

*M*agic realism collides with manic vaudeville in this family drama with a chewy metaphysical core by Noah Haide, one of our most exciting and daring young playwrights.

With a glancing nod to *Our Town*, a man named Footnote acts as guide. The Twins swap philosophy while awaiting their birth. Daughter Beauty eats dirt and doesn't speak, and Father is about to drive away and never return, leaving pregnant and dreamy mother Violet alone to live out her father's notion that "every love story is a tragedy, because its ending is built into its beginning." Whipping from astonishing tenderness to profound humor and back again, this wholly original play uncovers the extraordinary family connections that stretch and warp across the years but can never quite be broken.

Smokefall's award-winning Chicago premiere, directed by Anne Kauffman, was followed by its Off-Broadway premiere in 2015, also directed by Kauffman and starring Zachary Quinto and Robin Tunney, in highly praised performances.

"Quixotic, gorgeous . . . a very fine new American play."

—Chris Jones, *Chicago Tribune*

"If Thornton Wilder dropped acid he might have written *Smokefall*."

—Robert Hofter, *Variety*

"*Smokefall* is absolutely stunning. It's a near-perfect show."

—M. William Panek, *Broadway World*

"Leaves you thinking about every human connection you have, whether on an intimate scale . . . or the cosmic one. Haide's genius is that along with the pain and wistfulness come great bursts of true comic brilliance."

Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun-Times*

Noah Haide is a playwright and screenwriter. *Smokefall* premiered at South Coast Repertory in California, has been produced at The Goodman Theatre in Chicago, MCC in New York City, and most recently at the Staatstheater Kassel in Germany and the Stadsteatern Göteborg in Sweden. Noah Haide sits on the board of directors of the amazing Detroit Public Theatre.

COVER ART BY KELSEY SHULTIS
COVER DESIGN BY YELLOWSTONE LTD

DRAMA \$14.95 US/\$19.95 CAN/£9.95

ISBN 978-1-4683-1422-9

5 1 4 5

OVERLOOK DUCKWORTH

NEW YORK • LONDON

WWW.OVERLOOKPRESS.COM/DRAMA

WWW.DUCKNET.CO.UK



9 781468 314229

P8-CNH-098



"*Smokefall* took my breath away . . . a glorious play." —Hedy Weiss, *Chicago Sun-Times*

Smokefall

a play by

noah haide

OVERLOOK DUCKWORTH

smokefall

A PLAY BY

noah haidle



OVERLOOK DUCKWORTH
New York • London

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that all materials in this book, being fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States, the British Empire including the Dominion of Canada, and all other countries of the Copyright Union, are subject to royalty. All rights, including professional, amateur, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio and television broadcasting, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved. The stock and amateur performance rights in the English language throughout the United States, and its territories and possessions, Canada, and the Open Market are controlled by Dramatists Play Service, Inc. No professional or nonprofessional performances of the plays herein (excluding first class professional performance) may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission. Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to CAA, Attn: Chris Till.

For Tanya, with love, as she lets another soul enter

This edition first published in the United States and the United Kingdom
in 2017 by Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc.

New York
141 Wooster Street
New York, NY 10012

www.overlookpress.com

For bulk and special sales, please contact sales@overlookny.com,
or write us at above address.

LONDON

30 Calvin Street
London E1 6NW
info@duckworth-publishers.co.uk
www.ducknet.co.uk

For bulk and special sales, please contact sales@duckworth-publishers.co.uk,
or write us at the above address.

Copyright © 2017 by Noah Haidle

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and
retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission
in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who wishes
to quote brief passages in connection with a review written
for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the Library of Congress.
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Book design and type formatting by Bernard Schleifer
Manufactured in the United States of America
ISBN 978-1-4683-1422-9 (US)
ISBN 978-0-7156-5213-8 (UK)
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Preface

Time past and time future

Allow but a little consciousness.
To be conscious is not to be in time
But only in time can the moment in the rose-garden
The moment in the arbour where the rain beat,
The moment in the draughty church at smokefall
Be remembered; involved with past and future.
Only through time time is conquered

—T.S. ELIOT

After many years of readings, workshops, rewrites, and prayers, *Smokefall* was scheduled to be produced at South Coast Repertory in the spring of 2013 and at the Goodman Theatre later that fall. If both hadn't been scheduled I wouldn't be writing this preface because I fucked up the first one pretty effectively.

One unfortunate decision (among many on my part) was putting a dog in the show. A very kind local lady offered her very untrained and mentally imbalanced dog, who had to be sedated with half a Benadryl before every performance, so that instead of a lively sidekick to an American family, the dog appeared like he just lost his mother during the Holocaust.

Mostly, however, the third act was a disaster. It didn't cohere. Worse, it was boring. The last line of the play was, "Well, that's about it, there's apple pie and cider in the lobby for those of you who aren't too cool for that sort of thing."

Ouch.

Luckily, there is no greater impetus to rewrite than shame.

If for some unknown reason I was ever asked at a cocktail party to name the five most embarrassing moments of my life, all of them would be play readings or performances that went horribly. Sixth on the list would be the time I shit myself on the subway in Boston, just to give you a sense of how excruciating it is to sit through a bad reading/lackluster performance. (I'll save how reading bad/terrible reviews feels for another time (hint, imagine everyone you know watching you receive an enema and then a bunch of people you don't know hearing about gross it was)).

During the summer between the two productions I rewrote *Smokefall* from memory. I thought maybe the stuff I unconsciously excised probably wasn't necessary, and the places in the story where I couldn't remember what happened were probably places I should come up with something new.

I'd recommend this process to anyone. Not anyone. Just writers. And probably just playwrights. If Leo Tolstoy had tried to write *War and Peace* from memory he would have started to bleed out of his eyes.

The impulse to rewrite the play from memory probably stems from the fact that I learned to write plays through repetition.

and deeply trusted collaborators. I don't look at a production of a play as some sort of proof to a theory or a rigid execution of my vision, but the opportunity to give a bunch of artists somewhere to go where we all figure stuff out. I love writing for the specific production and company. So, if an actor is funny, I give her funnier lines. If it's Mike Nussbaum, steal a line from David Mamet. If Annie stages a long cross, write some words to fill the gap. Etcetera.

A lot of this play was written in direct relation to Annie's choices. She dressed the two fetuses in white tuxedos (I figure if you've read this far into this preface you might also read the play, so to give things away, the second act is set inside a womb). The brothers looked like a Borscht Belt comedy team, and so began talking about their entrance into the world as their entrance into "the entertainment," and pumped themselves up to go into life with the familiar cadence of street performers:

"What time is it?"

"Showtime!"

"I can't hear you!"

"It's showtime!!!"

The world as brief stage became an overriding theme of the play, all because of Annie's choice for the color of a dinner jacket. Without her this play would be much the poorer, and I am forever in her debt.

I know I've gone on and on the iniquities of a playwright's life, about shitting in subways and getting slighted by Leonard Nimoy's widow (who actually was really nice after the show and told me my wife was beautiful and that, "You two are young, this is a moment, enjoy it while it's here," which I found heartbreaking and beautiful), but I should at least spend a hot second on what a tremendous gift it is getting to see a play of yours become alive.

I know of no greater thrill than sitting in the back of a darkened theater watching a play of yours while it's working, when you feel the audience lean forward, the actors' energy pick up, when you're overwhelmed with gratitude for all the people who have given their time and hearts to a few thoughts you've written, when you know in your bones that there is no other place you'd rather be in the universe.

Noah Haidle
Detroit, MI

Credits

Smokefall was originally produced in 2013 by South Coast Repertory in Costa Mesa, California.

Artistic Directors: Marc Masterson, David Emmes, Martin Benson
It was directed by Anne Kauffman.

CAST

VIOLET	Heidi Dippold
COLONEL, JOHNNY	Orson Bean
BEAUTY	Carmela Corbett
DANIEL, FETUS ONE	Corey Brill
FOOTNOTE, FETUS TWO	Leo Marks

Smokefall was commissioned by and opened in 2013 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago.

Artistic Director: Robert Falls
It was directed by Anne Kauffman.

CAST

VIOLET	Katharine Keberlein
DANIEL, FETUS ONE	Eric Slater
BEAUTY	Catherine Combs
COLONEL, JOHNNY	Mike Nussbaum
FOOTNOTE, FETUS TWO,	
SAMUEL	Guy Massey
VOICE OF LENORE	Anne Fogarty

Smokefall had its New York premiere on February 22, 2016, at the Lucille Lortel Theatre/MCC.

Artistic Directors: Robert LuPone, Bernard Telsey and William Cantler

Executive Director: Blake West
It was directed by Anne Kauffman.

CAST

VIOLET	Robin Tunney
DANIEL, FETUS ONE	Brian Hutchinson
BEAUTY	Taylor Richardson
COLONEL, JOHNNY	Tom Bloom
FOOTNOTE, FETUS TWO,	
SAMUEL	Zachary Quinto

Characters

VIOLET: A housewife. Pregnant.

DANIEL: Her husband. Hallowed.

BEAUTY: Their daughter. Doesn't speak.
The most beautiful 16 year old girl in the world
(not defined by cosmetic beauty, but inner).

COLONEL: VIOLET's father. Doesn't remember much.

FOOTNOTE: Our narrator.

FETUS ONE and FETUS TWO: The twins inside VIOLET.
Played by actors playing DANIEL and FOOTNOTE,
respectively.

JOHNNY: FETUS TWO all grown up. Grown up and grown old.
Played by actor playing COLONEL.

SAMUEL: JOHNNY's son.
Played by actor playing FOOTNOTE.

HELP ME REMEMBER

I

A house in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Lots of it.

VIOLET enters from the backyard carrying earth in a pail. She puts the pail down and makes coffee. She's very pregnant. BEAUTY enters upstairs looking perfect and the COLONEL enters upstairs putting on his uniform. And DANIEL goes from the bathroom to the bedroom room upstairs with shaving cream on his face. Nobody says anything quite yet. There isn't much to say.

A man appears from the side of the stage or from through the audience. His name is FOOTNOTE.

The church bell tolls seven times.

FOOTNOTE speaks to the audience.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number one.

The church bell tolls seven times. It is seven in the morning. The Grace Episcopal church is well over two hundred years old making it the oldest building in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The bells themselves were imported from France they toll the hours away and everybody hears them in the town. No matter how hard they try not to. They are the metronome of these citizens' lives. Hour by hour.

VIOLET talks to her twins in her belly.

VIOLET

Do you hear that boys? The newest day.
We're making breakfast for our family.
Do you know what a family is?
Pretty soon you will. Pretty soon you'll be part of this one.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number two.

Violet is pregnant with twins. Due any day now. Two boys. The twins are mistakes and they suspect as much. For their part they are tired of hearing her explain the world. By now the twins know what church bells are and breakfast and families.

VIOLET (*Singing*)

Remember this space
Before light knows your name
Before my warm embrace
Before joy before pain

FOOTNOTE

But they never get tired of hearing her sing the lullaby she wrote for them.

The twins fight each other to get closer to their song.

VIOLET

Remember this wait
Before love before hate
Your lives without time
Remember this song
I'm singing for you
It won't be long
Then you'll sing it too

FOOTNOTE

The twins applaud.
They would give a standing ovation if they could.

VIOLET

You two are the newest citizens of my heart. I hope you know that.

COLONEL

Get the medals just right, Beauty.

BEAUTY *attaches medals onto the COLONEL's uniform.*

Straightens.

Shines his shoes, maybe.

With spit and a rag.

Footnote number three.

FOOTNOTE

The Colonel was, as his name suggests, a colonel in the United States Army. Every morning he still puts on his uniform, his medals. A distinguished officer, he and his wife finally settled in this house, where they raised their only daughter, Violet. Before moving here the Colonel had never spent more than three years in one place, and while the idea of stability was comforting, he found the patterns of routine numbing. The Colonel begged his wife to move. "I can't take this, I'm going out of my mind." But after 34 years of jumping from place to place, his wife said enough was enough. The Colonel relented. He quieted. And finally, even in his dreams, he stopped longing for far away places.

COLONEL

You don't have to talk, Beauty. I understand everything you do not say.

She smiles.

BEAUTY *combs his hair with her hand and some spit.*

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number four:

Beauty stopped speaking suddenly three years ago. The last thing she said, appropriately enough, was "I have nothing more to say," and she began her silent life from which there has been no respite or pause.

COLONEL

I'm hungry.

Are you hungry?

She nods.

COLONEL

Good.

Let's make our entrance.

She helps him down the stairs.

He winces with each step.

FOOTNOTE

The Colonel needs help down the stairs. And up them for that matter. He can't remember a time when each step didn't hurt. But he keeps it to himself even through the winces. Lately, he has become convinced that his entire life is another person's dream.

COLONEL

Hi, honey.

VIOLET

Hi, Dad.

They kiss.

FOOTNOTE

They kiss like they do every morning. Such a simple gesture. But such an act of devotion between a father and his only daughter. Violet grew up in this house, moved away when she got married, and moved back here seven years ago to care for her father. She is his constant friend, loves him when he wets his bed like a child even when he can't remember her name. Even then she loves him.

VIOLET

How did everyone sleep?

COLONEL

I dreamt of your mother, so it was perfect.

VIOLET

Beauty?

Beauty thumbs up.

COLONEL

We're hungry.

What's on the menu this morning?

VIOLET

I've got eggs for you, Dad, and earth from the backyard for Beauty. Is earth okay today?

Beauty nods.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number seven.

Beauty eats impossible things like bark from trees, newspapers,

shoes, rocks, lightbulbs, and earth. Nobody knows how she manages to survive on this diet, but nobody sees fit to mention it anymore. But they're embarrassed at restaurants when she eats the napkin, or at family weddings when she eats the bridal bouquet or the centerpiece. Like in most families, disturbing behavior that happens daily is ignored, and they do, every day, they choose to ignore it.

COLONEL

You're pregnant.

VIOLET

Twins.

Boys.

COLONEL

Can I say my hellos?

VIOLET

They would love it.

COLONEL

Hello, in there!

VIOLET

That is your grandfather, my father.

And your sister is here.

She's waiting for you, too.

Beauty waves.

VIOLET

We're all waiting.

We're all so excited to welcome you home.

Beauty, can I get you a cup of paint to drink?

*Beauty nods.**Violet gets the paint. Sticks a straw in it. Beauty sips it.*

COLONEL

What day is it today?

VIOLET

It's Monday, October 24th.

What time is it?

COLONEL

A little after seven.

VIOLET

It's not night.

COLONEL

Not even close.

VIOLET

How many hours until I get to go to sleep?

COLONEL

A lot.

VIOLET

How many exactly?

COLONEL

You go to bed at nine so you've got fourteen hours.

VIOLET

Fourteen. So many.

COLONEL

Maybe I'll take a walk after breakfast.

FOOTNOTE

She smiles. He says that every day like it was the first time. He takes a walk every morning after breakfast. Every day the exact same route. 146 steps to the corner. Turn left. Right at the hospital parking ramp, right at the house with the loud children, right at the embankment, cross over the river perpendicular to the expressway, curve around the public golf course and walk through the gates of the cemetery. Time spent on the grounds left to personal discretion. Turn around. Repeat in backwards order. But last month the Colonel got lost, was missing for nine hours, knocked on every door in a 12-block radius and asked, "Excuse me, do I live here?"

VIOLET

Your breakfast is getting cold, love!!

DANIEL

Coming!

Footnote number nine.

FOOTNOTE

Like many truly unhappy people, Daniel can be the most charismatic person in any room. Lying in bed at night he makes lists of all of his reasons to be grateful.

But they only temporarily relieve his general sense of dread and malaise. When Violet told him she was pregnant again he walked into the next room, closed the door and didn't come out for three hours. When they found out they were having twins Daniel started to cry. He avoids his house and his family as much as possible. He's never felt at home here, never gotten used to pooping in his father-in-law's house, and still feels so self conscious about the squeaky mattress during sex, which has gotten less and less frequent even before the pregnancy.

He's so tired. He's been tired for years. He survives each day through the smallest joys. A minor flirtation with a co-worker. A stolen cigarette in the loading dock. The first drink after finally making himself come home.

Along the way here DANIEL has been upstairs shaving and changing. He wears a suit. Finally by now he is ready and his hair is the way he likes it and he comes down the stairs.

DANIEL

Good morning.

VIOLET

Good morning, love.

Are you hungry?

DANIEL

Starving.

How are you today, Colonel?

COLONEL

I don't complain.

DANIEL

How's my Beauty?

She slugs.

Earth today?

She nods.

DANIEL

Excellent choice.

Paint?

She shows him.

DANIEL

Eggshell blue.

VIOLET

I had some left over from the twins' room.

Touch them.

DANIEL

Violet.

VIOLET

Please.

He sighs and relents.

VIOLET

Can you feel that, boys?

That's the hand of your father.

Who will hold you so often and so hard.

FOOTNOTE

Not exactly.

After breakfast, Daniel will drive past his office, he'll buy three loaves of white bread from the gas station and sit downtown by the river feeding the ducks. He'll call in sick, get in his car and start driving West. By 11 o'clock he'll already be in Chicago. I'll turn back, he'll tell himself. By 3 o'clock this afternoon he'll have just passed Dubuque, Iowa. Just a little longer, he'll say. He'll spend the night on Highway 12 just outside Aberdeen, South Dakota, getting the first peaceful night's sleep he's had in years. He'll wake up refreshed, and keep driving West. After this morning, Daniel will never see any of his family again.

Talk to them.

VIOLET

DANIEL sighs but relents

DANIEL

Good morning, gentlemen.

FOOTNOTE

The twins appreciate his respect.
He always calls them gentlemen.

DANIEL whispers into her belly.

VIOLET

What did you tell them?

DANIEL

You'll have to ask them.

FOOTNOTE

"Help me.

Help me, boys.

Remind me how much I love this family. Of all the things I have to be so grateful for. Please, gentlemen, help me remember the glory of living."

DANIEL

Do you want the flower, Beauty?

She nods.

He gets it.

She eats it.

DANIEL

Finding the right flower for an occasion is an ancient practice.
The Japanese call it Hanakotoba.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote twelve.

When he can't sleep Daniel watches public television.

DANIEL

That's a chrysanthemum.

It symbolizes optimism and joy.

It's also the official flower of the city of Chicago!

COLONEL

That's right.

DANIEL

FOOTNOTE

The Colonel also watches public television.

Not because he can't sleep, but because most afternoons the silence scares him.

DANIEL

A single petal at the bottom of a glass means you'll have a long life.

DANIEL *puts a petal into her glass of paint.*

DANIEL

I bet it's going to taste like spring.

She sips the paint.

DANIEL

And?

Does it taste like spring?

She nods.

VIOLET

Do you know what day it is today?

COLONEL

Of course I do who are you talking to?

Monday, a morning in mid autumn, its own season, I've got 14 hours left before I get to go sleep.

VIOLET

And.

Happy Anniversary.

COLONEL

What anniversary?

DANIEL

Our first date.

VIOLET

Beauty.

Boys.

This is the story of how all of you began.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote thirteen.

The twins listen hardest of all. Their origins are a source of perpetual curiosity.

VIOLET

Your father knocked on that door.

I pretended to still be getting ready.

The colonel tried to trick your father into accepting a drink.

COLONEL

You were an idiot.

DANIEL

You told me that every love story is a tragedy.

Because its ending is built into its beginning.

COLONEL

That still holds true.

VIOLET

I came down these stairs.

DANIEL

You looked so beautiful.

You were the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

VIOLET

We drove to the top of the world.

You turned on the radio.

DANIEL

Do you remember the tune?

VIOLET

Of course I do.

Sometimes I remember it too much.

FOOTNOTE *knows the song.*

*A doo wop song.
He sings it.*

DANIEL

My hands were sweating.

VIOLET

I held them anyway.

DANIEL

My back was sweaty.

VIOLET

I didn't know that part.

DANIEL

I remember thinking, if this girl loves me I can die happy.

VIOLET

I looked at you with those eyes. You learned to do that, too, Beauty,
you know how to speak with your eyes.
And I looked at you and said yes.

DANIEL

Two kids.

A night.

Cold stars.

Sweaty hands.

A song.

A car.

VIOLET

Yes.

DANIEL

Yes.

VIOLET

You kissed me.

Kiss.

VIOLET

It was happiness.

It was happiness. There in the car before life became habits, routine
and bills.

FOOTNOTE

COLONEL

What's your name?

DANIEL

It's Daniel.

COLONEL

How did you get in here?

DANIEL

I live here. I'm your son-in-law.

COLONEL

How would you characterize our relationship?

DANIEL

Strained but loving.

COLONEL

Do you see any room for growth?

DANIEL

I'm sorry, Violet, I can't do this today.

VIOLET

I'll take care of it.

He kisses her, takes the newspaper and goes into the living room.

BEAUTY follows and sits next to him on the couch.

He reads the paper. BEAUTY reads over his shoulder.

It's annoying and tries to get her to quit it, in that father/daughter way where both of them know she's not going to stop.

COLONEL

How old am I?

VIOLET

You're 77 years old.

When the fuck did that happen?

COLONEL

VIOLET

Year by year.

Hour by hour.

Drop by drop.

COLONEL

Where's your mother?

Where's my wife?

VIOLET

You know where she is.

COLONEL

Is she still asleep?

VIOLET

No, Dad.

COLONEL

Lenore?

The COLONEL looks for his wife.

He calls her name over and over.

"Lenore,

Lenore.

Lenore."

This is routine, so VIOLET goes into the kitchen and begins to clean up.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number fifteen.

Lenore. The love of his life.

["Lenore"]

They loved each other on six different continents.

By all accounts it was the most perfect love anyone had ever seen.

["Lenore"]

Like out of a romance novel but even better. Because those books aren't very well written anyway. It was like out of a song.

["Lenore"]

When she died the Colonel's mind began to decline. At first it was only the year or maybe the president. But soon it became the hour of any day, he barely recognized anyone's face, not even his, and now sees no difference between waking and sleep.

DANIEL reads the newspaper.

DANIEL

Don't forget your coat today. The highs are only in the mid 40's and there's an overnight freeze warning. If you're going be out late bring an umbrella. It might rain just after midnight.

Heavy fog in San Francisco, no surprise there. I had a girlfriend who moved to San Francisco and I always check the weather there. Imagine the fog and the bone chilling cold.

The Cowboys are leading their division. America's team.

"No risky investments today, Aries."

That's you.

Huh. They say our DNA looks like this;

He traces a double helix in the air with his finger.

DANIEL

When I was in 9th grade my science teacher told us that the most important system in our bodies is the reproductive system.

That that's all we're here to do. Reproduce and then boom, the earth is done with us.

That always stuck with me.

Boom.

And then done with us.

Are you excited about having two little brothers, Beauty?

She nods.

DANIEL

Do you think you'll want to talk to them?

She shrugs.

DANIEL

I remember the day you were born.

We were going to name you April but named you Beauty instead. Your mother was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen and then I met you. And I felt what it was like to love something more than I love myself.

Do you remember when we had the apple tree in the backyard?

In the summer, in the shade, I used to lie on my back, I'd hoist you up and balance you, so that you were parallel to the ground.

So that you could feel like you were flying.

It was our favorite game.

Beauty, would you forgive me if I couldn't be part of this family anymore?

She shakes her head.

DANIEL

I would forgive you.

If you had to leave.

That's how much I love you.

I would forgive you anything.

Maybe someday you'll understand what that means.

He kisses her on the head.

DANIEL

You are the best thing I've ever done with my life.

You are the most beautiful thing I'll ever see.

Kisses her again.

DANIEL

Well, I've got to finish getting ready for work.

He goes upstairs.

BEAUTY watches him go upstairs.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote sixteen.

"You are the most beautiful thing I'll ever see." These words will ring inside her mind for the rest of her life. Beauty will imagine all of the things her father sees, and wonder if she remains the most beautiful.

The COLONEL by now has given up his search and reports his conclusions to VIOLET.

COLONEL

Listen, your mother is dead.

VIOLET

I know she is.

COLONEL

We loved each other on six continents.

Count them. Six.

VIOLET

I know you did.

COLONEL

Hold up.

I just remembered your mother's last words.

"I wish we had loved each other on seven continents."

Maybe I'll swing by her grave. To say hello.

VIOLET

That sounds like a good idea. Dad.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number seventeen.

This is the usual routine when he remembers that his wife is dead. Which he inevitably does every morning. The Colonel decides to swing by her grave to say hello. Sometimes when he gets to the cemetery he has no idea why he's there and immediately comes home. Other days he remembers and sits and tells his wife all about the day, the weather, their daughter, their grandchild, and how hard it is to live without her.

VIOLET

Dad, why don't you do your jigsaw puzzle for awhile?

COLONEL

What is it a jigsaw puzzle off?

VIOLET

An apple tree.

COLONEL

In what season?

Late autumn.

VIOLET

Like today.

COLONEL

That's right.

VIOLET

Are the apples ready to be picked?

COLONEL

Find out for yourself.

VIOLET

The COLONEL looks.

COLONEL

Abhhhhh.

These are the most difficult, you know, the puzzles with so many similar colors.

A huge challenge, even for the most experienced puzzler, like myself, to interlock even the tiniest fragment.

VIOLET

But you always do.

COLONEL

We have an apple tree, just like this, just outside.

He looks outside.

No apple tree.

COLONEL

Where did it go?

VIOLET

We had to cut it down.

It was diseased.

They said it was past saving.

COLONEL

What a terrible thing to be past saving.

VIOLET

Come on, Dad.

She sits him down.

He does the puzzle with the occasional "Eureka," or, "I got one!"

BEAUTY looks through the newspaper very intently, like a detective.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote eighteen.

On the day Violet was born her mother Lenore planted an apple tree in the backyard and for years she played in its branches and hid in its shade. For years Lenore made cider and pie. But the tree fell victim to neglect, fire blight and apple maggots took their toll and finally six years ago they had to cut it down. The only reminder now is the extraordinarily difficult jigsaw puzzle that the Colonel does to pass the time. Violet takes apart the pieces that he's done the day before and feels terrible about it but he doesn't notice the difference, so in reality the puzzle will never be completed. The Colonel studies the forgotten pieces with such seriousness, and when he can interlock even the tiniest fragment of a branch or a leaf or an apple he erupts in a loud shout.

COLONEL

I got one!

FOOTNOTE

Or

COLONEL

Eureka!

FOOTNOTE

Every piece the same exultation and that makes Violet so happy.

VIOLET

What are you reading over here?

Oh.

Your brothers are kicking.

They're saying, "Hello, Beauty,"

BEAUTY waves back.

BEAUTY slowly gets on her knees.

She brings VIOLET's dress up.

What are you doing?

VIOLET

And kisses her belly.

FOOTNOTE

The twins fight each other to get the closest to their sister's kiss. They can feel her love.

VIOLET

Well.

I'm sure if they could they would kiss you right back.

BEAUTY puts the newspaper on the ground, takes some earth from her pail and makes a double helix using the dirt.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number twenty.

Three years ago Beauty overheard Daniel and Violet fighting about how loud this house was. Daniel was screaming, "Peace and quiet! Peace and quiet! All I want is some peace and quiet!" The next morning Violet asked why Beauty wasn't answering her. Beauty replied, "I have nothing more to say."

The following month Beauty overheard Daniel and Violet fight about money, "Who is going to pay for that? Not me. I'm not going to pay for that." Beauty went out into the backyard, scraped bark off the apple tree until her fingers bled, put the bark into her mouth, started chewing, vomited, kept chewing. It didn't take long before she got used to bark, earth, newspaper and silence. This morning Beauty thinks that her sacrifices must not have been enough. She thinks that she should have sacrificed more.

The COLONEL can't do his picture puzzle right now.

He throws it on the ground.

COLONEL

I can't do this without her!
We loved each other on six continents!
We sang songs into the night.
We made love four times a day.

Dad.

VIOLET

BEAUTY picks up pieces of the jigsaw puzzle.

COLONEL

What? It's true.

I was a stallion.

I probably still am.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote twenty-one.

It's true. He was a stallion and probably still is.

VIOLET

You were doing so well today, Dad.

You had breakfast.

You'll take a walk.

Later you can keep doing your jigsaw puzzle.

COLONEL

Is that a life?

VIOLET

It's yours.

COLONEL

What's your name?

VIOLET

It's Violet.

COLONEL

Of course.

You're pregnant.

VIOLET

I am.

Twins. Boys.

COLONEL

I'll be a grandfather.

VIOLET

You already are.
You remember Beauty.

Hello my girl.

COLONEL

BEAUTY waves.

COLONEL

Do they have names yet?

VIOLET

John and Samuel.

COLONEL

John is my name.

VIOLET

Yes, that's your name.

COLONEL

Can I say my hellos?

VIOLET

They would love it.

COLONEL

Hello, John. Hello, Samuel.

God exists.

Remember I said that.

Never go to Detroit.

Remember I said that, too.

And that the greatest possible act of courage is to love.

And anyone who says different is an asshole.

Remember I said that most of all.

FOOTNOTE

They do. They remember that most of all.

VIOLET

Thanks, Dad.

DANIEL

Well, I've got to get to work.

VIOLET

Do you have time to come home for lunch?

Not today, love.

DANIEL

VIOLET exits to get DANIELS coat, his hat, his briefcase.

FOOTNOTE

Violet wants to believe Daniel is happy. She's been trying so hard. She says to herself, this is your life, notice it, hold it, and be grateful.

DANIEL

I hope you have a great day, Beauty.

BEAUTY opens her mouth to speak to her father.

FOOTNOTE

"If I'm the best thing you've ever done then stay."

VIOLET enters.

VIOLET

Here we are.

DANIEL twirls her.

DANIEL

Don don don don

Donby dooby don

Wah wah wah wah

COLONEL

Hold up.

I hear singing.

Do you hear singing?

BEAUTY nods.

COLONEL

Do you know how to dance?

She can.

She demonstrates.

COLONEL

Do I?

She nods.

Good.

Let's hit it.

They dance. In the kitchen the COLONEL dances with BEAUTY.

DANIEL

Well love, love me, darling

Come and go with me

Please don't send me

Way beyond the sea

I need you, darling

So come go with me

FOOTNOTE

The two couples dance in the living room and in the kitchen. The twins get a little dizzy from so much motion but decide it's worth it since their mom is so happy. Occasionally the Colonel mistakes Beauty for his wife. Beauty still can't bring herself to tell him she's not.

COLONEL

I love you so much, darling.

Do you still dream of me every night, too?

The COLONEL kisses BEAUTY on the mouth. She pulls away.

COLONEL

Oh my God.

I'm so sorry.

I thought you were somebody else.

DANIEL kisses VIOLET.

DANIEL

You said yes with your eyes.

VIOLET

Yes.

He kisses her.

DANIEL

If this girl loves me, I can die happy.

VIOLET

And I did.

I do.

DANIEL

Happy Anniversary.

DANIEL touches VIOLET's belly.

DANIEL

Goodbye, gentlemen.

He goes. BEAUTY consoles the COLONEL.

VIOLET goes to the door.

VIOLET

Come back.

Come back.

Come back.

BEAUTY runs upstairs.

VIOLET

Dad?

I'm going to cry on your shoulder.

COLONEL

It's a good shoulder to cry on.

VIOLET cries on her Dad's shoulder.

He comforts her for a bit but then forgets why.

COLONEL

What's your name?

VIOLET

Violet.

COLONEL

Is it time for me to go for my walk, Violet?

VIOLET

Almost.

I just have to make your snack.

COLONEL
Oh good I love snacks don't I?

VIOLET
Yes you do.

VIOLET goes into the kitchen.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote twenty five.

Violet makes the snack.

She dreads the time when they will leave her. When she will be alone. She doesn't know what to do with her hands.

She thinks of all that time all of that day ahead of her.

Of all the hours when her reach cannot touch them.

She will wait in her chair by the window for everyone to come home again.

BEAUTY comes downstairs with DANIEL's clothes.

Shirts, pants, coats, ties.

She lays them out on the floor one by one.

COLONEL
Are those your clothes?

She shakes her head.

COLONEL
Are they mine?

She shakes her head.

COLONEL
Are they your dad's?
What are you doing with them?

BEAUTY kisses the clothes.

The COLONEL understands.

COLONEL
Oh no.
What should we do?

VIOLET enters from the kitchen.

VIOLET
Here you are.
Here's your snack.

She watches BEAUTY lay out the clothes.

VIOLET
What are you doing with your father's clothes?

BEAUTY lays a suit at VIOLET's feet.

VIOLET
Dad.

Do you know what she's doing with Daniel's clothes?

COLONEL
We have something to tell you.

But the COLONEL forgets the message.

COLONEL
You're pregnant.

VIOLET

Twins.
Boys.

COLONEL

I'll be a grandfather!

VIOLET

You already are. You remember Beauty.

COLONEL

Hello my girl.

VIOLET

It's time for your walk, Dad.

COLONEL

How long will I be gone?

VIOLET

For a few hours.

COLONEL
And you'll be here when I get back.

VIOLET
Yes I'll be right here waiting.

COLONEL
What if I get lost what if I can't find my way home.

VIOLET
Then I'll find you.

COLONEL
What if I die?

VIOLET
You won't die.

COLONEL
Okay. I trust you.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number twenty-six

The Colonel will die in two years. Violet will hold his hand, and hear him say only:
More.

At his military funeral with a 21 gun salute, Violet will be surprised at how many people will come. He must have talked to people on his walks she will think. There's no other explanation for how many people will come.

VIOLET
Say goodbye to Beauty.

COLONEL
Goodbye, Beauty.

I hope I find my way home and don't die so I get to see you again.

BEAUTY kisses him on the head.

COLONEL
Can I say my goodbyes to the boys?

VIOLET
They would love it.

Goodbye.

Remember that God exists.

And that your credit rating does not reflect who you are.
And in the very torrent, tempest and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote twenty-seven.

The Colonel made his bones playing Hamlet in summer stock.

COLONEL

Fare thee well!

He goes out the front door.

BEAUTY enters.

VIOLET

Will you be a good girl today?

She nods.

VIOLET

And you'll learn a lot?

She nods.

VIOLET

When I was your age I loved going to school.

I thought it was so wonderful to learn something new everyday.

Beauty.

You know your father loves you don't you?

She nods.

VIOLET

And you know the Colonel loves you?

She nods.

VIOLET

And you must know I love you?

She nods.

Okay. Time for school.

Go on I don't want you to be late for the bus.

BEAUTY is *at the door*.

BEAUTY

I love you too, Momma.

She goes.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote twenty-eight.

For over three years Beauty hasn't said a word and then this morning she decides to speak.

And not just any words either. "I love you too, Momma."

Unfortunately it is just a blip in the silence. She won't speak again for another ten years when, as she walks out of this house with her blue suitcase, she says to her brother Johnny "come with me."

VIOLET *cleans*.

Straightens.

Puts away.

FOOTNOTE

Violet sighs.

She is alone.

She wonders why we love it so.

This life.

"Maybe tomorrow will be different," she tells herself. "Maybe in another day I will know how to live."

She remembers the words.

"I love you, too."

VIOLET

Did you hear that, boys?

Your sister said, "I love you, too, Momma."

Please, boys, tell me you heard it, too. Tell me I'm not dreaming.

Her water breaks.

I'm going to take that as a yes.

VIOLET

Footnote twenty-nine.

FOOTNOTE

She's right.

That was a yes.

END OF ACT ONE

II

WHERE WE'LL NEVER GROW OLD

Inside VIOLET's womb.

FETUS ONE

Fuck this bullshit.

FETUS TWO

Don't be so negative. We're about to be born.

The womb shakes.

They're scared.

FETUS ONE

Speak for yourself. I'm not going anywhere.

FETUS TWO

It's not really up to you.

FETUS ONE

I'm not ready.

FETUS TWO

Ready?

We've had nine months to get ready.

FETUS ONE

I need a nap first.

FETUS TWO

You want me to sing the song?

FETUS ONE

I guess. If you're not doing anything.

FETUS ONE sings an immediately recognizable musical theater hit.

FETUS TWO *mouths the words but can't take it so he joins in with gusto.*

Until.

The womb shakes, cutting them off.

FETUS ONE

I'm just a little worried about original sin.

FETUS TWO

We've been through this.

FETUS ONE

As descendants of Adam, as a consequence of the first sin, of this transgressed hereditary strain, we will be born into an absence of holiness and perfect charity.

FETUS TWO

But there is no original guilt.

FETUS ONE

Okay, fine, we don't have to feel bad because of the initial transgression.

FETUS TWO

And?

FETUS ONE

But, but but.

We're going to inherit the distortion of the nature of man.

Weakness, ignorance, suffering, and the inevitability of death.

FETUS TWO

Let me give you a tickle.

FETUS ONE

No more fucking tickling and I'm serious when I say that.

FETUS TWO

Just a little tickle.

FETUS ONE

Quit it, man.

I'm gonna piss myself again.

FETUS TWO
Uh oh. Here comes Mr. Funny Fingers.

FETUS ONE

Mr. who?

FETUS TWO

Mr. Funny Fingers.

ONE *hits* TWO.

FETUS TWO

Quit hitting.

FETUS ONE

Quit it with the tickle torture, fucker!

The womb shakes.

FETUS ONE

Tell them to come back another day.

I just need a tiny nap.

FETUS TWO

I'm sorry, brother.

We're all out of time.

FETUS ONE

I don't want to leave.

In here it's perfect.

FETUS TWO

Maybe it will be better out there.

FETUS ONE

It can't be.

Out there we'll be tainted with the distortion of the nature of man.

FETUS TWO

You're just afraid.

FETUS ONE

Call me afraid again.

FETUS TWO

You're afraid again.

FETUS ONE *hits* FETUS TWO.

FETUS TWO

Quit hitting!

FETUS ONE

Quit denying our fall from perfection!

The womb shakes.

FETUS ONE

Okay, okay, let's forget original sin for a minute.

FETUS TWO

Thank you!

FETUS ONE

Let's talk about the nature of the family we're about to enter into.

FETUS TWO

With pleasure.

FETUS ONE

When was the last time Dad touched Mom?

FETUS TWO

I haven't kept track.

FETUS ONE

Try five and a half months.

FETUS TWO

Maybe it's a fallow period in their physical intimacy.

FETUS ONE

She asks him to touch her.

Fuck, she practically begs him to.

The other night she rolled over and said, "Please. Please, love. I miss you."

FETUS TWO

And what did he say?

FETUS ONE

Nothing.

He rolled over and pretended to be asleep.

FETUS TWO

Seriously?

FETUS ONE

Our family might not be a stable environment to nurture love.

And hey, fuck family.

It's only a group of people affiliated by co-residence, affiliation or consanguinity.

FETUS TWO

Don't forget the family duties toward maintenance of each other's emotional, economic, and social needs.

FETUS ONE

None of which will be met if we become part of ours!

FETUS TWO

But we'll also become part of the metaphoric concepts of family that bind the human species together.

Family.

Household.

Village.

Town.

City.

County.

Region.

Nation.

Global village.

Humanity.

FETUS ONE

Michel Foucault—

FETUS TWO

Do not start with post-structuralism again

Fingers in ears.

FETUS TWO

La la la la la.

FETUS ONE
Michel Foucault defines family as: "The fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us."

The la la la has beat FETUS ONE.

FETUS ONE
Okay, let's forget original sin and the instability of our family.

FETUS TWO
Forgotten.

FETUS ONE
Let's focus up on us.

What we've got here is perfect.
In here we'll never know suffering.
Here we'll never grow old.

The womb shakes.

FETUS ONE
There has got to be a way out.

FETUS TWO
Tadal

FETUS TWO indicates the obvious exit into the world.

FETUS ONE
That's cheap.

FETUS TWO
Hey, get excited, brother.
We're about to enter the reality of experience!

It's guaranteed to be the most dramatic entrance of our entire lives.

FETUS ONE
With our exit always waiting.

FETUS TWO
Okay, yes, but in the middle.

FETUS ONE
—in the middle, the endless cycle of desire and resultant suffering.

FETUS TWO
In the middle.
The realities of experience!
Some songs, a little dancing, add the occasional joke.

FETUS ONE
And if the jokes don't work, we can bring on a dog!

FETUS TWO
That's a great ideal

FETUS ONE
You're an idiot.

I can't believe we're related

FETUS TWO
Jeez, tough womb.

Pause. The joke lands. FETUS ONE laughs.

FETUS TWO
Right?

FETUS ONE
Yeah.

FETUS TWO
Timing.

FETUS ONE
You can't teach it.

They're satisfied with their riff.

FETUS ONE
I won't be special.

FETUS TWO
You'll be special to me.

FETUS ONE
Not one feeling I'll ever feel will be original.

FETUS TWO
No, but it will be yours because it's your experience.

When you say "I'm in love," when you say, "I'm sorry, when you say
"Don't die, not yet, stay with me a little longer."

Similar to others but yours because you're the one saying it.

FETUS ONE

108 billion people have already been alive.

And they've all been so much the same.

FETUS TWO

But with infinite variations!

FETUS ONE

First steps, first words.

FETUS TWO

Mine will be: "Hello, world!"

FETUS ONE

Grow older.

First kiss.

FETUS TWO

Someone else's tongue in my mouth!

FETUS ONE

Grow older.

Lose your virginity.

FETUS TWO

I'll lose mine to a girl named Sheila Goldstein.

FETUS ONE

Grow older.

Get an education.

FETUS TWO

"Wait for me, Sheila!"

FETUS ONE

Learn the same clinical facts everybody else does.

FETUS TWO

I'll major in combinatorial mathematics with a minor in Russian Literature.

FETUS ONE

Grow older.

Build your own version of stability.

A job, a house, a family.

FETUS TWO

We'll have two kids, maybe three.

FETUS ONE

Grow older still.

Grow tired.

Wait for your body to betray you and fail.

Last words, last breath.

FETUS TWO

"Goodbye Sheila! You have been all my reasons."

FETUS ONE

Every story, if you follow it long enough, has the exact same ending.

Every life is just a little bit of noise between two silences.

FETUS TWO

But there is that noise we get to make.

FETUS ONE

No one will notice.

FETUS TWO

We can laugh.

FETUS ONE

We can cry.

FETUS TWO

We can sing.

FETUS ONE

We can scream.

FETUS TWO continues singing the musical theater hit.

FETUS ONE screams.

FETUS ONE

Nobody heard me.

I did.

FETUS TWO

I heard you.

FETUS ONE

Let's get down to brass tacks, shall we?
We're mistakes.

FETUS TWO

"Blessed accidents."

FETUS ONE

You remember that fight the other day?

FETUS TWO

Which one?

FETUS ONE

The one about us.

FETUS TWO

Oh. I didn't like that one.

FETUS ONE

"I didn't want them in the first place."

FETUS TWO

"Please Daniel, stop yelling"

FETUS ONE

"I can't do this again.

The diapers.

The crying.

No sleep.

I can't sacrifice my life again."

FETUS TWO

"Please, love, please stop yelling."

FETUS ONE

"I'm not yelling!"

He broke a lamp and walked out.

She cried into her hand.

FETUS TWO

A well travelled American family drama.

FETUS ONE

Well travelled, yes, but . . . The variations inside our lives are infinite.

FETUS TWO

Dad's dread and malaise have their own special manifestations.

Mom's quiet reserves of strength through the daily weariness of habits and routines?

The Colonel? What a character.

Heartbreaking and hilarious at the same time!

FETUS ONE

I guess he's pretty interesting.

FETUS TWO

What about Beauty?

FETUS ONE

She sounds pretty cool.

FETUS TWO

Come on.

A 16 year old who martyrs herself through destructive emotional sublimation?

Don't you want to see what happens to her?

FETUS ONE

They didn't want us.

FETUS TWO

But we're here anyway.

FETUS TWO holds FETUS ONE's hand.

It comforts him.

Womb shakes.

FETUS TWO

Mom's working pretty hard to get us out.

Can you hear her crying?

FETUS ONE

We can stop it if we go.

FETUS TWO

Do you hear Dad comforting her?

FETUS ONE

They listen.

No.

FETUS TWO

No.

FETUS ONE

He's probably still at work.

FETUS TWO

Pause.

FETUS ONE

"Help me.

Help me, boys.

Remind me how much I love this family. Of all the things I have to be so grateful for. Please, gentlemen, help me remember the glory of living."

FETUS TWO

I forgot to tell you that he whispered something to us the other night while you were asleep.

FETUS ONE

What did he say?

FETUS TWO

"Good evening, gentlemen, I hope every breath and beat of your hearts are holy."

FETUS ONE

You should have woken me up!

Titty twister:

You said no more titty twisters!

FETUS TWO

I would never say that!

FETUS ONE

I just want you to get as much rest as you can.

FETUS TWO

You've been talking in your sleep and grinding your gums for months.

FETUS ONE

What do I say?

FETUS TWO

Mostly you just scream in anxiety.

FETUS ONE

Understandable.

FETUS TWO

Other times you wonder if you'll have a full head of hair.

Other times you wrestle with the problem of evil in relation to an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent God.

But last night you said the opening monologue from *Raging Bull*.

FETUS ONE

Really?

FETUS TWO

I swear.

FETUS ONE

That's a pretty hardcore thing to say in your sleep.

FETUS TWO does his best Robert Deniro. FETUS ONE shadowboxes.

They enjoy themselves.

FETUS ONE

You want to know what you look like when you sleep?

FETUS TWO

That would be amazing.

Like this.

FETUS ONE

FETUS TWO

Bullshit.

FETUS ONE

Not bullshit.

That's how you look. Like a frog.

FETUS TWO

How do you know what frogs look like?

FETUS ONE

I don't exactly. It's what I imagine they look like.

FETUS TWO

You see?

Out there we won't have to imagine the world anymore.

We'll get to see what everything looks like.

Smells like. Feels like.

Crisp air. The ocean. Horses.

FETUS ONE

Genocide.

FETUS TWO

Mountains. Fire.

FETUS ONE

The population bomb.

FETUS TWO

Cookies.

FETUS ONE

Nuclear winter.

FETUS TWO

The apple tree in the backyard.

FETUS ONE

They had to cut it down!

Weren't you listening?

Past saving.

That's all we are once we're out there!

We'll just be two more lives past saving.

FETUS TWO

Come on, John.

Tell me at least one thing you're looking forward to.

FETUS ONE

John. John. I don't feel like a John.

FETUS TWO

Maybe you're Samuel and I'm John.

FETUS ONE

Samuel. Samuel.

That sounds better, you know? It feels kinda right in my mouth.

FETUS TWO

The only problem is that I kind of like Samuel better too.

FETUS ONE

Too bad, it's mine.

They play rock, papers scissors.

FETUS ONE and FETUS TWO

Rock paper scissors shoot.

FETUS ONE *has rock*, FETUS TWO *has scissors*.

FETUS TWO

Son of a bitch.

FETUS ONE

Done and done.

I'm Samuel, you're John.

FETUS TWO

"Dear John, I don't love you anymore."

FETUS ONE

"Top of the morning, Samuel!"

"Heeeeeeeere's Johnny!"

FETUS TWO

Upset silence.

FETUS ONE

I'm so scared, brother.

FETUS TWO

But out there is the entertainment.

FETUS ONE

I'm so scared.

FETUS TWO

Me, too.

I'm scared, too.

Hey, did you fart?

FETUS ONE

No, did you?

FETUS TWO

Yeah.

FETUS ONE

Classic.

They laugh, that was funny.

But FETUS ONE begins to cry, he tries to hide it.

FETUS TWO

Hey, are you silently weeping?

FETUS ONE

No!

FETUS TWO

You can share it with me, this is a safe space.

FETUS ONE

The only safe space we'll ever know!

FETUS TWO

This is our invitation to the mystery of things.

Come on, brother, will you come with me?

The womb shakes its deepest thus far.

FETUS ONE

But we're going to come out all bloody and disgusting and covered in afterbirth.

FETUS TWO

Someone will wipe us off.

FETUS ONE

What will the air feel like in our lungs?

FETUS TWO

Cold at first. And then so natural we'll never even think about it.

FETUS ONE

What if it's too bright?

FETUS TWO

Our eyes will adjust.

FETUS ONE

What will love feel like?

FETUS TWO

You already know.

FETUS ONE

Do I?

FETUS TWO

Of course you do.

They hug really hard.

Womb shake.

FETUS ONE

I'm still just a little worried about original sin.

FETUS TWO

It's too late.

FETUS ONE

As descendants of Adam . . .

Stop.

FETUS TWO

As a consequence of the first sin . . .

FETUS ONE

Stop, brother.

FETUS TWO

Of this transgressed hereditary strain . . .

FETUS ONE

It's time.

FETUS TWO

FETUS ONE screams

What did the Colonel say this morning?

FETUS TWO

FETUS ONE

Never go to Detroit.

FETUS TWO

What else?

FETUS ONE

What's your name?

FETUS TWO

No.

FETUS ONE

What's your name? What time is it?

FETUS TWO

No.

FETUS ONE

What's your name? What time is it? How old am I? When the fuck did that happen? The torrent, the tempest, the whirlwind of passion. What's your name? What's your name? What's your name?

FETUS TWO slaps FETUS ONE.

FETUS TWO

"That the greatest act of courage is to love.

And anyone who says different is an asshole."
Are you an asshole?

FETUS ONE

No way!

FETUS TWO

No way!

So let's, be courageous, go out there, and love our time.
Every single moment of our lives.

What time is it?

FETUS ONE

It's showtime!

FETUS TWO

What time is it?

FETUS ONE

It's showtime!

FETUS TWO

I can't hear you!

FETUS ONE and TWO

It's showtime!

FETUS ONE

Will you sing Mom's lullaby?

During the song FETUS ONE begins to cry.

FETUS TWO

Remember this space

Before light knows your name

Before my warm embrace

Before joy before pain

Remember this wait

Before love before hate

Your lives without time

They hug.

FETUS TWO

Come on, brother.

It's time for us to enter the reality of experience.

Let's go.

FETUS ONE

Cool.

They do an intricate practiced handshake.

FETUS TWO

So who goes first?

FETUS ONE

You.

FETUS TWO

No. I insist. After you.

FETUS ONE

I couldn't possibly.

FETUS TWO

I couldn't possibly.

FETUS ONE

I'm not fucking asking.

FETUS TWO

Fine.

I'll go.

But you'll come out right after me.

FETUS ONE

I'll be right behind you.

FETUS TWO

You better because I don't want to be alone out there.

FETUS ONE

Don't worry you won't be.

FETUS ONE kisses FETUS TWO on the forehead.

FETUS TWO

So. See you in a minute?

FETUS ONE

Yeah.

See you in a minute.

*FETUS TWO is born.**FETUS ONE is alone.**He wraps his umbilical cord around his neck.*

FETUS ONE

I hope your life is extraordinary in every way, brother.

I hope every breath and beat of your heart is holy.

Holy.

Holy.

He tightens his umbilical cord. More. More.

END OF ACT TWO

INTERMISSION

III

THE ATTEMPT IS HOW WE LIVE

There's an apple tree in the living room.

*Well, an apple tree in the backyard but branches have
broken through the windows and a wall. There are
apples hanging off branches in the living room.*

Let's just say it's hard to miss.

JOHNNY prunes the tree. He's been doing it since forever.

He's old, not as old as the hills but close enough.

He wears a bathrobe with history in it.

No shirt.

Old underwear.

Socks that don't match.

Shuffling feet.

He looks hollowed.

Haunted.

It's night.

Late night but not that late either.

*JOHNNY sings the same musical theater hit that the twins
sang in the womb.*

*JOHNNY picks an apple from the tree, pares it with an old
knife.*

He's done this a thousand times or more.

He takes a bite of the apple.

Key in the front door.

The front door opens.

SAMUEL enters. He's JOHNNY's son.

A suitcase.

Groceries for his father who doesn't get out much.

He stocks the refrigerator.

For the birthday celebration, he brought wine, a cake from a chain store, perhaps a piñata, perhaps party hats. (If he does have those two items, he hangs the piñata from the tree, puts the party hands on himself and his father during):

SAMUEL

Sorry I'm late, Dad.

There was heavy weather in Detroit.

Happy birthday.

Kiss.

JOHNNY

The good news is this:

I'm just about ready to move past original sin.

SAMUEL

That's fantastic, congratulations.

JOHNNY

I was born! It wasn't my choice.

I didn't know I had one!

SAMUEL

I brought cake. A bottle of wine.

JOHNNY

But they say once I'm on earth I've already fallen from a state of perfection?

Bullshit.

SAMUEL

Look.

A piñata.

Party hats.

JOHNNY

The idea of original sin is responsible for so many people believing they are fundamentally bad and unlovable.

Maybe I am bad.

Maybe I am unlovable.

But certainly not only because of the fact that I was born.

So let's forget all about original sin.

SAMUEL

Forgotten.

JOHNNY

Instead let's talk for a minute or two about genetic determinism.

SAMUEL

So that's the bad news.

JOHNNY

Hear me out.

I was a bad husband, a terrible father.

I know this.

Don't try to say anything different.

SAMUEL

I wasn't planning on it.

JOHNNY

But how could I have been better based on the fundamentals with which I was born?

Maybe I'm only a mechanism that plays out the theme of our lineage. And if that's true I had no agency in how my life could play out.

SAMUEL

I see the maid forgot to come again this year.

JOHNNY

Let's assume this arguments validity and review the facts!

SAMUEL

I crossed two oceans to be here with you.

JOHNNY

My father?

Ha!

Gone.
Walked out.
Never met the man.
Abandoned us before I was born.

SAMUEL

Please, Dad.

I left my house 25 hours ago.

JOHNNY

My sister ran away, my mother fell apart, my grandfather went for a walk one day and never found his way home.

I don't even want to get started on how traumatic it is to not be able to convince your unborn twin brother to live.

SAMUEL

No one can hang themselves in utero!

JOHNNY

You had to be there.

I'm just saying that our family was not a safe place to nurture love.

SAMUEL

Was this a secret?

JOHNNY

I couldn't have loved you or your mother any better.

It was built inside of me to fail.

It's built inside of you, too.

SAMUEL

But that doesn't allow for our ability to grow.

To heal. To transform.

JOHNNY

I'll grant you cope but not transform.

SAMUEL

And it denies culpability.

JOHNNY

It explains, not denies.

I was fucked before the start, not stained with the distortion of the nature of man, but from this family, this blood. I'm only a minor variation on the theme of our lineage.
Same as you.

SAMUEL

Okay, Dad.

JOHNNY

Okay, what?

SAMUEL

You're right about all of it.

Original sin, genetic determinism, whatever other argument you came up with.

JOHNNY

Don't fuck with me, it's my birthday.

SAMUEL

So let's celebrate!

I brought a bottle of wine, this cake has your name on it in frosting, they ran out of candles so you'll have to make your wish without them.

I can't wait to see the look on your face when you open my present.

JOHNNY

I have no time for wishes!

No time for presents!

SAMUEL

Mom got you a card, by the way.

JOHNNY

Oh.

*Card.**Opens it.*

JOHNNY

"Dear John,

I love you more than you know you old piece of shit. I hope you can finally move past original sin.

Happy Birthday.
Sheila."

Sheila fucking Goldstein.
I called it.

SAMUEL

And a gift certificate.

Gift certificate.

Opens it.

JOHNNY

Bed Bath & Beyond.

SAMUEL

You could use a new set of everything.

JOHNNY

Wine?

Gift certificates?

I have no time!

I brought you into this life.

And because I did you were destined to fail.

I'm eternally sorry for it.

You're only a minor variation on the theme of our lineage.

Born past saving.

SAMUEL

Are you looking for absolution?

JOHNNY

Not from you.

For you.

SAMUEL

But I don't need it.

JOHNNY

I'm only saying this so you can begin to accept why your life has
been a failure, too.

SAMUEL

Seriously?

JOHNNY
And then maybe you won't end up like me, a tired old man alone on
his birthday.

SAMUEL

You're not alone.

I came all this way.

JOHNNY

Only out of filial obligation and then five and a half hours late.

SAMUEL

I can't control the fucking weather!

JOHNNY

You shouldn't fly through Detroit. I've always said so.

SAMUEL

My life has not been a failure.

JOHNNY

Oh really?

SAMUEL

Look.

Has my life been anything special?

JOHNNY

No.

SAMUEL

Okay, no.

But I don't need it to be special.

I perform my function.

I'm building my life, at great cost, with great effort.

I have a job.

An apartment.

A girlfriend.

We're talking about the future.

JOHNNY

You're building your own version of stability.

Congratulations.

How long do you think that's going to last before you fuck it up?

SAMUEL

Why I do keep trying?

"This is the year we'll actually know each other," I tell myself.

"This is the year I'll become real to you."

JOHNNY

You have to keep coming back.

SAMUEL

Why?

JOHNNY

If not for me then for your birthright.

SAMUEL

Dad.

JOHNNY

My mother.

Planted this tree the night I decided to be born and my brother did not.

You and I.

The last of our line.

When I die, her care will all be left to you.

SAMUEL

I won't be here, Dad, when you die it will have to fend for itself.

JOHNNY

You have got to watch out for pests and diseases.

SAMUEL

I pity your compulsion to stay in this place.

The world, Dad.

You still have more time.

Go see it.

JOHNNY

Apple maggots. Your greatest nemeses.

You'll need to use red sticky traps.

You have to order them special from the hardware store.

I have the number written down on the refrigerator.

SAMUEL

Look at me!

JOHNNY

What?

SAMUEL

If you want to celebrate your birthday and open my present that's what I'm here for.

Or I can go upstairs, change my flight and leave first thing in the morning.

Your choice.

JOHNNY

You're just like the rest of them.

You ran away.

SAMUEL

That's your answer?

JOHNNY

You left me alone with this lineage.

It's too much for just one person!

SAMUEL

It is your fault!

All of it.

You were a terrible father, a neglectful husband.

JOHNNY

By my own admission!

SAMUEL

You're alone because you drove everyone who cared for you away.

You destroyed yourself, destroyed every chance for your happiness.

JOHNNY

I'm only a mechanism.

It's you!
Not original sin.

SAMUEL

Not generations previous.
This life you have now.
You made it.

JOHNNY

Those before!!

SAMUEL

Take responsibility!

JOHNNY

You can't outrun a lineage.

SAMUEL

Nothing is chasing me.

JOHNNY

You're just like me.

Nothing holy about you, just another accident.

SAMUEL

Good night Dad. I won't wake you when I go.

JOHNNY

Hey!

SAMUEL

I won't see you for another year and pretty soon you won't be here
and I'll never come back.

And that kind of breaks my heart every day.

In spite of myself I love you, Dad.

Happy birthday.

Happy birthday.

He goes upstairs with his suitcase.

JOHNNY

Come back!

Come back.

Come back.

JOHNNY gives up.

Oh, fuck.

JOHNNY

JOHNNY sings the lullaby.

JOHNNY

Remember this space

Before light knows your name

Before my warm embrace

Before joy before pain

Remember this wait

Before love before hate

Your lives without time

He toys with the idea of opening his birthday present.

He tries to undo the ribbon.

BEAUTY enters still perfect, unseen by JOHNNY.

She's 95 years old but looks the exactly the same.

*She's dressed in a big parka, the type with the hood lined
with fur.*

She brushes off a bunch of snow.

BEAUTY

Otanjoubi omedetou.

That's Japanese for Happy Birthday.

JOHNNY

Beauty?

BEAUTY

Hi, Johnny.

JOHNNY

Jesus H Christ.

You look exactly the same. Literally.

BEAUTY

You look just like the Colonel.

JOHNNY

Your voice is as beautiful as I imagined.

I'm so happy to see you!

BEAUTY

I can't believe you're here.

JOHNNY

Come in! Come in!

BEAUTY

Oh my god, the tree.

When I left, it was so small.

And now.

JOHNNY

And now you're here!

It's like a dream.

Tell me everything.

BEAUTY

I don't know where to begin.

JOHNNY

How about the day you left home?

BEAUTY

It's been almost 74 years.

Can you believe it?

JOHNNY

It seems like twenty-two minutes ago.

BEAUTY

It was late, Mom was crying, I couldn't take it another second, packed my suitcase, crept down the stairs, you caught me at the door and I said,

JOHNNY

"Come with me."

BEAUTY

You didn't.

JOHNNY

I couldn't.

You didn't.

BEAUTY

So I walked down the street. You waved.

I got to the corner. Turned back, you were still waving.

The crosstown bus came.

I got on it.

At the last stop I got off.

Looked for Dad.

I tapped on so many shoulders. When they turned around I would say, "I'm sorry, I thought you were somebody else." That's when I started speaking again. Tap tap. Turn. "I'm sorry, I thought you were somebody else."

I went west. I kept looking. Worked odd jobs. Waitress, hotel maid, barista, I looked for Dad in the evenings and on weekends.

Tap tap. Turn.

"I'm sorry, I thought you were somebody else."

I couldn't stop moving, feeling restless, feeling anxious. I made friends here and there but just as quickly left them behind.

Eventually I worked my way to the ocean.

Have you ever seen the ocean, Johnny?

JOHNNY

On TV.

And in dreams.

BEAUTY

I looked at the waves and watched the water for a week.

I swam in high tides. Ate fresh fish and drank Sangria at a beach café. At first I threw up from normal food. My stomach wasn't used to it.

I thought, enough.

You deserve a settled life. You deserve stability.

So I got a job with benefits, started dating a nice man, we lived together, we had friends and dinner parties.

But I couldn't sleep. At night I stared at the ceiling cracks and counted all the places Dad had ever talked about. What sports teams he followed. What weather he was the happiest in.

I cut out, left a note on the kitchen counter.

"I can't rest yet."

Tracked down an old girlfriend of his in San Francisco. She gave me a picture of them when they were just teenagers.

She has the picture.

JOHNNY

So young.

BEAUTY

I realized I had stopped getting older.

Time didn't touch me. No sagging, no bags, no brittleness.

A weary mind, yes, but my body, no.

There was always the next town, around another corner.

I went down through the southwest, Texas, crossed over into Mexico.

Tap tap. Turn.

"Lo siento. Pense que eras otra persona."

South America. Africa. Asia. Australia. Europe.

Yes, I stopped from time to time.

Traded currency in New Delhi, taught English in Kyoto, I spent two seasons in British summer stock playing Hamlet in a non-gender specific production.

Kept repeating to myself, "There is nowhere you have to go, there is nowhere you have to go, there is nowhere you have to go."

I could have had so many legitimate lives. A wife, a mother, a lover, a hermit, an independent and sexually free spirit who throws pottery and wears ponchos.

I broke hearts, broke ties and burned every bridge.

Sadly I got an almost perverse thrill leaving places. I tried to want to stay somewhere, or with someone, but I couldn't maintain. Always another corner, another shoulder to tap on.

Finally, there wasn't much of the world left so I hitched a ride to Antarctica with some astrophysicists I met in Helsinki.

I said to myself, "This has got to be the end of your searching, you deserve a life, to rest, you deserve safety, and love."

And then I finally found him.

You found Dad in Antarctica?

JOHNNY

BEAUTY

No, I was in my bunk at the outpost in Antarctica, I walk outside, it's the darkest sky in the world, the stars are so close I tried to touch them, and I remembered how explorers used constellations to find the way back where they came from and I realized the one place I'd overlooked on earth was home.

Made some inquiries, chased a paper trail, and finally found him in that rest home near the airport.

JOHNNY

The one by the expressway.

BEAUTY

No.

Further down the road.

JOHNNY

Across from the Holiday Inn.

BEAUTY

But on the other side of the embankment.

JOHNNY

Behind the Sears.

BEAUTY

Exactly.

I found him there.

JOHNNY

What was he doing?

BEAUTY

Assisted living. Oxygen. Incontinence. Pudding. It's not a long story. I'd spent 74 years looking for this man. I didn't know what to say.

I asked him "Dad, do you like the sound of my voice," but he was mostly deaf.

I asked him, "Am I still the most beautiful thing you've ever seen, Dad," but he was mostly blind.

We sat with the TV on. I held his hand. I don't know if he ever knew I was there, or who I was.

When he died, I kept his remains.

Opens suitcase.

Bones roll out.

BEAUTY

Happy birthday!

JOHNNY

Wow.

BEAUTY

I thought maybe if we buried him in the backyard I might finally be able to rest.

JOHNNY

I can't think of any better way to celebrate my birthday.

BEAUTY

I'm so tired.

JOHNNY

You've had such a long journey.

I'll go get the shovel from the garage.

There's nowhere you have to go anymore, Beauty.

Welcome home.

He kisses her head and goes.

She picks up the skull.

BEAUTY

"Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft.

Where be your gibes now?

Your gambols?

Your songs?"

VIOLET comes on with the baby.

VIOLET

Welcome Home, Johnny That is the first time you entered your home.

So many times you'll do it.

And you'll be safe.

And you'll know peace.

And you'll know love.

Let's see, the characters in our family are me, and your father, your grandfather, your sister, and soon all the people who you choose to love.

Beauty.

Say hello to your brother.

Johnny.

This is Beauty.

Beauty, this is Johnny.

BEAUTY waves.

VIOLET

Would you like to hold your brother?

BEAUTY nods.

VIOLET

Don't be scared.

You're not going to break him. I said the same thing to you when you were born. Welcome Home.

You fit right here. I was so scared I would break you. We were going to name you April, but the second your father saw you he called you Beauty, and the tone in his voice said there would be no debate. We were just kids.

Nobody taught us how to do this part.

I improvised.

I said, "Welcome Home, Beauty.

That is the first time you entered your home.

So many times you'll do it.

And you'll be safe.

And you'll know peace."

Where was this peace?

This safety?

You say to yourself, this will make sense.
Things will be still.
Tranquility will come.
When will it come?

BEAUTY *doesn't know.*

VIOLET

Your other brother didn't make it.
I had to say goodbye to him at the hospital.
It happens from time to time. That's what they said. The cord. No
breath.

I told them:

"Let me hold my son! Let me hold him!"

They said I would have to sign a form. I signed the form, they put
him in my arms.

Cold already, I kissed his lips.

None of this had to happen.

No date no kiss no wedding no you, Beauty. No Johnny. No Samuel.
Your father knocked on that door.

Knock knock knock.

VIOLET

I thought, "I am in love with this boy."

"If he loves me, too then I can die happy."

Knock knock.

COLONEL (OS)

Violet!

Answer the door!

VIOLET

My heart was racing.
What if I say the wrong thing?
What if he doesn't love me, too?

Knock knock knock.

COLONEL (OS)

Jesus H. Christ are you going to answer the door?

Who could have told me it would be like this?

COLONEL *enters.*

COLONEL

Violet.

He's just standing out there.

VIOLET

I have to finish getting ready.
Entertain him.

COLONEL

I don't want to.

VIOLET

I like this boy, Daddy.
I really like him.

Please take this seriously.

She runs upstairs.

LEONORE (OS)

John, stop torturing her and answer the door!

COLONEL

Yes, dear.

He wheels the door open.

DANIEL

Good evening.

COLONEL

I'm supposed to take you seriously, what's your name?

DANIEL

It's Daniel.

COLONEL

Won't you come in?

DANIEL

Thank you.

COLONEL

Can I fix you a drink?

That would be amazing.

DANIEL

COLONEL

Bourbon?

DANIEL

Perfect.

COLONEL

That was a trick.

DANIEL

What was?

COLONEL

To see if you'd actually accept a drink.

You're underage you're driving a car with my only daughter in it.

She wants me to take you seriously so I'd advise to wise up quick, son.

Let's begin again, shall we?

DANIEL

Okay?

COLONEL *shooshes him out the door. Closes it.*

COLONEL

Knock!

Knock knock.

He wheels the door open.

COLONEL

Daniel! There you, are old sport.

Come inside, let me fix you a drink.

DANIEL

No, thank you, sir.

I'm driving.

COLONEL

Come on!

Let's drink like men.

That's all right.

DANIEL

COLONEL

Stop being a pussy, Daniel.

DANIEL

No.

I understand it's customary to accept a host's offer but in this case I'm afraid I have to break that custom.

I would never endanger your daughter, sir.

COLONEL

Good man.

Have a seat.

DANIEL

Thank you, sir.

They sit.

Silence.

DANIEL

Beautiful house.

COLONEL

We've been here a long time.

Silence.

DANIEL

Violet says you're in the army.

COLONEL

30 years.

DANIEL

I personally feel that war is the acting out of a nation's collective neuroses.

COLONEL

Oh.

Silence.

DANIEL

Can we skip the small talk, sir?

Please.

COLONEL

VIOLET is at the top of the stairs and hears this part.

DANIEL

So.

For me romantic love is not manifest of an emotional or societal programming or a projection of pre-existing yearnings onto another or sexual desire with regards to mate selection, but, as Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, a revolution of mind and body that harmonizes both the individual and society.

I just wanted to say that I am in love with your daughter. I have been for quite some time. It has already transformed me.

What the end of that transformation will be I can't say but all I want to do is be around to find out.

Pause.

COLONEL

Can I level with you?

DANIEL

Please.

COLONEL

Every love story is a tragedy.

The ending.

Built in from the very beginning.

Either somebody falls out of love or somebody dies. It is required to end.

I don't say that as a warning but as a challenge.

Your challenge starting right now.

DANIEL

What's the challenge, sir?

VIOLET pretends to be just entering.

COLONEL

To love anyway.

Here I come!

VIOLET

COLONEL

And I hope this goes without saying, but if you fuck with my daughter I'll slit your throat like a pig.

VIOLET

Sorry that took so long!

DANIEL

No problem.

COLONEL

Daniel and I were having the most interesting conversation.

DANIEL

Violet, I'll wait for you outside.

COLONEL

Daniel.

A pleasure.

DANIEL

You, too, sir.

VIOLET

I'll see you in a minute?

DANIEL

See you in a minute. Okay.

DANIEL goes.

VIOLET

Do you like him?

COLONEL

We talked for four minutes, honey.

The question is do you?

VIOLET

I'm in love with him.

COLONEL

Then for God's sake notice this time.
Hold it.

Be grateful.

It won't last forever.

It's not supposed to.

VIOLET

Goodnight, Dad.

COLONEL

Goodnight, love.

The COLONEL kisses VIOLET.

She goes.

LEONORE (OS)

Is she gone?

COLONEL

Yes, dear.

LEONORE (OS)

We've got 2 more times to go today and it's already 7 o'clock.

COLONEL

If we do it 2 more times I'm going to break in half.

LEONORE (OS)

If you break then I'll fix you. Come on, John.

COLONEL

I'm coming, Lenore!

The COLONEL goes up the stairs.

VIOLET comes back in.

VIOLET

Only a year later, the Grace Episcopal Church.

I was so nervous. So many people. A tasteful veil. My hair was longer then.

Your father was just a boy. I don't know if he'd ever even been in a tuxedo before. The Colonel squeezed my arm, down the aisle, gave me away, tears in his eyes, he whispered, "Have courage."

I chose this.

To be a wife to your father.

To be a mother to you.

To your brothers.

It didn't last forever.

It wasn't supposed to.

But I hoped maybe for a little bit longer.

I'm sorry, Beauty.

Would you forgive me if I have nothing left to give?

BEAUTY would.

VIOLET

You two are the citizens of my heart.

You two are bound to each other, and for all time.

Say goodnight to your brother.

BEAUTY kisses JOHNNY on the head.

As VIOLET carries her baby upstairs, JOHNNY enters from the backyard with a shovel.

JOHNNY

We'd better get started, Beauty

Late October.

The frost every morning already.

Have you given any thought about where exactly in the backyard you want to bury Dad's remains?

My favorite place, southwest corner.

Beautiful.

The best light.

I always imagined that would be Dad's favorite parcel, sitting in the mornings with the paper before work, maybe a cocktail in the evening.

Or:

If we want to go the more punitive route we could bury him next to the fence where the neighbor's dog takes a shit every morning. Up to you.

Pause.

Do you remember Mom crying?

BEAUTY

Sometimes I remember it too much.

JOHNNY

I would lie in bed and something inside me would say, go. Go!

BEAUTY

I didn't want to. I couldn't help it.

Go, get out of here.

Find him.

Find Dad.

Maybe then she'll stop crying.

Maybe he's the cure.

JOHNNY

You found him.

BEAUTY

Way past too late.

Tell me your life, Johnny.

From when I walked out that door until I walked back in it.

JOHNNY

The frost, Beauty, we have to get started.

Every minute we wait will be that much harder.

BEAUTY

I've missed so much already. Please.

I stood at the door.

I said, "Come with me."

JOHNNY

I wanted to so bad.

I saw you get on the crosstown bus. I almost ran after you.

I cried all night. I screamed into my pillow.

Teenager stuff. "Why me!?! What did I do to deserve this!?!"

The next morning Mom asked where you were.

I told her you were taking a little trip but you'd be home soon. Ten years I told her the same story.

"Where's your sister?"

"Don't worry, Mom, she'll be home soon."

She died asking when you were coming home!

BEAUTY

I'm so sorry.

JOHNNY

I couldn't handle it. I didn't know what to do with myself, with my hands, so I got the axe and started to chop down the tree. Chop. Chop. Chop.

You can still see the scar.

But I couldn't finish it.

I put down the axe.

Spent the next couple of years getting drunk. High when I could get it.

I felt so sorry for myself I thought I would die out of self-pity and loneliness.

But I made myself get up. Push through.

I worked my way through community college. I majored in mathematics. A minor in Russian literature.

I read and read and read. Translated Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Bulgakov,

Wrote briefs about game theory and non Euclidean geometry.

Nobody gave a shit. The world didn't change.

SAMUEL is at the top of the stairs, like VIOLET previously.

He was coming to give his father his birthday present but listens instead.

JOHNNY

I met a girl. We got married. We had a son.

I tried hard to be a good husband. To be happy with the quiet intimacies. With the tacit contracts.

I tried so hard to be more than a variation on the theme of our lineage.

But I couldn't, maybe I wasn't strong enough. I don't know.

I became withdrawn. Angry. Hateful.

I was a terrible father, a neglectful husband.

I destroyed every chance for my happiness.

When my wife finally left we gave our son a choice and he chose to live with her.

I missed him so much. He's the best thing I ever did with my life.

I got depressed. Drew the blinds, didn't get out of bed for nine months. Had piss bottles all around the bedroom. Overflowing ashtrays everywhere. Was scared of the doorbell. The mailman. Went to the grocery store on the other side of town so I wouldn't run into anybody.

I came downstairs, tied a noose to the tree, around my neck. When I jumped, the branch snapped.

This tree!

She was neglected. Diseased.

She required me.

My attention.

So I stayed.

I took care of her.

It's how I spent my life.

Wrapping plastic mouse guards.

Keeping the soil well-drained.

Fighting pests and diseases.

At this point taking care of her might be the reason I'm still alive.

I imagine her all withered and broken.

Rotten apples on the ground and sick branches.

Just a little longer. I say to myself.

You can make it another year.

BEAUTY

70 years.

Perpetual searching.

An old man in a nursing home who didn't know who I was?

I was searching for the wrong thing!

JOHNNY

At least you went searching!

BEAUTY

You made something grow!

Before you were born we had a tree like this in the backyard.

They had to cut it down because it was past saving.

JOHNNY

You see!

All of us.

The same fate.

Born past saving.

BEAUTY

But you proved it isn't true.

You kept Mom's love alive, Johnny, this family's.

You didn't have to look anywhere because there wasn't anything missing.

This is our piece of the earth, our piece of the universe.

You kept it safe, you made it grow.

JOHNNY

What was the point?

After I'm gone there won't be anyone left.

BEAUTY

What about your son?

SAMUEL

It's the right question.

SAMUEL comes downstairs.

JOHNNY

This is my son, Samuel.

Samuel, this is your Aunt Beauty.

BEAUTY

It's nice to finally meet you.

SAMUEL

How old are you, Beauty?

BEAUTY

95.

Give or take a couple of months.

She couldn't age!

JOHNNY

A weary mind. But her body, no.

She brought our father's remains home.

We're going to bury them in the backyard!

BEAUTY

And then maybe I'll be able to rest.

SAMUEL

Wow.

It's like your fantasy birthday party, Dad.

JOHNNY

I know!

SAMUEL

I never thought you were real, Beauty.

BEAUTY

I am.

SAMUEL

My Dad.

He would tell me bedtime stories about you.

About our family.

BEAUTY

What kind?

SAMUEL

Every kind.

Comedies. Tragedies. Love stories. A couple of westerns.

"The Colonel's Long Walk."

"God's Spies."

"Paint for Breakfast."

"The World is Round."

JOHNNY

Tell her one, Samuel.

Tell her, "The World is Round."

No matter how scared he was, this one always put him down.

Go ahead.

"Once upon a time there was a girl so beautiful."

JOHNNY *mouths along, he loves this story so much.*

SAMUEL

"Once upon a time there was a girl so beautiful she had to have it as her name, and like all the most intelligent people had to learn the truths of the world through experience, which is why Beauty had to find out for herself that the world is round."

Why don't you tell it, Dad?

JOHNNY

"Beauty took that first single step, and then another, and then ten more, ten thousand, ten million, she had to get hundreds of pairs of new shoes, an uncountable number of socks, along her way she saw so many wondrous things, met so many people, they talked with her, and she talked with them, too. About joys and sorrow, about hope, about grief, and about love.

After many many years of single steps, Beauty returned home, and knew for herself that the world is round."

The end.

BEAUTY

I'm sorry it took me so long to come home.

JOHNNY

You had so far to go!

BEAUTY *picks the suitcase of bones.*

BEAUTY

I want to bury Dad in the shade of the tree.

He would hoist me up there, I felt like I was flying. I've still never felt so free.

The punitive route is tempting but I know what forgiveness means. He said that I would.

Now I do.

BEAUTY *collapses.*

JOHNNY
Beauty, honey, you're exhausted.
We'll bury him tomorrow.

BEAUTY
Tonight.

JOHNNY
The ground, Beauty.
The frost is heavy already. It might be too hard.

BEAUTY
Please, I can't rest until it's finished.

SAMUEL
Let me help.

BEAUTY
Thank you Samuel.

JOHNNY
You want to help?

SAMUEL
But first you have to open your birthday present.

JOHNNY
After.

SAMUEL
Now.

SAMUEL gives him a manila envelope.

JOHNNY
An envelope, how did you know?

SAMUEL

Inside.

Inside is a sonogram.

JOHNNY
I'll be a grandfather?

SAMUEL
You will.
Four months.

JOHNNY
And then we begin again.

SAMUEL
Let's bury your father and then we can celebrate your birthday.

JOHNNY
Finally there's something to celebrate.
I'll go get started.

SAMUEL
I'll be right behind you.

JOHNNY
I'll see you in a minute.

SAMUEL
I'll see you in a minute.

JOHNNY goes.

BEAUTY
Congratulations, Samuel.

SAMUEL
Were we born to fail, Beauty?

Do you think it's conscionable to bring a child into this world? This family.

BEAUTY
Do you know where you got your name?

SAMUEL

A family name.

An Uncle, a cousin, I never met him.

BEAUTY

It was our brother's name.

The one who didn't want to be born.

Our mother had to say goodbye to him at the hospital. It broke her.

She called your father and me the citizens of her heart. She said we were bound to each other. And for all time.
I'm so happy to know another citizen.

SAMUEL

Will I be strong enough?
Can I transform this lineage?
Will I have enough to give?

BEAUTY

Maybe not, maybe so.
But maybe the attempt is how we live.
Tell me a story while I fall asleep.

SAMUEL

What kind of story?
Happy or sad?

BEAUTY

Maybe a little bit of both.

SAMUEL

Once upon a time there was a family.
Who woke up on every newest day to try to love each other.
Not with the kind of love for songs or poems.
Practical love. Daily. Built of tiny acts of care inside routine.
Buttoning a uniform. Paper sack lunches. Jigsaw puzzles.
Dancing.

This goes on for years. For decades. But it's so hard to maintain.
Bodies fail. Love wanes. Promises are forgotten.
But there are homecomings, too.

Peace is discovered.

And some hearts get to rest.

BEAUTY

Do I get to rest now, too?

FOOTNOTE

Footnote number thirty.

Tonight, just before she dies, Beauty will look out at the sky and thank the stars for lighting her passage home.
The church bell tolls twelve times.

It does.

FOOTNOTE

The newest day.

VIOLET comes downstairs.

FOOTNOTE

Violet enters.

The sun will rise in seven hours.

She will take out the same dishes, silverware, the same glasses, and then wait for everyone who remains to wake up.

I imagine the universe as a household which is always beginning again.
A circle without a cause or an end, a circle that never gets tired, that has no apparent aim, unless the aim is to find bliss inside the circle.
To find joy, and hope, and meaning in the details and facts that hour by hour define our lives.

The names might be different but our fate is the same.

To give what we have.

The attempt is how we live.

Violet decides to plant this tree.

VIOLET picks up an apple.

She kneels and breaks it open with her hands, plants it in the ground.

Knock knock.

COLONEL (OS.)

Violet, answer the door!

VIOLET

How could I know how much courage this was going to take?

Knock knock.

COLONEL (OS.)

Jesus H Christ, are you going to answer the door?

VIOLET opens the door.

Sorry that took so long.

VIOLET

DANIEL

No problem.

She kisses him.

He's surprised, she is, too.

DANIEL

Are you ready?

VIOLET

Yes.

To FOOTNOTE:

VIOLET

I choose this.

VIOLET and DANIEL go.

FOOTNOTE

Footnote thirty-three.

Upstairs, in what used to be my childhood bedroom, I will stare at the same ceiling cracks I counted as a little boy, the same ceiling cracks that Violet counted, and Beauty, my father, and soon, my own son.

Just before sleep, I will think, "Yes. How funny. Here I am. Back where I started. Another variation on the theme of a love that can't cease transforming."

JOHNNY (OS.)

It's been more than a minute. Please, son.

I can't do this alone.

FOOTNOTE picks up the suitcase with his grandfather's remains and walks outside.

FOOTNOTE

Don't worry.

You don't have to.

Here I come.

THE END

Afterword

In Act 3, Samuel tells Beauty the titles of the bedtime stories he heard about their family. The Colonel's Long Walk, Paint for Breakfast, and God's Spies.

The first two have obvious correlations inside the script, but God's Spies has zero. Eric Slater, an actor in both Chicago productions, missed a few days of rehearsal for the birth of his daughter and asked me to write God's Spies so he could tell it to her.

So I wrote the following for my cast. It was my way of saying thank you and goodbye.

God's Spies
For Winona

Maybe it's true that the world is dreamed by one single dreamer, and all of us get only our own humble angle with which to watch the one dream.

But how vast the field! But how many bridges and streets and mountains and miles! The dream is too big to see enough from our singular view!

And so came together a band of spies who said to each other, "No! My lookout is too lonely! Let's take off the veil, share our eyes, and then we'll get to see so much more of the one dream!"

That's when these spies became a family, not a family bound by blood or name but an altogether different kind of magic. The shared dream.

They said to each other, "Look! There are so many more rivers than before! And sidewalks. And wind through leaves, and tissue paper. There are so many more types of walks, cadences of laughter, and now my heart can love more love!"

This dream crossed band of spies then said to the world, "Look with us!"

And when the people came to share it they screamed, "It's such a beautiful dream! I never saw how beautiful! You have helped me open my heart to wonder!"

We all know in the deepest parts of us that we don't have to be so lonely. That when we look outside our portion, when we agree to see the single dream through the vision of one another, then the many become few, and then the few become one. A unity indivisible. One breath. One beat. One window. One door. One dream. One love.