAN

You wicked bastard.

RODDY

They're struggling here. They need help. Dad's not getting better, and Mother is declining by the day.

EVAN

It seems so cruel—

RODDY

It's cruel to leave them here. Out there, they'll be part of a community.

EVAN

Who's going to tell her?

RODDY

You are.

EVAN

I am not going to tell her.

RODDY

Then we both will.

EVAN

You will have to do that yourself, Big Boy. I will not be present.

RODDY

Remind me to send you a card of thanks at the end of all this, "for your loving help at this difficult time."

Long-ass pause. EVAN is looking out a window. RODDY looking out another window.

*Evan.... You **do** understand what I've done.*

EVAN

Yes.

RODDY

And you agree? At least in part.

EVAN

I don't have to agree.

RODDY

But it's the right thing. Don't you think it's the right thing?

EVAN is silent.

What did you think of the dinner? Grace did a great job, didn't she? Did all the research, the planning. Then we didn't have to worry about what Mother did or did not put in the gravy.

EVAN

Mother was perfectly capable of fixing a turkey.

RODDY

I know, I know. But she needed help. She was delighted with this idea. Have you talked to Dad?

EVAN

Yeah. Have you?

RODDY

He said to do whatever we think is right.

EVAN

He didn't say that.

RODDY

He'll go along with whatever we decide.

EVAN

As soon as he learns he's moving, too, it will be a different story. And when he learns that the mice are not going, you'll be up to your tits in trouble.

RODDY

He can't take the mice anywhere.

EVAN

(Sarcastic.) Not even Crown Royal?

RODDY

Crown Properties! You can have a house pet at Crown Properties, not more than one per household. And they do not allow rodents. You can't have rodents anywhere.

EVAN

He can have rodents here.

RODDY

But that's crazy. A barrel of mice, for god's sake. I can't even let Grace in there. She'd call 911.

EVAN

He's meticulous with them. Everything is controlled.

RODDY

They're mice, Evan! It's like raising chickens in your bedroom, snakes in the swimming pool.

EVAN leaves in exasperation. ANNIS enters, a bit surprised to find RODDY.

ANNIS

Oh.

RODDY

Ma, would you like me to make you a drink?

ANNIS

No, thanks.

RODDY

You sure?

ANNIS

I quit.

RODDY

Did you? When?

ANNIS

Quite some time ago, I think. I just...quit.

RODDY

Good for you.

ANNIS

Good for me.

Pause.

RODDY

How ya doing? More people than you're used to?

ANNIS

Yes.

RODDY

But you liked the dinner....

ANNIS

Yes. Oh. Yes....

RODDY

I don't think anyone missed the missing turkey.

ANNIS

Except maybe Evan. Maybe.

Long pause. RODDY studies her.

RODDY

You're feeling all right, then?

ANNIS

Fine.

RODDY

You're not depressed or anything?

ANNIS

No. Not me.

RODDY

Well, there are drugs for that, good ones. You don't have to suffer from depression, not in this day and age.

ANNIS

No, not in this day and age.

Big-ass pause.

RODDY

Ma....

ANNIS

Roddy....

RODDY

Ma, I found that bottle. On the mantel.

ANNIS

Oh....That's your father's. For the mice.

RODDY

Please don't lie to me.

ANNIS

All right.

RODDY

You're planning something.

ANNIS

Yes, a trip to England. Never been there before.

RODDY

You are my mother. I will not have you pulling something like this.

ANNIS

Pulling?

RODDY

You know what I'm talking about. Not after Leah.

ANNIS

Leah was an accident. She was distracted.

RODDY

Whatever you say.

ANNIS

It was...an accident.

RODDY

The point is: you have plenty to live for.

ANNIS is silent.

This is a great time of life.

ANNIS

Yes.

RODDY

Yes, what?

ANNIS

I'm looking forward to it.

RODDY

To what?

ANNIS

What's next. Whatever's next.

She looks at him. It's an accusation. He looks away. It's clear now what she must do.

RODDY

We all want whatever's best for you. And Dad. You're clear about that, aren't you?

ANNIS

Clear.

RODDY

Good. Why don't you come in and join us for the game?

ANNIS

I don't know...the rules.

RODDY

It's not hard. I'll explain it to you.

ANNIS

I have to set the table.

RODDY

Dinner's over.

ANNIS

For dessert.

She touches his face, then slaps his arm and exits. RODDY takes his drink and exits.

LD and EVAN enter from opposite directions. They're laughing.

LD

What are you drinking?

EVAN

I don't know. Whatever Roddy mixed up.

LD

Does it have a name?

EVAN

Roddy's Toddy?

They both laugh.

LD

(Referring to the other room.) Who's winning?

EVAN

Who's playing?

LD

Where's Pop?

EVAN

He's in there with Roddy.

LD

He doesn't know a thing about football.

EVAN

It doesn't matter. Roddy talks all the time. Dad likes listening to him.

ANNIS sneaks an envelope into her coat pocket and quietly moves to the window seat.

LD

You got any Xanax?

EVAN

No.

LD

You got any weed?

EVAN

Yeah. I got some weed.

LD

Let's smoke a bowl.

EVAN

You sure?

LD

It's a holiday. No one smells smoke on a holiday .

EVAN

(Chuckling.) I think you may be right....

They move under the desk and light a bowl.

Mom's relying on you. You know that, don't you?

LD

I know.

EVAN

You all right with it?

LD

I believe in what she's doing.

EVAN

So do I, but....

LD

I'm in on the plan. That makes all the difference. Don't wanna be taken by surprise, not by anything.

EVAN

You always were the strongest one in the family.

LD

I've just been through everything, at least once.

EVAN

You might need to be ready. Roddy's got some plan.

LD

Meaning what?

EVAN

Meaning I'm glad she's got you. You'll do a good job.

LD

What about you?

EVAN

What about me what?

LD

Why don't you come with us? When the time comes.

EVAN

I'd like to. I'd be good at it. But I've got to take care of Dad.

LD

No, you don't.

EVAN

Dad needs someone. I'm letting it be me. I'd like to be there, though. I think it's perfect, the way she's got it planned.

LD

Is it really?

EVAN

Oh, yeah. I got her some killer weed.

LD

Watch your mouth. Killer?

EVAN

Part of a shipment from Colorado. Designer stuff.

LD

She's gonna get high and do it?

EVAN

Wouldn't you?

LD

I'd get high to cross the street.

EVAN

She was a big head in the '60s.

LD

I thought she was.

EVAN

And she's right about how fast she's losing it.

LD

I know she is.

EVAN

Must be pretty damn scary.

LD

So then why don't you come with us?

EVAN

I gotta take care of things here. Besides, she's crazy about you.

LD

That is not an answer. Come with us.

EVAN

Maybe I will.

LD

No you won't.

EVAN

You're right. I won't. But I will wish I had.

LD

You and Pop both, you're just cowards, you know that? And one of these days, you will both have regrets.

EVAN

I guess so. But that's the nature of life.

LD

...And death.

She punches him. They crawl out from beneath the desk.

Would you note that no one even smelled the smoke?

ANNIS is sitting in the window seat.

ANNIS

I did.

EVAN and LD break into laughter.

LD

Don't tell nobody, Gram, we don't want to share.

EVAN

Yeah, this is part of that shipment from Denver, named Weezer's Bastard. Remember?

ANNIS

(Chuckling.) Yes. We liked the title.

EVAN

The title's great. But the weed itself is majestic, right, LD?

LD

Mega-majestic.

She twirls and throws herself on the couch.

ANNIS

Evan, honey, you remember this quilt?

EVAN

Your grandmother made it when she started to go blind.

ANNIS

And Leah walked out with it. She was out...in the cold at night. It was snowing. And she walked out...with my grandmother's quilt. When she stepped out...in front of that van. I don't know what to do with it.

EVAN

Not to worry ma, I'll take it.

She hands him the quilt.

ANNIS

Remember her.

EVAN

Of course, we'll all remember her.

ANNIS

How many times? How many times will you...remember her?

EVAN

Everyday, Ma. Everyday.

ANNIS

(Looking out the window.) Not another car on the street. Just the one that hit her. The horn stuck on hawwww-nk. The front grill dented where it struck her. The driver babbling like a crazy man, "She ran into my car like a deer, like a goddamn deer." (To herself.) Like a deer....

EVAN hugs her.

EVAN
Thanks, Ma.

ANNIS
Welcome.

EVAN
I'll take it with me when I go.

He puts it on the back of the couch.

ANNIS
Good.

EVAN
Ma...Roddy found that bottle on the mantel.

ANNIS
I know. Did he take it?

EVAN
No. I wouldn't let him.

ANNIS
You fought him off...and won the day?

EVAN
Something like that.

ANNIS
Thank you, boy.

EVAN
Welcome. It's in your purse.

ANNIS
(Lying now.) Your father needs that...for his work.

EVAN
(Lying too.) Yes, I know.

ANNIS
For the mice.

EVAN
Right.

ROBECK enters, a glass in his hand.

ROBECK
(Calling.) Here they are, Roddy, all the people that are missing one helluvah football game.

LD
That's okay, Pop. We have our own delights.

ROBECK
You sure, little girl?

LD
I'm sure, Pop.

ROBECK
Good. Because we should all enjoy this day together.

EVAN
We are. Promise, Pop.

ROBECK
And later, I want to show you the mice. As soon as the game is over, I want to show you both the mice.

EVAN
I've seen them, Dad. But you should show them to LD.

LD
Right after the game, Pop, we'll take a look at those mice.

LD punches EVAN as they exit. ROBECK makes a drink.

ROBECK
You know who knows everything about football? Roddy.

ANNIS
Evan swears he knows everything...about everything.

ROBECK
You want one of these drinks? Roddy's got his own drink. Guess what it's called?

ANNIS

Roddy's Drink?

ROBECK

Yes! I always think he's so, I don't know, surprising.

ANNIS

Stop gushing over the boy, would you?

ROBECK

So what's this thing you have to talk to me about? Right now. Can't wait.

ANNIS

You know what it is.

ROBECK

Annis, for god's sake, it's Thanksgiving.

ANNIS

I know what day it is.

ROBECK

Well, don't be so damn selfish then!

ANNIS

It's urgent.

ROBECK

It cannot be urgent.

ANNIS

Would I insist...if it weren't?

ROBECK

Just try and behave yourself until the weekend is over.

ANNIS

They are about to haul us out of here, Ro.

ROBECK

Your imagination is in overdrive.

ANNIS

The vans...have been called.

ROBECK

Nonsense. I've talked to Roddy.

ANNIS

It's Roddy who ordered the vans! I heard him on his...phone.

ROBECK

He is a little worried about you, it's true. But I reassured him.

ANNIS

Beware when your children...are "a little worried about you."

ROBECK picks up some clutter.

ROBECK

(Trying to distract her.) Did you like the dinner?

ANNIS

*I liked the dinner. But even more, I liked the guessing game **about** the dinner.*

ROBECK

Yes, well, that was a bit over the top.

ANNIS

She makes...my teeth ache.

ROBECK

What do you think about Roddy? CEO at his age. LD was so impressed.

ANNIS

By the way, she doesn't want to be called...LD anymore.

ROBECK

We're too old to change that. What does she want to be called?

ANNIS

Obsidian, I think.

ROBECK

(Lecturing.) Obsidian? That's actually just volcanic glass. Indians used it to make arrowheads. Traded it all across the continent, pre-contact—

ANNIS

Shhhhh.

ANNIS waits through a span of emptiness. It's another "episode." Again the boys change something on the set. She watches EVAN, then RODDY. She bumps back, confused. Pause.

Every once in a while, a piece...goes missing.

ROBECK

A piece of what?

ANNIS

Of time. Where were we?

ROBECK

LD.

ANNIS

What about her?

ROBECK

She's changed her name or something.

ANNIS

Has she?

ROBECK

You're the one that told me!

ANNIS

I did?

ROBECK

Good God!

ANNIS

I'm losing it, Ro. And it...frightens me.

ROBECK

We all lose a bit here and there. (Lecturing.) But the trajectory of this disease is long. Eighty-three percent of patients will live 10 years after diagnosis--

ANNIS

I forget how to get home.

ROBECK

From where?

ANNIS

It's happened...several times.

ROBECK

How many times?

ANNIS

I have to ask small children which way is Ninth Avenue. They think it's a quiz. But in fact, I have no idea where I am.

ROBECK

That's not such a serious symptom.

ANNIS

*It is the **most** serious symptom!*

ROBECK

You've been terrible with directions your whole life.

ANNIS

I know the difference between that...and this!

Pause. He studies her.

I'm going out before I lose my dignity. A couple more days, a couple more months, a year, even. It doesn't matter...to me.

ROBECK

We're at different stages of our lives.

ANNIS

And that's the last, great tragedy of marriage. Both people are expected to finish at the same time. To arrive at the end of the sidewalk on exactly...the same step.

ROBECK

I want to finish my work.

ANNIS

Well, I am finished...with my work. I was finished five years ago. I just didn't know it. You don't know you're done until you try...something...and fail.

ROBECK

You didn't fail.

ANNIS

I tried to write what I could see and touch, only to find I had...no words.

ROBECK

You used to believe in your work.

ANNIS

My work allowed me to be...deceived. And that's the secret of a happy life: the degree to which one is deceived.

ROBECK

That's a deeply cynical thing to say.

ANNIS

I can write a good line. But I cannot follow it...with another.

ROBECK

The work is harder. But it's not impossible.

ANNIS

It is impossible, Ro.

Long pause.

Do you remember that Japanese movie, The Ballad of...something? A man carries his mother to the top of a mountain. In winter. And leaves her there.

ROBECK

Narayama. That's the title, The Ballad of Narayama.

ANNIS

Do you remember it?

ROBECK

Of course. Beautiful, clean and swift, the death from cold.

ANNIS

Beautiful, clean, and swift.

She stops suddenly. Another "episode." She bumps back. Confused.

ROBECK

That was one of them, wasn't it?

ANNIS

Yes.

ROBECK

And they...frighten you.

ANNIS

And they...frighten me.

ROBECK

I'm so sorry....

ANNIS

I'm going to the Spruces...when the time comes.

ROBECK

All right. But not yet, dear, please not yet.

ANNIS

That beautiful field. Remember that...field?

ROBECK

Of course. It's our plan. But not now.

ANNIS

No. Not now.

ROBECK

After the snow melts.

ANNIS

After the blossoms sprout.

ROBECK

And I'll help you then. So you won't be frightened.

ANNIS

I won't be frightened.

ROBECK

So you won't be alone.

ANNIS

Thank you.

Pause.

ROBECK

Sometimes I see you, with freckles, lying on the lawn in summer looking up at the sky through the branches of a tree.

ANNIS

Do you?

ROBECK

It's the slant of the light.

ANNIS

The slant...of the light.

ROBECK

Slant of light on your face.

ANNIS

What's "slant," what's "light"? What are words doing in clumps? Bunches of words are....

ROBECK

Are what?

ANNIS

Confusing.

Pause. They cuddle. They could say two-dozen things, but all of them seem trite or redundant.

ROBECK

There is no summation, is there?

ANNIS

No.

ROBECK

The substance is in the details.

ANNIS

As any poet will tell you.

Pause.

It's a beautiful night. Sharp. The moon like a...blade.

ROBECK

Cold night, though. Below zero.

ANNIS

I like the cold winter nights.

ROBECK

I do, too.

ANNIS

Nights when...the coyotes howl. (Smiling at the thought.)

Silence. A settling.

ROBECK

Well, maybe we ought to go back in. It's probably time for dessert.

ANNIS

I'll be in shortly. I need to get some...lemons from the 7-Eleven.

ROBECK

For what?

ANNIS

For tea.

ROBECK

Well, don't dawdle.

ANNIS

I'll take LD with me. She'll keep me from dawdling.

ROBECK nods and exits with his drink.

ANNIS checks her purse from the coffee table and takes out the bottle of liquid.

ROBECK (Off.)

Obsidian, your gram needs you to drive her to the store. For lemons. She said, please.

LD enters.

LD

Now? It's not now, is it?

ANNIS

What better time?

LD

You said it would be later.

ANNIS

Now is better... than later.

LD

I really wanted to go to England with you.

ANNIS

You have my credit card. Go. Because I've actually been there before.

LD

You haven't been there before.

ANNIS

Hardy, Woolf, Eliot. I've been there. Byron, Keats and the Brontes. I've been there... many times.

LD

Why don't you take just a little more time?

ANNIS

A little more time will change nothing. We'd both just fill it with worry.

ANNIS rises. LD stops her.

LD

With some people, I could be only one way, the way they preferred. But with you, I could be any way I was.

ANNIS

Well said. I think...there is a writer inside there.

LD

You're ready, then?

ANNIS

Looking forward, actually.

LD

Looking forward?

ANNIS

With a sense of relief. And anticipation.

The two link arms and move to the door. LD puts the coat on ANNIS, then tightens her scarf.

LD

Have you got everything you need?

ANNIS

Have you got everything you need?

LD

What more could we could possibly need?

They move to the door; ANNIS looks back. Then out they go, into the snow. Lights out.

End of Play.