

# *Qualities of Starlight*

by Gabriel Jason Dean

“At its best our age is an age of searchers and discoverers, and at its worst, an age that has domesticated despair and learned to live with it happily.”

-Flannery O'Connor

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## **DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION HISTORY & AWARDS**

*Qualities of Starlight* was part of a portfolio that won the 2011 Kennedy Center Ken Ludwig Award for a body of work from an emerging writer. A previous version was the winner of the 2010 Essential Theatre Playwriting Award and was produced by the Essential Theatre, Peter Hardy, Artistic Director, as part of the 2010 Power Plays Festival in Atlanta, Georgia. The play was workshopped and given a public reading at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival PLAYground readings in 2011, directed by the playwright. Subsequently, a new draft was workshopped and produced at Cultural Development Corporation's 2012 Source Festival in Washington, DC, directed by Sasha Bratt. And a new draft was workshopped and produced in 2013 by The Vortex Repertory Theatre in Austin, TX, directed by Rudy Ramirez. The Kentucky premiere is now underway at Louisville's Theatre [502], Mike Brooks directing.

The play is the winner of the ScriptWorks Finer Point Grant (2013) and winner of seven B. Iden Payne Awards including "Best Comedy" and "Best Original Script," and was nominated for two Austin Critic's Table awards including the David Mark Cohen New Play Award. This draft was read and workshopped in 2014 and 2015 at Abingdon Theatre in New York, Sean Daniels directing and was nominated for the Kesselring Award.

*Qualities of Starlight* is the sixth play in a 7-play collection called *The Attapulugus Elegies*. Through the lives of the residents of Attapulugus, over the course of the last two decades, the collection chronicles the death of a rural mill town in the foothills of the Appalachians Mountains.

### **WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING...**

“...riveting and effective, Dean's script is overall incredibly smart, memorable, and honest...he's created a distinct work akin to a modern *Long Day's Journey Into Night* with a peppering of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* If work like this continues, Gabriel Jason Dean is sure to be thought of a great modern American playwright.”

--*BroadwayWorld.com*

“...a well-crafted...engaging drama...*Qualities of Starlight* registers as a welcome find.”

--*Washington Post*

“...well-structured and poetic...plays out in a chorus of beautifully interlaced dialogue...burrows down to the roots of estrangement, but finds hope along the way.”

--*Washington City Paper*

“ ...a dark, yet comedic exploration of family bonds, love, loss, forgiveness, and whether we all really turn into our parents despite our best efforts not to....If you're looking for a night filled with family dysfunction, theoretical astronomy, and a look at the strength of bonds of love and family, go check it out!”

-- *DC Metro Theatre Arts*

“...a thoughtful and entertaining new play...*Qualities of Starlight* shows people determined to recover from the bruises of the past and move towards a brighter, more hopeful future.”

--*DC Theatre Scene*

“Dizzily compelling ... a celestial symphony of emotional tones ... the ending is an elegiac coda to memory and affection and connection and, yes, to the qualities that starlight can bring to the heart.” --*Atlanta Theater Buzz*

"A work of great imagination...a terrific show and an enjoyable evening, one you do not want to miss." --*Publishers Feature Syndicate*

"So dang funny!" --*VSA Arts of Georgia*

## **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

ROSE TURNER:	54	mother
JUNIOR TURNER:	55	father
THEODORE TURNER:	35	their son
POLLY TURNER:	34	his wife

## **SETTING**

The interior and exterior of the Turner's double-wide trailer in a valley in Attapulgus.

The year is 2008.

**RUN TIME:** 2 hours, 10 minutes with a fifteen minute intermission.

## **NOTES**

/ indicates interruption  
< > indicates a beat  
... indicates stammer or trailing off of thought  
— in the middle of a line, indicates a shift in thought  
— at the end of a line, indicates that the next line should flow without pause  
(*Silence.*) an opportunity for the unspoken

## **SCENES**

ONE:	<i>QUICKIE</i>
TWO:	<i>BABIES</i>
THREE:	<i>RESERVATIONS</i>
FOUR:	<i>HOOKED</i>
FIVE:	<i>BUTTER</i>
SIX :	<i>EXPANSION</i>
SEVEN:	<i>CONTRACTION</i>
EIGHT:	<i>WEPT</i>



***This play is dedicated to the memory of my fierce mama, Elizabeth Rose Dean.***

1.

## QUICKIE

*(The sky is the color of bruises.)*

*(Dusk stars shine above the Turner double-wide, casting hazy illumination on the whole valley.)*

*(Inside, the double-wide is a museum of junk. There's a half-filled fish tank with a few desperate goldfish. There are stacks of books—mostly romance novels—and magazines—T.V. Guides and National Geographics. There are half-filled garbage bags with unknown contents—full of treasure, not trash. There are stacks of computer monitors against one wall and here and there a few interesting antiques that are probably worth much less than you'd think.)*

*(There's what might be a dining room table covered in lawnmower parts and somewhere on the table there's a praying hands napkin holder—sans napkins—but you can't see that just yet.)*

*(The carpet's matted in places and where it's torn, it's patched together with duct tape.)*

*(Framed and unframed photos of THEO as a child and teenager hang on one wall—awkward sports photos, prom, a photo of THEO and his mom, ROSE taken at La Plaza Mayor, Madrid.)*

*(There's a black and white photo of a dark eyed man with a thick mop of black hair and cherubic cheeks. This is John Lee, ROSE's father.)*

*(Also, there's a velvet Elvis.)*

*(An oversized, out of date TV blares WWE Wrestling and dimly lights ROSE and JUNIOR who are sleeping in two tattered, plump recliners, feet up.)*

*(ROSE has a copy of "Astronomy Magazine" draped open atop her chest.)*

*(JUNIOR is cuddling his guitar like a woman.)*

*(A body slam on TV startles ROSE. She takes a massive breath in as though waking from the dead, uprights in a cold sweat and starts to dig in the cushions of her recliner, looking for something...)*

**ROSE**

Where did I? OK. Gotta take out the trash. Move them stupid parts. Junior! < > The fish, the fucking fish. Junior, water the fish! Wake your ass up! < > Junior?

*(JUNIOR snores.)*

**ROSE**

Pathetic.

*(ROSE takes the Spain photo from the wall.)*

*(The wall behind the photo is bright white, a ghost from a time when paint was fresh.)*

**ROSE**

Only you could ever convince me to get on a airplane. < > Shit, talking like you're dead or something.

*(ROSE places the photo back on the wall, eyes the fish tank.)*

**ROSE**

The fucking fish!

*(She takes JUNIOR's "Big Gulp" from the side table, takes a swig, thinks about it, moves JUNIOR's guitar elsewhere, then spits the "Big Gulp" juice on JUNIOR.)*

**ROSE**

I baptize you in the name of the holy... the holy whatever. God, how do you drink this stuff?

**JUNIOR**

You a mean spirited woman, you know that?

**ROSE**

Ewck, this Mountain Dew's flat as a pancake.

**JUNIOR**

Ain't no reason to spit it on me!

**ROSE**

Well, you need a bath. You stink.

**JUNIOR**

/ I do not!

**ROSE**

I told you to water them fish.

**JUNIOR**

What?

**ROSE**

The fish! They gonna die if you don't water them.

**JUNIOR**

You're already up.

**ROSE**

They ain't my fucking fish!

**JUNIOR**

Language.

**ROSE**

I'll give you some language if you don't get off your ass! The boy is coming, Junior.

**JUNIOR**

Time is it?

**ROSE**

Six something. Now get up. Look alive. Water your fish. Clean something!

**JUNIOR**

Give me a minute, woman! Damn, can't a man get back in the world?

**ROSE**

Put a shirt on. You don't want Polly to see that belly, do you?

**JUNIOR**

*(grabbing his belly by the handful)*

Hey, she married *my* boy. *This* is what she's got to look forward to.

**ROSE**

Yeah, well thank God he's better looking than you.

**JUNIOR**

Takes his looks after his mama.

**ROSE**

What are you trying to butter me up for? Put on a shirt, you fat thing.

*(ROSE smiles and throws a wrinkled button-up shirt at him.)*

*(ROSE looks at the photo of John Lee.)*

**ROSE**

Looks like his grandpa. *(touching the photo)* Ain't right a minister was that handsome.

**JUNIOR**

No, it ain't right that his *daughter* is always saying how handsome he was.

**ROSE**

You just jealous. *(indicating the La Plaza Mayor photo)* Hey, I forget, where were we in this photo?

**JUNIOR**

Somewheres in Europe.

**ROSE**

I know *that*. But where?

**JUNIOR**

How should I know? Ya'll didn't invite me.

**ROSE**

But I told you where it was.

**JUNIOR**

How'm I supposed to remember somewhere I never been?

**ROSE**

You wouldn't remember your own damned name if I didn't yell it at you a thousand times a day.

**JUNIOR**

Mean. Just mean.

*(JUNIOR's hands are badly clawed with neuropathy and he struggles to put on the shirt.)*

**JUNIOR**

Why I gotta wear something with buttons?

**ROSE**

Your son is coming home. Look nice for a change.

**JUNIOR**

Help me?

**ROSE**

They God, what would you do without me?

**JUNIOR**

Stay naked.

*(ROSE helps him with the shirt.)*

*(JUNIOR flops back in the recliner.)*

**JUNIOR**

Something's up and you know it.

**ROSE**

What do you mean?

**JUNIOR**

They just call all the sudden and say they want to come see us for a couple days. We ain't seen him in—they been married for what—

**ROSE**

/ Five years—

**JUNIOR**

Going on six years now. And not a single visit home. Something's up.

**ROSE**

Well whatever it is, it's a damned blessing if the boy's coming home. Now get off your ass and clean something!

**JUNIOR**

When they getting here?

**ROSE**

A few minutes probably.

*(JUNIOR looks around at the catastrophic mess.)*

**JUNIOR**

A few minutes ain't gonna do this place a lot of good.

**ROSE**

I been telling you to clean this shit up for two days now.

*(ROSE throws "Astronomy" at him.)*

**ROSE**

If you ain't gonna help me, at least educate yourself.

**JUNIOR**

What's this?

**ROSE**

What's it say?

**JUNIOR**

*(mispronounced on purpose)*

Astronomy.

**ROSE**

Don't act dumber than you are. There's a whole article about Theo in there.

**JUNIOR**

I'll be— he's published in a *magazine*?

**ROSE**

Stop fooling around. If you ain't gonna bother to read it, just tell him you're proud of him. He'd probably like to hear that from you.

**JUNIOR**

*(sitting Astronomy aside)*

We got any Tylenols left?

**ROSE**

I need some too. You give me a damned headache.

*(ROSE gets the Tylenol, pops the top, grabs the "Big Gulp," swigs it, makes a face, pushes a couple pills down.)*

**JUNIOR**

*(tongue out)*

AAAAAAHHHHHH—

*(ROSE puts two pills on JUNIOR's tongue.)*

*(JUNIOR fumbles for the straw on the Big Gulp.)*

**ROSE**

You're helpless.

*(ROSE assists him. He drinks.)*

**JUNIOR**

We got time for a quickie?

**ROSE**

Is that *all* you think about?

*(ROSE plants a small kiss on his lips, then breaks away.)*

*(ROSE pulls out meth paraphernalia—pipe, lighter and a small bag of rocks— hidden in her recliner.)*

**ROSE**

We gotta quit this shit some day.

**JUNIOR**

Yep.

*(She packs the pipe, lights up.)*

**JUNIOR**

Just a *little* hit, now—

**ROSE**

I know.

*(ROSE inhales it.)*

*(She holds the pipe for JUNIOR while he hits it.)*

**JUNIOR**

We shouldn't say nothing to Theo about this.

**ROSE**

Really? Cause I thought I'd offer him and Polly a hit when they get here. Don't wanna be rude.

*(For a second, JUNIOR thinks she's for real.)*

**ROSE**

Damn, you're stupid.

**JUNIOR**

Don't play tricks on me when I'm high. I get vulnerable.

*(They veg in the recliners and gawk at the TV.)*

**JUNIOR**

Phew. This is good stuff. Where'd you get it?

**ROSE**

Mexicans.

**JUNIOR**

Ooph. Ummm.

**ROSE**

/ Yeah.

**JUNIOR**

They do good work. OK, OK...give me the skinny, pretty lady.

**ROSE**

What?

**JUNIOR**

The article about Theo. < > So I can say I'm proud.

**ROSE**

You got eyes. Read.

*(JUNIOR grumps and turns the TV to a Christian channel. A frothy evangelist breathlessly delivers his message.)*

**EVANGELIST**

*(from the TV)*

*You better make a commitment that you're gonna serve God with all your mind, all your heart, all your soul..*

**ROSE**

Aww...come on...I'd rather watch wrassling than this shit.

**JUNIOR**

Word of God. Listen to the man, Rose. We might learn a thing or two. < > I'm hungry. When's the last / time we ate?

*Cause I'll tell you something, with what's getting ready to happen in America, you're gonna need Him.*

**ROSE**

Turn off that windbag!

**JUNIOR**

It's comforting to hear the Lord's word.

*The Bible says in Revelations that when the sound of that trumpet comes, those that are in sin will be in sin still, those that are righteous will be righteous and those that are holy will be holy still.*

**ROSE**

Oh, hell.

**JUNIOR**

When's the last time we ate?

*Whatever you are, whatever your state, whenever that trumpets sounds, that's where you're gonna be.*

**ROSE**

I don't know.

**JUNIOR**

Make us some mac n' cheese. No no no no! Some eggs. I'm craving eggs. Don't eggs sound good?

**ROSE**

You got two hands.

**JUNIOR**

Funny. Ha ha.

*(ROSE grabs the remote, channel surfs.)*

**JUNIOR**

Rose! Come on, now!

*(She pauses on an action movie—a car chase, shoot ‘em up.)*

**JUNIOR**

Oh, oh...leave it here. I like this. That’s Charles Bronson.

*(They are transfixed.)*

*(Lights fade, sound remains.)*

*(Brakes squeal.)*

*(Then a loud thump.)*

2.

**BABIES**

*(Dusk on a country road.)*

*(Lights reveal POLLY and THEO standing over a small deer. Headlights beam from offstage.)*

**THEO**

Looks dead to me.

**POLLY**

Are you sure?

**THEO**

She’s not breathing.

**POLLY**

How do you know it’s a girl?

**THEO**

It doesn’t have balls.

**POLLY**

Oh. Yeah. Right. I guess it doesn’t.

THEO  
Did you get the insurance?

POLLY  
What?

THEO  
For the rental car?

POLLY  
I think so. Everything was so fast. I did it all online. < > I *probably* got the insurance.

THEO  
Well...you *definitely* killed this deer.

POLLY  
What was I supposed to do? Drive off that... that cliff?

THEO  
It was a small *embankment*.

POLLY  
Please don't correct me.

THEO  
Sorry. You obviously did the right thing. Hitting the deer instead of driving off a *cliff*.

POLLY  
Don't be like that.

THEO  
I'm serious. Better her than us. < > So weird. There never used to be deer in this valley. Come on. Let's get out of here. I wanna get there and do this before dark.

POLLY  
We can't just leave her. We have to...bury her...or something.

THEO  
People don't do that kind of thing in the country.

POLLY  
I ran her over with a Ford Fusion. The least I can do is give her a Christian burial.

It's just a deer.

**THEO**

*(POLLY tries to pick up the deer. She struggles, manages to drag it a few feet.)*

What are you doing?

**THEO**

*(Drag.)*

I can't bury her here. She'll fit ... in the trunk. I'll bury her ... at your parent's.

**POLLY**

**THEO**

We can't put a deer in the trunk.

*(A little more.)*

Look at the hood. The stank of deer musk isn't gonna matter at this point.

**POLLY**

*(POLLY sees blood on her hands. She backs away from the deer, repulsed and stares at her hands, her mind elsewhere.)*

Come on.

**THEO**

Hmm?

**POLLY**

Let's go.

**THEO**

What if she has babies?

**POLLY**

< > Polly. She doesn't.

**THEO**

How do you know?

**POLLY**

She's too young.

**THEO**

How can you tell?

**POLLY**

She's not big enough.

**THEO**

So she's what...an *adolescent* deer?

**POLLY**

Probably.

**THEO**

She could be a teen-mother.

**POLLY**

*(THEO giggles and POLLY tries to fight tears.)*

Whoa, whoa—

**THEO**

I'm sorry—

**POLLY**

Polly, this is *just* a deer. Nothing else.

**THEO**

*I know that, Theo.* Jesus. I just...I need a second, OK?

**POLLY**

*(THEO exits toward the car, opens door offstage, shuts it, returns with a bottled water and some napkins. He washes POLLY's hands.)*

**THEO**  
Come on, Fraggie Rock. Don't get weepy. You don't wanna be all red-cheeked and puffy-eyed when we get there, right? They'll think I beat you or something.

(POLLY chuckles, sighs, pulls it together a bit.)

**POLLY**

You have a warped sense of humor.

**THEO**

It's why you love me.

**POLLY**

How are you so calm about all this?

**THEO**

I've seen dead animals before.

**POLLY**

Not the deer. I mean *this*. Here. The "mission."

**THEO**

Yeah, *calm* isn't the word I would use.

**POLLY**

Then what *are* you feeling?

**THEO**

Tired. This is our last hurdle. I just want it to be finished.

**POLLY**

Me too.

**THEO**

So let's go, shall we?

**POLLY**

What are we gonna tell them when they ask us why?

**THEO**

The truth. Same as your folks.

**POLLY**

You can't tell *that* kind of truth to strangers.

THEO  
They're not exactly strangers.

POLLY  
I barely know them.

THEO  
My parents adore you.

POLLY  
How do you know that?

THEO  
Well...they say "I love you" on the phone.

POLLY  
That doesn't mean anything.

THEO  
You know / love you, right?

POLLY  
Sometimes.

THEO  
OK...well...they love me. And I love you. Ergo my parents love you. It's an equation based on—

POLLY  
On a Barney song?

THEO  
You know what I mean.

POLLY  
Yeah.

THEO  
Look, I know they're not exactly what you dreamed of when you imagined your in-laws.

POLLY  
I never imagined in-laws.

**THEO**

They'll do whatever we need them to do. They're country, but they're good people.

**POLLY**

/ I know—

**THEO**

Especially mom. And dad...well, he seems to have mellowed with age.

**POLLY**

< > I know coming back here isn't easy for you.

**THEO**

Yeah. Well. Don't have much of a choice, do I?

**POLLY**

We're so close.

*(She takes his hand. They almost kiss when THEO's cell phone rings—"Star Wars Darth Vader Theme" ringtone.)*

**POLLY**

I thought you turned that off.

**THEO**

It's Rebekah. Sorry, I have to take this.

*(POLLY shoots a look at THEO: "Of course it is.")*

**THEO**

Doctor Theo Turner.

**POLLY**

*(under her breath)*

She knows who you are.

**THEO**

What? I'm catching, like, every other—no, no...I have a minute.

*(THEO walks away from POLLY.)*

**THEO**

Yeah. < > Right...right. < > Say that again. < > HOLY SHIT! That's fantastic! I knew it! I fucking knew it! < > When I get back. < > Hey, buy everyone a beer from me. Buy them two. < > I said buy them two. < > You too. < > All right. < > Bye.

*(A long silence.)*

**POLLY**

The telescope readings came in?

**THEO**

The data is completely supportive. My cyclic model is looking better and better.

**POLLY**

That's great.

**THEO**

OK, OK. I promised. I'm sorry. No more phone. *(robot voice)* Powering down now.

**POLLY**

That girl can't fart without telling you.

**THEO**

She had to tell me that news.

**POLLY**

She's called three times. Today.

**THEO**

She's just doing her job. I left her with a lot to do and very little notice.

**POLLY**

*(playful)*

Is little Miss Rebekah crushing on fancy-pantsy Doctor Turner?

**THEO**

Don't be ridiculous. She's 23.

**POLLY**

You know her *exact* age?

**THEO**

I know Phil's and Jamal's too. Everybody on the team.

**POLLY**

The point is...you shouldn't take a phone call from your hot, 23 year old grad assistant in the middle of a conversation with me.

**THEO**

She's not my assistant. She's a research fellow.

**POLLY**

Oh my God, whatever! Every time she calls, you walk out of my earshot. Do you realize that?

**THEO**

I do that when anybody calls.

**POLLY**

< > Ever since I lost the last one, you look at me differently.

**THEO**

I can't have this conversation again—

**POLLY**

But that's the thing. We *don't ever* have this conversation. Not fully. I try to tell you how I'm feeling—which I can't exactly articulate and so I ask how you're feeling and, and...you dismiss it all with a joke. You talk about work. You take a call. Anything to avoid talking about what happened. < > Do you even want this, Theo?

**THEO**

I can't believe you're actually asking me that.

**POLLY**

Just tell me. Do you want her?

**THEO**

I'm here, aren't I? I dropped everything at the last minute to do this.

**POLLY**

You missed three meetings with Kayla.

**THEO**

Two! I missed two.

**POLLY**

Whatever. You *missed* them. You know, Kayla *even* asked me if you really wanted this.

**THEO**

I missed those meetings for work emergencies! Jesus Christ, you'd think that a good work ethic and tenure income would count for something with this girl.

**POLLY**

It does, but her parents walked out on her and when you don't show up—

**THEO**

Are you implying that she's making us do this because I missed those meetings?

**POLLY**

It sends a message, Theo.

**THEO**

< > Why are you picking a fight with me right now?

**POLLY**

Because a fight gets your attention.

**THEO**

Well, you've succeeded. I'm listening. Say whatever else it is that you have to say.

**POLLY**

< > I don't even know what I want to say. I just...I need to know you'll be there, you'll hear me...whenever I do.

**THEO**

I always hear you.

**POLLY**

I never thought I'd want my life to be about...dirty diapers in public restrooms, strollers, play dates. Gross. My mom *hounding* me—biological clock, Pollygirl, biological clock. It never ticked before. I never wanted this...until I couldn't have it. Do you know how impossibly stupid that makes me feel? I mean, don't *you* feel stupid?

**THEO**

Stupid? No.

**POLLY**

Like stupid to expect that making a family should be easy?

**THEO**

The Germans would have a word for that. They excel at complicated emotional terms.

**POLLY**

Please don't make a joke.

**THEO**

Polly, I don't know how else to respond. What do you want me to do?

**POLLY**

Say something with weight. Say, "I'm sad. I hurt."

**THEO**

I'm sad. I hurt. Now, can we please just go and get this over with?

**POLLY**

Are you listening to yourself?

**THEO**

I mean it. I am sad. I'm hurting. And I'm dealing with it the best way I know how. Which is to keep going. To do my job. And yes, to laugh occasionally.

**POLLY**

Well...your way isn't working for me.

**THEO**

What should I do, Polly? Just tell me. Wail and gnash my teeth? Write you a fucking poem? A sonnet? What?

*(POLLY glares at him, then calmly walks to the offstage car, slams the door.)*

*(After a moment, THEO looks down at the deer and mumbles...)*

**THEO**

I'm sorry.

*(Lights fade as the stars brighten.)*

3.

**RESERVATIONS**

*(The TV lights ROSE and JUNIOR.)*

*(They watch “The Cosby Show,” and laugh egregiously.)*

*(Outside the double-wide, a fluorescent streetlamp flickers on. Headlights approach. Car doors open.)*

*(The exterior of the double wide is a graveyard for lawnmowers—Snappers, Craftsman, Cub, Troy-Built, etc.)*

*(There’s a tired tire swing hanging from a pine tree.)*

*(Split scene.)*

*(THEO enters, dragging the deer by the back legs, surveys the yard and finds a suitable place for her, goes back to the car.)*

**JUNIOR**

S’that where you came up with “Theo”?

**ROSE**

What?

**JUNIOR**

On the Cosbys—is that where you came up with his name?

**ROSE**

This show came out after Theo was born.

**JUNIOR**

You sure?

**ROSE**

His name is Greek. That was before the Cosby’s.

Where's my guitar?  
**JUNIOR**

I moved it.  
**ROSE**

Where? < > Rose, where'd you put it?  
**JUNIOR**

*(ROSE is staring at JUNIOR, her whole body stiff with fear.)*

Hold still.  
**ROSE**

Are the kids here?  
**JUNIOR**

Just don't move.  
**ROSE**

*(ROSE slowly grabs a pair of scissors from a table and raises them over her head.)*

Oh *hell* no! No no / no no—  
**JUNIOR**

It's on the back of the chair. It's gonna bite you!  
**ROSE**

There ain't no lizard, Rose!  
**JUNIOR**

I'm gonna kill it.  
**ROSE**

How many times you gonna do this?  
**JUNIOR**

Be still now!  
**ROSE**

**JUNIOR**

Rose, put down them scissors.

**ROSE**

We can't let those kids come in this house with these things everywhere. What if they bite them? They could be poison! Green, bugged eyed sons of bitches—

*(ROSE goes after the back of the chair, stabbing it with her scissors.)*

*(JUNIOR doesn't move.)*

**ROSE**

Damn. I missed. Get up.

**JUNIOR**

*(getting up)*

I ain't gonna fight you.

**ROSE**

Keeps getting away. *(stabs)*

**JUNIOR**

Them drugs have fried up your brain, woman!

**ROSE**

They're lizards in this house! *(stabs)*

**JUNIOR**

There ain't no lizards, Rose! Settle down.

**ROSE**

We gotta kill em. *(stabs)*

**JUNIOR**

You want Theo and Polly to see you like this? < > You need another hit?

**ROSE**

OK.

**JUNIOR**

Put down the scissors.

*(ROSE hesitantly puts down the scissors.)*

Here.

**JUNIOR**

*(JUNIOR gives ROSE the pipe. She lights it, hits.)*

Better?

**JUNIOR**

**ROSE**

Better.

**JUNIOR**

No lizards?

**ROSE**

I know what I see.

**JUNIOR**

Don't tell them kids about the lizards.

**ROSE**

I know what I see, Junior.

*(The Cosby's play on...)*

*(ROSE hands JUNIOR his guitar.)*

**JUNIOR**

Aww, I don't want that thing. Reminds me I'm crippled.

*(ROSE sits down with the guitar, cradles it upright, like a kid too big to sit on her mama's lap.)*

*(THEO and POLLY re-enter, each dragging a rollaway suitcase.)*

*(POLLY surveys the yard.)*

Why do they have all these lawnmowers?  
**POLLY**

Dad's in...landscaping.  
**THEO**

*(THEO knocks on the door.)*

Shit!  
**JUNIOR**

/That's them.  
**ROSE**

Hide the stuff!  
**JUNIOR**

I am, dumbass.  
**ROSE**

*(Knock.)*

We're coming!  
**ROSE**

Rose. *No lizards.*  
**JUNIOR**

*(THEO and POLLY enter.)*

*(JUNIOR and ROSE are panicked and sweating.)*

*(THEO and POLLY survey the mess.)*

*(Silence.)*

We... let ourselves in. I hope that's... OK?  
**THEO**

*(After a moment, ROSE hugs and kisses THEO, then POLLY.)*

God, boy, it's good / to see you!

**ROSE**

Long plane ride?

**JUNIOR**

About five / hours.

**THEO**

Not too bad—

**POLLY**

Look at you Polly. So / beautiful.

**ROSE**

Son, how'd *you* ever get such a good looking woman?

**JUNIOR**

Don't embarrass, Junior! Turn off that TV, so we can visit. Ya'll come in and / pull up—

**ROSE**

Pull up a chair, if you can / find one.

**JUNIOR**

We can clean off that couch. Junior—

**ROSE**

That's OK. We'll sit...uh—

**THEO**

Just move some of that stuff / to the floor—

**JUNIOR**

I—those suitcases—I'll put 'em away for you. God, I sure am glad to see you.

**ROSE**

Make yourself / at home.

**JUNIOR**

Junior, get off your lazy ass and do something.

**ROSE**

Gotta be comfortable / to visit—

**JUNIOR**

And turn off that TV!

**ROSE**

*(JUNIOR does.)*

*(ROSE takes the suitcases, paces with them, trying to find a place to store them.)*

Mom, what is all this...stuff?

**THEO**

My riches. This here's your inheritance.

**JUNIOR**

Where did it come from?

**THEO**

It's crap from the foreclosures we clean out. Your daddy insists on keeping—

**ROSE**

You never know when you might need something.

**JUNIOR**  
*(to Polly)*

I thought you were in landscaping.

**POLLY**

Honey, you make it sound fancy. < > When Rose lost her job down at the mill, we started mowing yards for this realtor. But nobody pays you to cut grass no more. So, every now and again, we clean out his foreclosures. I mean, it's all legit. Everything's legal.

**JUNIOR**

I assumed it was.

**POLLY**

People leave nice things behind when they're in a hurry. We get some antiques sometimes. Fetch a good price at the flea market. Like this thing—how much you think this is worth?

**JUNIOR**

**POLLY**

Looks pretty old.

**JUNIOR**

That's what I thought. See, Rose? Polly says it's old.

**ROSE**

Don't encourage him, Polly. He ain't got the sense God gave a goat. You oughta just throw all this stuff away like I ask you. My house wasn't always a pig sty. Theo can tell you. I kept a nice place when he was growing up. Ain't that right, son?

**THEO**

It definitely was not like this.

*(POLLY picks up the guitar.)*

**POLLY**

Whose guitar?

**ROSE**

Junior, I told you to put that thing away.

**POLLY**

You play?

**JUNIOR**

*(lifts hands)*

Used to.

**POLLY**

You any good?

**JUNIOR**

I got by.

**THEO**

Are you practicing humility now?

**JUNIOR**

"By humility and fear of the Lord are riches and honor and life." That's a Proverb, son.

**THEO**

I'm aware of that.

**JUNIOR**

You religious now?

**THEO**

I absorbed a thing or two from you.

**JUNIOR**

I used to play rhythm guitar in a gospel band. Theo was our biggest fan. We were pretty good, weren't we son?

**THEO**

If you like that kind of music.

**JUNIOR**

Yeah. Well...I also played for Billy Etheridge whenever he was in town. That's actually one of his guitars. *(to Polly)* You probably don't know who that is.

**POLLY**

What, you think I'm too West coast to know the dirty southern blues?

*(POLLY plays/sings a bit of a Janis Joplin song.)*

**JUNIOR**

Theo, you didn't tell me you married Janis Joplin!

**POLLY**

Why didn't you tell me your dad played with *Billy-freaking-Etheridge*?

**THEO**

It never came up. Now you both know. Congratulations.

**JUNIOR**

Did you hear that, Rose?

**ROSE**

Beautiful, Polly.

*(POLLY sits in ROSE's recliner.)*

**POLLY**

Sit down, Theo. You can have my lap.

I'm fine.

**THEO**

Theo, you a little fatter round the middle.

**JUNIOR**

Sign of happiness.

**ROSE**

I'd be happy too if I'd married this one.

**JUNIOR**

Oh hush! Theo, what is that? You got some gray on your temples!

**ROSE**

Getting old, boy!

**JUNIOR**

Makes him look distinguished. Like a professor. Commands respect.

**ROSE**

Some of his students respect it more than others.

**POLLY**

We didn't come here to talk about my old hair.

**THEO**

Then what did you come for?

**JUNIOR**

Well...we have some good news.

**THEO**

*(POLLY shoots THEO a look...not yet.)*

**POLLY**

Well, first...Theo's research is being published and really celebrated by the scientific community.

**ROSE**

That's great, son!

**THEO**

You got the magazine I sent you? I bought you a subscription—

**ROSE**

*I've been reading it. (to Polly)* Trying to make sense of it.

**JUNIOR**

*(holding up "Astronomy")*

I wondered why we been getting this.

**ROSE**

I told you! I told him, son.

**THEO**

They've been closely following my team's research.

**ROSE**

I told you, Junior!

**JUNIOR**

And what is it you research?

**THEO**

< > My team is studying starlight. The history of starlight, really. The article explains it. If you wanna know more, read it.

**ROSE**

Oh, he did. He's just being a so-and-so, ain't you?

**JUNIOR**

Yeah, just a so-and-so.

**ROSE**

He told me he's real proud of you.

**JUNIOR**

Yep. Proud.

**POLLY**

We all are.

**THEO**

Well...thanks.

**ROSE**

Theo, I bet *you* remember. (*La Plaza Mayor photo*) Where were we in this picture?

**THEO**

Whoa. Blast from the past. Look at my hair.

**ROSE**

/ So blonde.

**JUNIOR**

At least you still got / your hair.

**POLLY**

Let me see. < > Did you dye your hair?

**THEO**

Maybe.

**ROSE**

Where was this?

**THEO**

La Plaza Mayor. Madrid.

**ROSE**

That's it! Madrid!

**POLLY**

Your mom went to Europe with you?

**ROSE**

Only time I been on a airplane. Theo convinced me.

**POLLY**

That's a nice story. Why didn't you tell me that?

**THEO**

I was a sophomore in college. It was a long time ago.

**POLLY**

A trip to Europe with your mom? That's not something you forget to tell your wife. (*to ROSE*) I wonder what else he hasn't told me.

**JUNIOR**

Oh, darling. I got some good ones for you.

**THEO**

Dad, she doesn't want to hear—

**POLLY**

Oh, I do. I really do.

**JUNIOR**

Rose, you remember that time we caught him kissing that little black girl at Wal-Mart?

**ROSE**

Junior—

**JUNIOR**

He couldn't been no more than three. Got away from us and we come around the aisle and there he was, planting one right on her big old lips. Took after his daddy...liking exotic women.

*(Awkward.)*

**ROSE**

Well...you both look so healthy.

**JUNIOR**

Healthy enough for grand babies.

**ROSE**

Shut up, Junior!

**JUNIOR**

Why can't I say what I think?

**ROSE**

If you said every stupid thought in your feeble brain, nobody'd get a word in edgewise.

**THEO**

Mom, can I talk / to you?

**JUNIOR**

Say Polly, how are your people doing?

**POLLY**

Pardon?

**JUNIOR**

Your folks?

**POLLY**

Oh, they're fine. They say hello.

**JUNIOR**

Your daddy's a good feller. Now don't take this the wrong way, but at your wedding, he was the only one of your bunch came and talked to me and Rose. Sat there for a good while shooting the shit. After we drove across the country, and nobody talks to us.

**THEO**

Nobody knew you, dad.

**JUNIOR**

That ain't my fault, is it? Good feller, your daddy. He ever buy that vacation house up in Oregon?

**POLLY**

No.

**JUNIOR**

Well, why not? Bound to be some good deals in this market. Wish I had some money. I'd buy us all a vacation house in Oregon. Somewheres. You tell your old man the Turners are doing just fine and we say hello.

**ROSE**

Ya'll want something to drink? Eat? Polly, what can I get you?

**POLLY**

I'm / fine.

**THEO**

Mom, can I talk to you?

**JUNIOR**

You got a secret, boy? Say what you gotta say.

**THEO**

I don't think we can stay here.

Why ever not?

**ROSE**

My allergies.

**THEO**

I can dust—

**ROSE**

It's a... a mess.

**THEO**

We can clean off the couch, son.

**ROSE**

I don't even *see* a couch—

**THEO**

Theo, / it's OK—

**POLLY**

I think it might be better if we stayed at that motel down by the prison. Is it still there?

**THEO**

Attapulgus ain't changed *that* much.

**JUNIOR**

Now, come on, son! It's just some extra stuff! Junior, I told you to clean this shit!

**ROSE**

It's fine. We'll stay here, Theo.

**POLLY**

We can't sleep in this. It's...it's—

**THEO**

It's what?

**JUNIOR**

It's embarrassing, dad. OK? You want me to say it? This is an embarrassment. How do you live like this?

**THEO**

**POLLY**

*(through a clenched smile)*

Theo.

*(Silence.)*

**JUNIOR**

Ya'll go ahead and stay at the motel if our home don't suit you.

**ROSE**

Junior, don't be an asshole.

**JUNIOR**

Well he's being one! Why don't you ever say anything to him? If he's too good to stay in his own home, then he might as well leave.

**ROSE**

JUNIOR!

**JUNIOR**

I don't need nobody judging the way I live.

**POLLY**

Nobody's judging. < > We'll stay here if that's still OK with you.

**ROSE**

Yes, of course—

**JUNIOR**

If his royal highness can bring himself to sleep among the hoi polloi—

**THEO**

I don't / need this.

**ROSE**

Junior, that's enough!

**THEO**

We came here, across the country, to bring you good news and as usual, dad, you have to shit all over it.

**POLLY**

Theo—

**JUNIOR**

Oh, your precious research is getting some attention. Big deal. I could've read about that in a magazine.

**POLLY**

That's not the news.

**ROSE**

What?

**POLLY**

That's not the news.

**THEO**

Polly, just forget it.

**JUNIOR**

*What's the news?*

**THEO**

Let's just go.

**POLLY**

We can't leave. We need / them to—

**THEO**

We don't need anything from *him*. Come on, we'll figure it out. Mom, I'll call you / later—

**POLLY**

Stick to the plan. < > Rose. Junior. < > We're adopting a baby. (*taking Theo's hand*) That's what we came to tell you.

**JUNIOR**

Adopting?

**POLLY**

Yes.

**JUNIOR**

Why?

*(POLLY looks to THEO...please don't tell him.)*

**THEO**

< > Because... because we *should*. It's the responsible thing to do nowadays.

**JUNIOR**

Damn, son, why don't you just do it the old fashioned way?

**ROSE**

*(understanding Polly)*

Junior, shut your goddamned mouth.

**JUNIOR**

Language, woman! The Lord's listening.

**ROSE**

*(at the edge of polite)*

Well, Jesus and all his angels are about to hear me rip you a new asshole, honey. You don't know what you're talking about, so shut the fuck up.

*(ROSE goes to POLLY and hugs her.)*

**THEO**

*(to Rose)*

The mother had the baby two days ago.

**ROSE**

A newborn?

**POLLY**

Yes.

**THEO**

We were waiting to tell you, just to be sure.

**ROSE**

Well, of course.

**JUNIOR**

*(touched)*

Ya'll came all this way just to tell us in person?

**POLLY**

We're just one final step away from getting our baby.

**ROSE**

*(smiling at Polly)*

What are they waiting on? That child should be so lucky.

**JUNIOR**

It ain't a black baby, is it?

**THEO**

Oh my god—

**JUNIOR**

I don't mean nothing by it. I just wondered. They usually are.

**THEO**

She's not. But if / she was—

**JUNIOR**

I would love it just the same. A granddaughter—

**ROSE**

It's a girl? You're having...I mean, *getting* / a girl?

**POLLY**

Having's fine. People still say having when you're adopting.

**ROSE**

You're *having* a girl?

**POLLY**

Yes.

**JUNIOR**

Thought of any names?

**POLLY**

We thought it best to wait.

**ROSE**

Well, that makes sense. When will you know for sure?

**POLLY**

Well, like I was saying, there's just one more step. < > The mother, Kayla's her name, well, she's just asked to interview you before she grants final approval.

**JUNIOR**

< > Us?

**THEO**

Yeah. You.

**JUNIOR**

Me and your mama?

**POLLY**

She thinks it would be a good idea to interview any potential grandparents.

**JUNIOR**

Well, it ain't like I'm gonna be raising it.

**POLLY**

We just have to jump through this last hoop and then she's ours.

**JUNIOR**

She getting cold feet?

**THEO**

No, nothing / like that—

**POLLY**

We don't think so. Kayla's young. Fifteen. It's hard to make this kind of decision at the age. She came from a broken home—

**JUNIOR**

That figures.

**THEO**

Dad! Do you *have* a filter?

**POLLY**

She was raised by her grandparents. So, in case anything ever happened to us, she just wants to know where her baby, our baby, might end up.

We couldn't handle no baby!

**JUNIOR**

That's not the point, dad.

**THEO**

Is there a chance she'll say no?

**JUNIOR**

No—

**THEO**

Yes—

**POLLY**

*(Silence.)*

Kayla could still call the whole thing off. That's her right.

**POLLY**

But she won't. She gave us her word that she'll sign the baby over once and for all after she meets the grandparents.

**THEO**

That's a lot of pressure, kiddos.

**JUNIOR**

Look, Junior—

**POLLY**

Call me dad.

**JUNIOR**

OK...*dad*... I've been with Kayla for the last five months. I trust her. She knows we are this baby's best option. She's just cautious. She's been very sweet and mature this whole process. When you meet her, you'll love her. And the interview's not a big ordeal. My parents were in and out in, like, twenty minutes. Plus, you get to come out to California for a few days.

**POLLY**

We'll pay for everything.

**THEO**

Vacation!

**POLLY**

**JUNIOR**

I ain't ever been on a plane. I'm terrified of flying.

**POLLY**

They make drugs for that.

**JUNIOR**

I bet they do. < > Now, listen...I ain't trying to be rude, so don't fly off the handle, Theo... I know they got them fertility clinics now...did ya'll consider something like that?

**THEO**

Dad...it's a long process and it's very expensive and there are no guarantees.

**JUNIOR**

I see. < > Well, what do you think, Rose?

**ROSE**

*(to Junior)*

They's a lizard on his shoulder. I ain't gonna kill it cause you told me not to tell him, but they's a lizard on him.

**JUNIOR**

/ Damnit, woman!

**THEO**

/ Mom?

**ROSE**

Be careful! It's gonna / bite you! It's hissing.

**JUNIOR**

Rose, now. Calm down. There's no lizard.

**ROSE**

I know what I see.

**POLLY**

Is / she OK?

**ROSE**

You don't see that?

**POLLY**

No—

**ROSE**

It's there. I know what I see.

**JUNIOR**

Rose...Rose...honey, what do you think about the adoption?

**ROSE**

*(quickly)*

I love the baby. Black, white, Mexican, Canadian. I love it. Kill that lizard.

**JUNIOR**

I think she needs to lay down.

**ROSE**

OHHH! It's on your head, Theo! Kill it.

*(THEO musses his hair.)*

**ROSE**

Ohhh! Careful!

**JUNIOR**

Rose! Shut up! / And get in the bedroom.

**ROSE**

It'll bite you. Don't let it bite you. They've got sharp little teeth.

*(JUNIOR rushes ROSE toward the offstage bedroom.)*

*(Silence.)*

**THEO**

Is there something in my hair?

**POLLY**

No—is she on medication or something?

**ROSE**

*(O.S)*

They's lizards on the bed! No! No!

**JUNIOR**

*(O.S)*

Sit down here and hush!

**POLLY**

Maybe we *should* stay at that motel. Do I need to make reservations?

**THEO**

It's not that kind of place.

**JUNIOR**

*(O.S)*

I'll come back for you when you settle down, understand?

**ROSE**

*(O.S)*

You better *not* lock me in here again! Junior...

*(We hear JUNIOR struggle with the lock, then click.)*

*(ROSE tries to pull open the door.)*

**ROSE**

*(O.S)*

JUNIOR!!

**JUNIOR**

*(entering)*

I'm sorry, ya'll. She...she's...not doing too well today.

**ROSE**

*(O.S)*

Junior!

**THEO**

What the hell is going on?

**JUNIOR**

She's just...she's just—

**ROSE**  
*(O.S)*

Junior! Goddamit!

**JUNIOR**

Language! Can we go outside? I'll tell you outside.

**ROSE**  
*(O.S)*

Ohhhh shit! They're everywhere! You little green bastard! Junior! I'm gonna kill you!

*(JUNIOR ushers THEO and POLLY out the door.)*

*(ROSE bangs offstage.)*

**ROSE**

Where the hell are they coming from? Junior! Junior? We've *got* to get Terminix or something. They have a special on TV.

*(Fade on the inside of the double-wide.)*

**4.**

**HOOKED**

*(Streetlamp flickers on.)*

*(POLLY, JUNIOR and THEO are standing over the deer carcass.)*

**JUNIOR**

Your mother's just happy to see you. It's been a long time, son.

**THEO**

So happy she's hallucinating reptiles?

**JUNIOR**

Yep. Now, what're we gonna do with the carcass?

**THEO**

Screw the carcass!

Can we *not* call it a carcass?

**POLLY**

Can't wait long in this heat.

**JUNIOR**

Is Rose on medication?

**POLLY**

You still like venison chili?

**JUNIOR**

We're not *eating* the deer.

**THEO**

Ought not to waste it.

**JUNIOR**

/ Can you focus, please?

**THEO**

**JUNIOR**  
I've got a good knife for the job in my shed out back. But, you'll have to do the butchering. I can't grip—

**THEO**

Is she smoking pot?

**POLLY**

Pot doesn't make you hallucinate. Unless it's laced.

**JUNIOR**

How would you know?

**POLLY**

I went to college.

**JUNIOR**  
Oh, I forgot, you sing the blues too. You know all about it. < > Look, ain't none of ya'll's business really. Ya'll choose to live the life you live and we choose to live ours. It's different, but it's our business. Damn them lizards! We got control over the situation. Don't worry.

**POLLY**

What...situation?

**JUNIOR**

We only got a little while before this meat—

**THEO**

*What situation?*

**JUNIOR**

All right. I ain't gonna dance around it. She's on ice.

**THEO**

What?

**JUNIOR**

Your mama's on ice.

**THEO**

What the hell is—

**POLLY**

Crystal meth.

**JUNIOR**

Yep.

**THEO**

Crystal meth—like those toothless people on billboards—crystal meth?

*(POLLY nods.)*

*(THEO sits.)*

**JUNIOR**

It don't always make your teeth rot. If you do it in moderation. See, my teeth are fine.

**THEO**

You're on it too?

**JUNIOR**

Just to ease things.

**THEO**

I should've known. Are you high right now?

**JUNIOR**

Maybe a little. It's hard to tell.

*(THEO laughs desperately and throws a lawnmower part as far offstage as possible.)*

**JUNIOR**

That was a perfectly good carburetor.

*(THEO throws another part.)*

**JUNIOR**

That one was already broken.

*(THEO paces.)*

**JUNIOR**

If we ain't gonna butcher her, we need to get her on ice. < > Ohhh—I mean the deer, darling. We ought to put *the deer* on ice. You thought I meant—

**POLLY**

That's not funny.

*(THEO paces offstage.)*

**POLLY**

Theo?

*(Without looking back, THEO waves her off.)*

*(POLLY and JUNIOR stare at the ground for a while.)*

*(JUNIOR chuckles, then spits.)*

**POLLY**

Do you have to do that?

**JUNIOR**

What? I didn't spit *on* the deer.

*(Silence.)*

**JUNIOR**

How's *your* job?

**POLLY**

Over.

*(Silence.)*

**JUNIOR**

Remind me what you did?

**POLLY**

Mortgage broker.

**JUNIOR**

Ohhh. Yeah. That's tough. Lot of math. < > Here's a story for you: when Theo was in second grade, I got my GED. He ever tell you this?

**POLLY**

No.

**JUNIOR**

He taught me algebra. A second grader. Can you believe that? Teaching his old man algebra. < > I'm happy for the two of you—getting that baby. That'll be nice.

**POLLY**

I should check / on Theo.

**JUNIOR**

Ain't like I'll ever get to see her though. She'll be too busy with *your* folks up at that vacation house in Oregon.

*(THEO enters.)*

**THEO**

Crystal meth!?

**JUNIOR**

Didn't stutter.

**THEO**

I should've known. How long?

**POLLY**

Does it matter?

**JUNIOR**

I guess...well, I got started back when my fingers went to clawing with this neuropathy. Couldn't work no more. Couldn't play guitar. Hell, I couldn't even flirt! Women think I'm some kind of handicap. Got on the disability and...well, la dee friggin' da, woe is me— ya'll know the rest of that sad song.

**THEO**

And mom?

**JUNIOR**

When she found out I was doing it, she went off and left for a couple days. Came back. Tried it for herself. Ain't stopped since.

**THEO**

So *you* got her hooked?

**JUNIOR**

Hey, she's the one with that addictive personality.

**THEO**

This is *un-fucking*-believable!

**JUNIOR**

We didn't raise you to talk that way.

**THEO**

Fuck. You.

**JUNIOR**

You ain't gonna talk to me that way in my own home, boy! You oughta be ashamed, talking that way in front of a woman. If I had my hands—

**THEO**

You'd use them. I know. < > Did you ever think that maybe it's karma, dad? Maybe you don't have your hands now because you made poor use of them when you did.

**JUNIOR**

< > Ya'll do whatever you want. Go on and sleep in that motel if it suits you and if it don't, then just go on back to California. Or Spain...or Oregon or wherever the hell it is you *vacation*.

*(JUNIOR starts toward the trailer.)*

**POLLY**

Do you know what this could mean for the adoption?

**JUNIOR**

This is the first time I've seen either of you dandy darlings since your wedding day. Five years. And now ya'll come here expecting us to drop everything and fly off to California. You know, it'd be nice to see you just cause you *want* to see us. That's what we thought. Finally, you *wanted* to see us. But no, you come here cause you *need* something. *Need* us to interview—selfish!

**THEO**

We're trying to *adopt* a baby. Please tell me how that's selfish.

**JUNIOR**

Why do you even want a baby? They just grow up and leave their parents.

**THEO**

No, they leave *you*.

**JUNIOR**

You're an ingrate, boy. You think you was just born who you are—some kind of magic hocus pocus voodoo happened in the womb and you popped out spouting algebra?

**THEO**

Yes, I happen to have a gift.

**JUNIOR**

A gift? No. *We* made you who you are. Your mama and me sacrificed our youth to make sure you had enough. Working in the Chenille factory sixteen hours a day. You try that out for a while. See how you like it. Whatever you are, it's because of how hard we worked. And I ain't once heard you say thank you. Selfish. Always have been.

**POLLY**

*(controlled fury)*

If there's anyone that's selfish, it's you.

**JUNIOR**

Ya'll both just get the hell out of here. Leave us be.

**POLLY**

It's not Theo's fault you're a drug addict. It's nobody's fault but your own.

**JUNIOR**

HEY! Theo, you better keep her in line. She might have a pretty voice, but she ain't gonna talk to me like that—

**POLLY**

I will talk any way I please. And Theo can say whatever *fucking* word he feels like—

**JUNIOR**

*(laughing)*

Woo! You married one with a mouth on her. Phew. Now, lookahere. I did the best I could. And I'd appreciate you not judging me. My son abandoned me. For what, I can't tell you. When you have kids—*get* kids—and they leave you, you'll know. You'll know it breaks your heart so damned much, you'll smoke just about anything to feel alive.

**POLLY**

Theo left because he's a dreamer. And you have nothing for a dreamer.

*(Silence.)*

**JUNIOR**

You know, sister, I might've had some kind of dream once too.

*(JUNIOR exits.)*

*(A very long silence.)*

**THEO**

Thank you.

**POLLY**

I shouldn't have said that.

**THEO**

That was—wow.

**POLLY**

I shouldn't have said it.

**THEO**

Thank you.

**POLLY**

Stop thanking me. Just leave me alone. I'm used to it. Please, Theo—just go...do whatever it is you do.

*(THEO hesitates.)*

**POLLY**

Go.

*(THEO leaves.)*

*(After a moment, POLLY goes to the deer, bends over it, studies it, pets it, looks into its black eyes.)*

*(She lays its head tenderly on her lap.)*

*(POLLY cries, a little at a time, building until she is sobbing with her whole body, trying not to be heard, rubbing the fur gently.)*

*(After a while, there's a banging from the trailer.)*

*(Lights remain on POLLY and rise on JUNIOR in the trailer, sitting head buried in hands, in his recliner.)*

**ROSE**

*(O.S.)*

Junior! < > I know you're out there! I heard you come in—unlock this damned door now. It's hot in here!

*(Bang bang!)*

**ROSE**  
(O.S.)

< > I know you hear me.

**JUNIOR**

You still seeing lizards?

**ROSE**  
(O.S.)

< > No.

*(JUNIOR gets up, goes to the eight track player, pops in Elvis' "Suspicious Minds," turns the volume as high as it will go.)*

**ROSE**  
(O.S.)

Damnit, Junior!

*(Bang bang!)*

**ROSE**  
(O.S.)

I'm gonna break this door down!

*(Bang bang!)*

*(JUNIOR calmly returns to his recliner, turns off the lamp, sits in darkness.)*

**ROSE**  
(O.S.)

If I get bit and die, you mark my words, I will come back and haunt your ass!

*(Bang bang!)*

*(Bang bang!)*

*(Elvis croons.)*

*(POLLY rises from the deer and walks to the offstage car, opens the door, closes the door.)*

*(THEO re-enters, goes to the tire swing.)*

**THEO**

Polly? Polly?

*(THEO spots a rusty bucket.)*

**THEO**

Hunh. Can't believe this is still here.

*(He looks around, finds a few glass bottles and an old wooden baseball bat.)*

*(THEO places one of the bottles in the bucket.)*

*(He smashes it and grinds the shards with the bat.)*

*(He does it again.)*

*(Again, he places the bottle in the bucket, raises the bat as, in the darkness of the trailer, JUNIOR struggles with his hands to flick a lighter.)*

**JUNIOR**

Come on, now. < > Come on, you cheap piece of junk!

*(JUNIOR grunts and grumps, but never manages to get it lit.)*

*(JUNIOR throws the lighter across the room and sits in darkness.)*

*(Elvis and the lights fade.)*

5.

**BUTTER**

*(Later, stars dazzle a choir of crickets.)*

*(THEO rocks slightly in the tire swing, looking upward, holding a pen and small piece of paper in his hands, the bat at his feet.)*

*(A crash offstage alarms THEO.)*

Polly?

**THEO**

*(All is quiet.)*

*(A moment later, ROSE tiptoes in, carrying a large stick.)*

*(She raises it over her head and brings it crashing down on the rusty bucket, spilling the glass, terrifying THEO.)*

Mom! What are / you doing?

**THEO**

*Jesus-Christ-was-a-boy-scout!*

**ROSE**

What are you doing!?

**THEO**

I escaped.

**ROSE**

Maybe you should put down the stick?

**THEO**

**ROSE**  
You don't understand, son...them things is dangerous. They're probably poison. If they bite you—

**THEO**

Nothing's gonna *bite* me. The lizards aren't real. < > Dad told me about the meth.

**ROSE**

< > He told you about that? < > Great, now you think them lizards are because of the drugs too. I knew you'd take his side! I see 'em plain as day, son. I'm pretty sure I killed that one. Lookahere—

*(ROSE nearly touches the glass.)*

**THEO**

Don't touch it!

*(ROSE jumps back.)*

**ROSE**

Stop scaring me! Shit.

**THEO**

It's glass, mom. It'll cut you.

*(ROSE examines it carefully.)*

**ROSE**

Well, that lizard musta got away.

**THEO**

It was never there.

**ROSE**

I know what I see. I ain't crazy. I know things. I know there used to be a muscadine vine growing out here. I bet *you* don't even remember that, do you?

**THEO**

No.

**ROSE**

Uh-huh. See. Mama bear remembers. Mama bear knows.

*(THEO laughs a little.)*

**ROSE**

You'd eat so many of them things when you was little, you'd get a tummy ache. Pine tree's taken over now. Muscadines need a lot of light to survive. You really don't remember?

**THEO**

I remember my bucket. Got rusty, but...twenty something years and it hasn't gone anywhere.

**ROSE**

What on earth did you want with a bucket full of glass?

**THEO**

You know how he was.

**ROSE**

He ain't ever been easy.

**THEO**

*(scientific)*

Every time he would—well, I'd come out here to the muscadines. And according to you, I'd stuff my face full of them. That part I don't remember. What I *do* remember is that I'd bring glass bottles, I'd put them in this bucket, one at a time. Then I would take a bat, like this one, and I would crush the bottles. Then I would sit here and grind the glass. Churn it like butter.

*(Silence.)*

**ROSE**

Things were different then. It was OK to spank kids.

**THEO**

I had to wear pants in the summer, mom. So people couldn't see the stripes.

**ROSE**

< > I never knew that.

**THEO**

I never told you.

**ROSE**

His daddy was a lot worse. Nearly beat him to death—

**THEO**

Please don't / defend him.

**ROSE**

I'm just saying... people's got reasons for what they do is all.

**THEO**

He's got a reason for locking you in the bedroom, but that doesn't make you feel better about it, does it?

**ROSE**

Why you always gotta be so logical? < > Shit, Theo, we was still kids ourselves when we had you. We didn't know what we was doing and you turned out all right.

**THEO**

I want to be a good father to this little girl.

**ROSE**

And you will be.

**THEO**

You know what could happen if the mother finds out about you.

**ROSE**

She don't have to know about this.

**THEO**

She's gonna know.

**ROSE**

I'm not gonna tell her. How's she gonna know?

**THEO**

Mom, you *look* like a drug addict.

*(ROSE sits in the swing.)*

**ROSE**

*You* didn't know till your daddy told you.

**THEO**

I knew something. Lizards?

**ROSE**

I see 'em.

**THEO**

I don't doubt that. But that doesn't make them real. < > You don't even look like the same person anymore.

**ROSE**

Contrary to what men would like to believe, women do get older, son.

**THEO**

It's not age. That photo of us in Spain...where's the woman in that photo? That was only fifteen years ago, mom. < > When I was little, I was so proud to have a beautiful mother. All the other kids, their moms, they looked so tired, run-down, but you—you were young and—some of the boys had crushes on you.

**ROSE**

*(delighted)*

They thought I was pretty?

**THEO**

You remember Jaybo Freeman? Lived down by the tracks with his granny? Came around all the time?

**ROSE**

Little black boy who played the piano—

**THEO**

/ Yeah.

**ROSE**

Boy, your daddy thought he was something. Jaybo got killed, you know?

**THEO**

I didn't know that.

**ROSE**

Attapulugus ain't the same, son.

**THEO**

No. < > The point is... Jaybo came around because he wanted to see you...be near you. That's the woman I want my little girl to know.

**ROSE**

I ain't the only one who's changed. Where's my little boy standing on that roof teaching me about constellations?

**THEO**  
*(vulnerable)*

Mama, why did you do this?

**ROSE**

What else could I do?

**THEO**

You could quit.

**ROSE**  
*(quick)*

Tell me about the stars. Like you used to.

**THEO**

Did you hear / what I said?

**ROSE**

I've been reading that magazine you sent me, but it's / over my head.

**THEO**

You can quit / this.

**ROSE**

You don't just quit this shit, Theo! If it was that easy, don't you think—

**THEO**

We'll help you.

**ROSE**

Who will?

**THEO**

I will.

**ROSE**

How you gonna help me in California?

**THEO**

There are places you can go for help. Treatment centers.

**ROSE**

Hush now and tell me about the stars.

**THEO**

There are treatment centers with professionals—

**ROSE**

If you don't tell me about them stars, then I'm gonna march in there and take the longest drag my lungs can muster!

**THEO**

*(rote)*

< > We're developing a theory based on qualities of starlight that will help redefine the origin of the universe.

**ROSE**

I got that much from the magazine.

**THEO**

Mom—

**ROSE**

*Tell me more!*

**THEO**

You've heard of the Big Bang?

**ROSE**

I ain't an idiot, son.

**THEO**

Well...it's not really a bang. We think it's more of an *intersection*.

**ROSE**

OK?

**THEO**

We think there's been more than one. And there will continue to be more. In cycles.

**ROSE**

More what?

**THEO**

*Intersections.* If it's money you're worried about, I have some savings—

**ROSE**

I am fine. / Now, go on.

**THEO**

Mom, there are places with professional people who know—

*(ROSE walks toward the trailer.)*

**THEO**

The problem with the big bang is that the idea of one, singular event doesn't explain the way stars are made. If just one explosion happened, then the universe would've initially been abundant with mostly hydrogen. And a little helium.

**ROSE**

So what?

**THEO**

So stars need more than hydrogen and helium to form.

**ROSE**

What do they need?

**THEO**

This gets technical, mom.

**ROSE**

Try me.

**THEO**

*(fast)*

Helium can't form molecules at all. The only molecule that could be formed would be *molecular* hydrogen. And molecular hydrogen's *easily* destroyed by UV light—which would be everywhere in a massive explosion. And molecular hydrogen needs dust grains to form. And dust grains require heavier elements than hydrogen and helium. *And* the only coolant possibly left is *atomic* hydrogen, and this would leave gas clouds a hundred times too hot to collapse and create stars. < > Now does it all make *perfect* sense?

*(ROSE laughs.)*

**ROSE**

Why is it a mama feels pride when her baby says things she can't understand? < > I ain't seen my son in five years. You can't blame me for wanting to know what's keeping you away. < > I miss you, son. Don't you miss me? < > They's as many stars in Georgia as they are in California.

**THEO**

My work's in California, mom.

**ROSE**

Your family is here.

**THEO**

My family *isn't* here. < > I spend hours looking at starlight that doesn't exist anymore. I know a ghost when I see one.

*(Silence.)*

**ROSE**

You don't know my life. You ain't here. In this place, this miserable shit hole of a place. There's never enough money—we scrape by best we can. Your daddy's hands. He draws *too much* disability to get on food stamps. Ain't that something?

**THEO**

I didn't know / you needed...

**ROSE**

I never told you. < > I just thank God there's something to numb me, something to make me forget the weight of all this shit. I ain't the only ghost. I don't recognize you either.

**THEO**

I grew up. That's not a felony.

**ROSE**

It is to a mother. When I had my little boy—when you was here, there was something bright and hopeful—and when you left for school, I watched you pull out of that driveway and I stood there for so long, looking out, thinking you might come back...that we was *enough* for you. But I knew better. When people leave Attapulcus, they're gone. And I was glad for you when you went. I really was. I still am. But I turned around and I saw the last eighteen years of my life staring at me and what was I gonna do? < > What was I gonna do? There it was. That ugly hollow feeling—that feeling I hadn't felt since daddy died. I was left with me. And I wasn't enough for me either. < > I ain't suggesting this is your doing, son. *(touching his face)* Babies

are supposed to grow and mamas are supposed to let 'em go, wish 'em well. That's how it works. Just nobody ever told me how much it would hurt.

*(ROSE starts toward the trailer.)*

**THEO**

Mama—

*(THEO grabs ROSE by the arm.)*

**ROSE**

Son.

*(THEO hugs his mother. They are suspended. Who is the child?)*

**THEO**

This isn't how it's supposed to be. You can get help.

*(THEO releases ROSE.)*

**ROSE**

I ain't going to no *treatment center* with a bunch of junkies!

**THEO**

You should've left him a long time ago. He's never deserved you. You should've taken me / and we should've—

**ROSE**

And done what? You don't know a thing about it.

**THEO**

I know more than you think. < > He took me to her house, mama. Debbie. When I was seventeen. He said she was an old friend, but I knew. You just know something like that. Her daughter was there and you know what dad said to me? He told me to ask her out, said I could definitely do worse. Telling his son to ask his mistress's daughter on a date. She and I just sat watching MTV, didn't say a word to each other, while our parents were in the bedroom...

**ROSE**

Debbie Kilgore was one of many, son. He met her down at Arlo's Bar, playing that damned guitar.

**THEO**

You knew about her?

**ROSE**

He never tried too hard to hide it, 'cept from you. And I guess he didn't do a very good job of that either. You've always made people wanna be better than they are. That's the effect you have, you know that? < > I don't have a way of changing what happened between you and him. If I could, I would. You've got a right to hate him if you want. But I *can* tell you this—Junior Turner ain't that kind of man no more. He ain't got the temper he used to. That neuropathy's made him into a big fat baby. < > Like it or not, I *love* your daddy. They ain't a day goes by that I don't wanna murder him, but still— you're lucky to be as old as you are and have parents that are still married.

**THEO**

Maybe they shouldn't be.

**ROSE**

What an awful thing to say.

**THEO**

It's true.

**ROSE**

We all fuck up, son. Junior Turner's done it more than most. But he's mine.

**THEO**

< > I'll never understand either of you.

**ROSE**

Didn't nobody tell you? That's what you do at your age: spend your remaining days trying to understand the wisdom of your elders.

*(THEO laughs a little.)*

*(THEO picks up the bat and uses it to sweep the glass back into his bucket.)*

*(After a while...)*

**ROSE**

You hungry? I can make you some spaghetti with Doritos on top. Your favorite.

**THEO**

*(not looking up)*

No. I'm fine.

*(ROSE grabs her stick, saunters toward the trailer.)*

*(THEO watches her go.)*

*(ROSE disappears into the darkness.)*

*(THEO sweeps a few shards with the bat...)*

**6. EXPANSION**

*(...then goes to the deer.)*

*(THEO nudges the deer with his foot as if to wake it.)*

*(THEO pulls the piece of folded paper and pen from his back pocket, continues writing.)*

*(Split scene.)*

*(As THEO writes, lights rise inside the trailer where JUNIOR is clumsily playing guitar.)*

*(He manages a chord, progresses to the next, fumbles the fingering, then starts over.)*

*(He is attempting Elvis' "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" But he doesn't sing it.)*

*(ROSE stands out of his line of sight, quietly listening.)*

*(Chord.)*

*(Chord.)*

**ROSE**

Sounds nice.

*(Car door closes offstage.)*

**JUNIOR**

*(not looking at Rose)*

How'd you get out this time?

**ROSE**

Was you planning to let me stay in there all night suffocating?

*(POLLY enters.)*

*(POLLY and THEO regard each other.)*

**JUNIOR**

I's gonna let you out when you's ready to behave.

**ROSE**

How do you even lock that door with your hands?

**JUNIOR**

I got my ways. I can do things when I want to.

**ROSE**

I bet you can.

**THEO**

I have something for you.

*(THEO hands POLLY the piece of paper.)*

**ROSE**

Lock me up so I don't raise suspicion, then run your mouth and tell Theo I'm a junkie—

**THEO**

Read it—

**JUNIOR**

How'd you know about that?

A lizard told me—

**ROSE**

*(ROSE rummages through her recliner.)*

Thanks for staying here.  
Not much could mean more—

**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

You ain't gonna find nothing in there—

**JUNIOR**

Forget the stars, my dear.  
It's you I adore—

**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

Where'd you put my stuff, Junior?

**ROSE**

In a safe place—

**JUNIOR**

My folks are meth heads—

**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

You best give me my shit—

**ROSE**

This much is true—

**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

You ain't gonna find it.

**JUNIOR**

I might've called *the* feds—

**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

You hide things in obvious places—  
**ROSE**

If I didn't have you—  
**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

You'll get it back when them kids is gone—  
**JUNIOR**

Now you've seen the worst—  
**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

The hell you say—  
**ROSE**

*(ROSE overturns boxes, unpacks garbage bags, makes a magnificent mess.)*

And still, you stuck it out—  
**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

Rose, now—  
**JUNIOR**

Putting others first—  
That's what love's about—  
**POLLY**  
*(reading)*

Stop messing my things—  
**JUNIOR**

God, you're cheesy—  
**POLLY**  
*(not reading)*

Can't get much worse than it already is—  
**ROSE**

**THEO**

It gets better. Keep reading—

**JUNIOR**

I got a system!

**POLLY**

*(reading)*

You'll be the best mom in the whole world  
For our soon-to-be, lucky little girl—

**JUNIOR**

This is exactly why I lock you in that bedroom. You're crazy as a damned loon—

**THEO**

It's a poem. A sonnet, actually. I think. Words.

**POLLY**

Yeah, I got that—

**JUNIOR**

Rose! Settle down—

**THEO**

I wanted to say *cosmos* at the end instead of *world*, but nothing rhymes with cosmos, so...

**POLLY**

It's sweet. And...funny.

**THEO**

It was supposed to cheer you up.

*(ROSE is throwing shit everywhere.)*

**POLLY**

I don't want to be cheered up.

**JUNIOR**

I'm gonna lock you in the bedroom again!

**ROSE**

You'll have to catch me first.

**THEO**

Polly, they can be sober enough to make it through a twenty minute interview—

**JUNIOR**

I've decided—

**POLLY**

What about *after* the interview—

**JUNIOR**

I'm quitting—

**POLLY**

You'll trust them with our child?

**THEO**

There's a reason we live two thousand miles away.

**POLLY**

So you'll tell them they can't see her—

**JUNIOR**

I'm going cold turkey—

**THEO**

I don't know *what* will happen after the interview. Let's get past that hurdle first.

**POLLY**

So your *plan* is to fly your method-out parents to California and sit them in front of the person who *decides* if we adopt our baby?

*(ROSE is a tornado.)*

**JUNIOR**

I knew this was a bad idea, telling them kids they could come here—

**THEO**

The interview is just a formality—

**JUNIOR**

Damnit Rose! Listen to me—

**POLLY**

It's a legal *requirement*. In writing. If you'd come to the meetings, you would know that.

**JUNIOR**

I had that organized—

**THEO**

Fraggle Rock—

**POLLY**

Don't.

**THEO**

Kayla's not gonna turn us away because of *this*. *This* isn't *us*. We're ideal parents.

**POLLY**

Are we?

**JUNIOR**

I said I'm quitting this—

**POLLY**

If we're so ideal—

**JUNIOR**

You should quit too—

**POLLY**

...then why can't we make one of our own—

**ROSE**

Quit if you think you're so strong—

**THEO**

You know that's not in our control—

**ROSE**

Leave me here and I'll rot and fester in this filthy-ass place. Amidst your *riches*.

*(ROSE searches, grunting.)*

**POLLY**

What if your universe is trying to tell us something, Theo—

**JUNIOR**

Rose, honey, you're getting too worked up—

**THEO**

You're being irrational—

**POLLY**

It's not *irrational* to think that after all this, maybe it's not *supposed* to happen. Don't you wonder why we couldn't do it?

**THEO**

Of course I do. But I'm not letting it consume me. *(to himself)* I never should have brought you here. *(to Polly)* Look at me.

**JUNIOR**

Look at me.

**ROSE**

No.

**THEO**

Polly—

**THEO**

Look at me.

**JUNIOR**

Look at me.

*(POLLY and ROSE look at THEO and JUNIOR.)*

**THEO**

We're gonna get through this.

**JUNIOR**

We're gonna get through this.

**POLLY**

You're naïve—

**ROSE**

You're full of shit—

**JUNIOR**

A grandbaby is a new chance, Rose. If that means no more dope, so be it. *I'm* willing to change—

This little girl's a new start—

**THEO**

Where do you get off—

**ROSE**

She's gonna be our *daughter*—

**POLLY**

Acting so high and mighty—

**ROSE**

*Flesh, blood and bone*—

**POLLY**

You're down here too, Saint Junior—

**ROSE**

She doesn't *represent* anything—

**POLLY**

You dug the damned hole in the first place—

**ROSE**

She's a *baby*. She's not going to save us—

**POLLY**

Now, where the hell did you put my ice!?

**ROSE**  
*(tearful)*

*(Silence.)*

Since when do we need to be saved?

**THEO**

*(ROSE screams and runs across the room.)*

*(POLLY walks away from THEO.)*

What is wrong with you, woman?

**JUNIOR**

They's a lizard on daddy's face—

**ROSE**

Polly—

**THEO**

What?

**JUNIOR**

On the picture! Kill it—

**ROSE**

Where are you going—

**THEO**

I can't kill what I can't see!

**JUNIOR**

If you'd just call Terminix—

**ROSE**

We need to talk about this—

**THEO**

*(POLLY stops.)*

I would call the exterminator, just to please you. But we smoke all our money. So you're gonna have to live with these little / lizards—

**JUNIOR**

They ain't little!

**ROSE**

Well, OK, these gigantic, hissing, conniving, scheming sons of bitches—

**JUNIOR**

Polly, please...talk to me—

**THEO**

*They are hallucinations!* You're a drug addict, Rose. Face the damned music.

**JUNIOR**

(ROSE sits, buries her face in her hands, cries a little.)

**POLLY**

(turning to THEO)

I have been talking. Or trying to. And you haven't listened. I can barely lift a toothbrush to my mouth most mornings. Because I look in the mirror and I see the end of something. I'm sad, Theo. I'm inconsolably fucking sad. It's like someone let all the air out of the balloon. Like I'm a floppy, discarded piece of rubber or plastic or whatever. Useless! But I've been smiling anyway. I've been smiling because I thought you needed me to. You were handling this in your own way and you needed me to smile. If I smiled, I'd be pretty to you. If I smiled, eventually you'd start to believe everything was OK, that I was capable of making you happy.

**THEO**

Polly—

**POLLY**

I can't smile anymore. We're about to lose *this* little girl too. Get your head out of your ass, stop writing goofy poems and help me come up with a new plan!

**THEO**

I never asked you to smile, Polly. Never. < > Have you stopped to consider what I'm feeling right now?

**POLLY**

Yes, you're finally angry! You're finally confused! For once, you don't have the answer. Welcome to my life.

**THEO**

I'm ashamed! I am mortified that you saw this. My fucking parents are Jerry Springer junkies! A little *moral support* from my *wife* would be nice.

**JUNIOR**

Rose, I'm sorry.

**ROSE**

I know I'm an addict, Junior! But I don't care—

**POLLY**

I'm sorry this is happening to you.

**JUNIOR**

Think about the boy—

**POLLY**

I mean that. I cannot even imagine—

**THEO**

No you can't. Because your parents are perfect.

**ROSE**

He's a grown man.

*(ROSE rises.)*

**POLLY**

If you think my parents are perfect, then you don't actually know them.

**THEO**

I didn't mean that—

**ROSE**

If you won't tell me where it is, I'm gonna go get some more—

*(ROSE heads for the door.)*

**POLLY**

I really am sorry this is happening to you. To us. But, we need to make a plan, Theo—

**JUNIOR**

You can't go nowhere without a ride.

**ROSE**

I'll walk!

*(JUNIOR rises.)*

**JUNIOR**

Your stuff's right here.

**ROSE**

A damned old hen sitting on her egg. Obvious.

*(ROSE laughs, grabs the stuff.)*

**POLLY**

I need you to fight for this. Whatever it takes.

**THEO**

I will. I just need time to process this.

*(ROSE packs the pipe, hits it.)*

**POLLY**

We don't have *time*.

*(POLLY walks away.)*

**THEO**

Where are you going—

**ROSE**

*(exhaling)*

We don't gotta quit to help them get that baby—

*(ROSE vegs.)*

**POLLY**

We can't bring them back with us. I'm going home.

**THEO**

Then so am I.

**POLLY**

You are home. < > I can't do this anymore. I'm tired of being the one who always makes the plan. I'm tired to death of hoping and then having to live through the end of that hope.

**THEO**

I knew I shouldn't have brought you here.

**POLLY**

Look, I know you're going through something here, but this—us—has nothing to do with your parents. I've felt this way ever since we lost the last one. We haven't been on the same page for a long time.

**THEO**

I think you're letting your emotion dictate—

**POLLY**

Of course I am! I want this little girl more than I am capable of expressing to you. With every little breath, every little atom that makes me me, I want her. < > But you know what? I'm glad we couldn't have those other ones...I'm glad because I don't think you're ready.

**THEO**

You know that isn't true. Don't say things you don't mean. You're emotional right now—

**POLLY**

*DO NOT CORRECT ME!*

**THEO**

< > I'm sorry. But this is heat-of-the-moment kind of talk. You'll regret saying it later.

**POLLY**

What will it take to break you apart?

*(Because she doesn't know what else to do, POLLY hits THEO on the chest, slow at first, then growing in intensity.)*

**THEO**

Stop. < > Polly, that hurts.

**POLLY**

Do something about it!

**THEO**

You're hurting me!

**POLLY**

Do something, Theo! Break! Fight!

*(POLLY pushes THEO to the ground.)*

**THEO**

Why are you doing this?

*(POLLY is surprised by her fury.)*

**POLLY**

I don't know. I'm sorry. I have to go.

*(POLLY runs into the darkness.)*

*(The car cranks. The headlights blind THEO.)*

**JUNIOR**  
*(with guitar)*

I's trying to play a little bit earlier.

**ROSE**

Play some Elvis.

*(JUNIOR gives it his best.)*

*(ROSE occasionally sings along.)*

*(As ROSE and JUNIOR sing, POLLY backs the car up, the headlights fading as it moves further and further away until she is gone.)*

**JUNIOR**  
*(singing)*

***Are you lonesome tonight?***

***Do you miss me tonight?***

***Are you sorry we drifted apart?***

***Does your memory stray to a bright sunny day—***

*(JUNIOR stops, a little ashamed.)*

**ROSE**  
*(offering the pipe)*

You want some?

**JUNIOR**

This is the last time.

*(THEO walks toward the trailer.)*

**JUNIOR**

Make the promise. It's the last time.

*(ROSE passes him the pipe.)*

**ROSE**

You can have honors.

**JUNIOR**

You'll have to light it. Elvis kills my hands.

*(ROSE takes it back, lights it, passes it to JUNIOR.)*

*(JUNIOR hits it, leans back.)*

*(ROSE takes it from him, puts the pipe to her lips, inhales.)*

*(THEO enters the trailer.)*

*(THEO sees ROSE.)*

*(ROSE sees THEO.)*

*(ROSE exhales.)*

*(A very long silence lingers as the smoke rises.)*

*(THEO walks to ROSE, calmly takes the pipe from her, smells it.)*

**JUNIOR**

Last time. Ain't that right, Rose? We're quitting—after this—so we can help you get that—

*(THEO picks up the bag of ice.)*

**JUNIOR**

Son, now you know I didn't mean what I said earlier, don't you? I just—Polly's a firecracker, ain't she? Reminds me of somebody / else I know.

**ROSE**

Son, what's a matter?

**THEO**

Is this everything? You don't have anymore?

**JUNIOR**

Last of it.

*(THEO dumps the contents into his hand.)*

**ROSE**

Son, what's happened?

*(THEO swallows all of the meth.)*

**JUNIOR**

Damn, boy!  
You lost your mind?

That stuff'll kill you!

**ROSE**

Theo!  
What are you doing?  
What's happened?

*(Silence.)*

**THEO**

BANG. BANG. BOOM.

*(Blackout.)*

***INTERMISSION***

**7.                   CONTRACTION**

*(A couple hours later, around midnight.)*

*(Clip lights illuminate the deer hanging upside down by her hind legs.)*

*(She is gutted.)*

*(JUNIOR, wearing a “Kiss the Cook” apron smeared with blood, wields the knife, saws at the deer.)*

*(THEO is vomiting offstage. Eventually, he enters, speaks quickly, breathlessly.)*

*(ROSE is upstage, THEO’s cell phone to her ear.)*

**JUNIOR**

Better?

**THEO**

All right pops, it’s like this: imagine a motherfucking balloon.

**JUNIOR**

What color is it?

**THEO**

Who cares? It’s clear. Transparent. And and and it’s painted, painted with dots... billions of dots.

**JUNIOR**

What color of dots?

**THEO**

It doesn’t matter. All colors. And each one of *us*, me, you, mama bear, each one of *is* a dot on the balloon. Look out and see the other dots. We see each other. But only from a distance, right? Never *too* close. Too close not good.

*(The knife is stuck.)*

**JUNIOR**

Theo, / can you help—

**THEO**

And the little clear balloon painted with multi-colored dots is getting bigger. Real big. Explosively big. And you, me and mama bear there, each being a dot on the balloon, when it expands, to us, each a dot, it looks like all the other dots are moving *away* from us, right? Because they are. They *are* moving away. Going going going. Everything's expanding. We're all moving away from each other.

**JUNIOR**

Rose? / A little help?

**ROSE**

*(on the phone)*

/ Shhhh! I'm trying to hear—

**THEO**

NOW—what *if* we let a little air out of the balloon? Sssssssssssssssssss. What happens then?

**JUNIOR**

Theo, can you / pull out this knife?

**THEO**

We all seem closer. Because we are. We are closer. But *then*, then something puts air back in the balloon...something puts it back. God, gravity, dark matter...it doesn't matter what it is or *who* it is that's blowing air into the balloon. That's not the point...no matter what we call that force, the fundamental truth is...the truth about all of it is...the nature of all things is to push and pull, push and pull till it breaks apart. You see? More distance. The dots—we—get further away. And then when it breaks, when it touches another balloon—a balloon so unfamiliar we can't process it, like a balloon of endlessness, poetry, it's that kind of balloon—when our balloon, our universe you see, rubs up against another, then there's contraction, whip-like reset, tabula rasa, and nothing's ever the same. Empty is different than full. It's back to square one, but a different square one, more like a condensed square 10. And there are layers and layers of these balloons. On planes. You following me?

*(Silence.)*

**JUNIOR**

A motherfucking balloon. I heard you.

**THEO**

Right. *(laughs loudly)* Oh, Jesus. Honestly, we don't know anything. Nothing. We're just guessing. Guessing with a lot of data, but still guessing nonetheless. We haven't really known anything new since Galileo. God, that's depressing. What am I doing with my life? For all we

**THEO**

know, when something appears to be getting farther away, it might be hurtling right toward us. And we'd never know it. That's how far we've come since...we can see so far and yet we see nothing.

*(JUNIOR stares at the sky.)*

**JUNIOR**

What about comets? We'd know if a comet's gonna hit us, right? I watched this thing on TV—

**THEO**

Metaphor, pops. Metaphor. Theories. I'm saying theoretically. Invisible stuff. Not comets. Yes, we'd know. Mostly. < > I should've been an engineer. Make things move.

**JUNIOR**

A mechanic. There's some money in that. You know what they wanna charge me for my truck?

**THEO**

Not a mechanic. An engineer.

**JUNIOR**

Same difference. A hundred and—

**ROSE**

Your reception sucks / here, Theo. I can't get her.

**THEO**

We'd never know. We'd never know because we—the insignificant little dots on the balloon—

**JUNIOR**

The balloon again?

**THEO**

Yes, the balloon...it's important. You said you wanna know, so I'm preaching the gospel. Pay attention! School's in sesh. That balloon's the only way to process it. Metaphor. You follow me? *The balloon isn't real.* We'd never know about the intersection—planes of balloons—because we can't be part of the intersection in real time. In the time as we know it, in the time that we've invented for ourselves...a year, a day, a second...it's relative. Real time is bigger. Bigger than all of us. We're billions of years behind what's really happening out there. We're forever seeing the result, not the cause.

**JUNIOR**

You get all that from looking at the stars?

*(THEO pulls the knife out, wipes the blood from his hands on JUNIOR's apron.)*

**JUNIOR**

/ Thanks.

**THEO**

Wooo! < > Gonna take a ride! Gonna get you on an aeroplane, pops! Gonna get you and mama bear on an aeroplane! And rock a bye sweet baby mine! Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe we *should not* get the baby. Like Polly said. The baby the baby the baby...

*(THEO picks up a strange looking tool, plays with it.)*

**THEO**

Need to name the baby. Polly says I can name her, you know that? Polly's so nice.

**JUNIOR**

We're both very lucky men.

**THEO**

What is this?

**JUNIOR**

That's a castration tool. For goats.

*(THEO drops the tool, shudders, jumps up and down rhythmically.)*

*(JUNIOR laughs at him.)*

**THEO**

*(jumping)*

I hate flying too, you know. It's unnatural. People are so so so *vulnerable* on planes. All crammed in this metal tube thinking about dying—not talking to each other because they're thinking about--I always think about dying...imagine some awful crash where you don't die instantly, you know? Like you free fall from way up in the troposphere or some shit.

**JUNIOR**

You ain't easing my fear of flying, son.

**THEO**

*(staring into the clip light)*

Have you ever stared at the sun?

**JUNIOR**

Sure.

**THEO**

Remember what happened to your eyes?

**JUNIOR**

Couldn't see.

**THEO**

That's what dying will be. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Staring at the sun, only instead of turning away because your eyes are on fire, you keep looking.

**JUNIOR**

Sounds awful.

**THEO**

I'm gonna die one day. Maybe now. Ahhhhhh.....you know what, though? I find comfort in certain things when I fly...like seeing the curve of the earth from up high. When you fly to California, popsy, look down so you can see it. It's purple, the curve. The edge of everything is purple. Moving at that speed so high up, you feel like you're moving slow. You're here. Then you're there. Unnatural. It takes my mind a few hours to catch up to my body. I think I'm just now catching up to being here. My brain can't travel at 500 miles per hour.

**JUNIOR**

It's going pretty fast / now.

*(THEO stops jumping.)*

**THEO**

So many words in my mouth how *did* they get there?

**ROSE**

It's ringing!

**THEO**

I won't remember all these words. If she wants to know them, what will I say to her? Ah da da da... oooohhhh. Burning, burning. Ohhh. Phew. Nope. Nope. I'm OK.

**ROSE**

Still ringing!

**THEO**

Flying west, do you travel *against* or *with* the jet stream—against I think, if you're flying west. But once you get past Texas, you can look out your window, down to the ground and see...yeah, yeah, it looks like the beginning of time, like dinosaurs should be down there stomping around, eating little cave people. Nothing but the color of rust. But there's nothing down there, just piles of dirt and holes in the ground. < > I flew over the Grand Canyon once. Doesn't look too grand from 35,000 feet.

**ROSE**

I've been.

**JUNIOR**

When?

**ROSE**

Daddy took me.

**JUNIOR**

You never told me that.

**ROSE**

You ain't the only one that lived before we was married. < > Voicemail.

*(ROSE hands THEO the cell phone.)*

**ROSE**

Say something.

**THEO**

What?

**ROSE**

To Polly. Say something.

**THEO**

She's here? Where?

**ROSE**

No, the phone...leave a—

*(THEO grabs the phone.)*

**THEO**

Ohhhhhh. Ohhhhhh. Mama, my heart's beating real fast again.

**ROSE**

We need to take him to the hospital!

**JUNIOR**

I told you, we can't take him to no hospital, Rose. You wanna get us all arrested?

**THEO**

I think I should...yeah, I'm gonna lay down here for a while.

*(THEO lies on the ground.)*

*(ROSE takes the phone.)*

**ROSE**

Polly? Call us. It's Rose.

*(Silence.)*

*(THEO's "Da-Da's" continue through the scene. The actor playing Theo should feel license to score the scene appropriately.)*

**THEO**

*(at the tempo of his heart, to himself)*

DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA...etc.

**ROSE**

We gotta take him to a doctor, get his stomach pumped, Junior. Leave that stupid deer alone!

**JUNIOR**

You'll think stupid once you taste it.

**ROSE**

I ain't cooking no deer!

**JUNIOR**

Who said you were?

**ROSE**

*You* sure as shit can't do it.

**JUNIOR**

I gutted it, didn't I?

**ROSE**

Theo's wiggling the fuck out and all you can think about is supper?

**JUNIOR**

I'm cutting these steaks for / him.

**ROSE**

We need to take / him to a doctor!

**JUNIOR**

If he gets some food in him—

**ROSE**

Them Mexicans sell pure shit, Junior. You know that.

**JUNIOR**

We didn't get that from no Mexicans.

**ROSE**

I sure as hell did.

**JUNIOR**

No / you didn't!

**ROSE**

I bought it. I ought to know. They was at least a gram in that bag. Pure shit will fuck you up bad—you know that. He needs to go to the emergency—

**JUNIOR**

There wasn't that much!

**ROSE**

You're as blind as a skunk in a shithouse. I'm calling an ambulance—

**JUNIOR**

And when they find meth in his system, their chance of getting that baby is over. D'you think about that?

**ROSE**

< > Well, If he dies, his chances are a hell of a lot worse!

**JUNIOR**

He ain't gonna die. You're paranoid.

**THEO**

Everybody's dying! Oh. < > Oh. < > It's hot out here. It's reaaaal hot.

*(THEO takes off his shirt, lays back down.)*

**THEO**

DA-DA...etc.

**ROSE**

He needs a fucking doctor.

**JUNIOR**

He'll come down with some meat in him. Try Polly again.

**THEO**

She's gone. Going. Going. Gone. Shhhhhwoooooo *(sitting up)* I didn't want to come here. I told Polly we should just lie about you...tell Kayla you were dead and Polly said, "No, if she finds out we're lying, then no baby for us." And then I was like, "I'll just go by myself and bring them back." Because I knew, I knew something would go wrong. Embarrassing. And Polly was like, "Theo, I want to see where you grew up." She wanted to get to know you better. Mission a-freaking-complished. She's so good...and sweet and normal and if she's gone for good, I'll never forgive you. It's your fault. If I'd never brought her here, she wouldn't be gone now!

**JUNIOR**

You're just being hurtful now. Don't pay attention to him, Rose. It's the meth talking.

**ROSE**

He ain't talking to me.

**THEO**

DA-DA...etc.

**ROSE**

I'm gonna call an ambulance.



**JUNIOR**

We took care of him for eighteen years, didn't we? We can take care of him now.

**ROSE**

Look at him! Does he look fine to you?

*(THEO is breathing very audibly.)*

**JUNIOR**

It's just like your lizards. You're being paranoid!

**ROSE**

Whatever happens here, Junior Turner, I want you to live the rest of your stupid little life, knowing it was all your fault.

**THEO**

Crucify him! Crucify Junior Turner! And they hit him with a car and they hung him by his feet and they gutted him for the sinners to see.

*(THEO laughs.)*

**THEO**

*DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA-DA...etc.*

*(THEO curls on his side into a fetal position and moans.)*

**ROSE**

Here we are: a *family* of goddamned junkies. Is this what you wanted? Company?

**JUNIOR**

You made your choice and so did he. I didn't shove it down nobody's throat. I do it for my hands. Ya'll ain't got no excuse!

**ROSE**

As usual—denying your own bullshit. You ain't innocent, Saint Junior.

**THEO**

And the people came and looked upon Saint Junior's fat old body. No one wept. No one shed a single little tear.

**JUNIOR**

That's all right. Ya'll gang up on me. Ya'll have always been mean-spirited people.

*(JUNIOR filets the deer.)*

**ROSE**

Son, how you / feeling?

**THEO**

Spinny. And hot. Real hot. My heart, mama. I have one. I know because I feel it.

**ROSE**

You think you need to go to the hospital?

**THEO**

I don't know what I need. I need...some feathers. Feathers. Yes. They float.

**ROSE**

We don't got no feathers, son. Why'd you take all them drugs?

**THEO**

I thought it might— I wanted to break apart. Why'd *you* take all them drugs?

*(Silence.)*

*(THEO rises, looks into her eyes, then looks directly at the audience.)*

**THEO**

Mama, who are all those people?

**ROSE**

What people?

**THEO**

Those people! You don't see those people?

*(THEO sits down, looks at the audience, nods off.)*

**ROSE**

Theo? < > Theo! Junior! He's crashing—

**THEO**

Sorry—

**ROSE**

Don't you do that, now. Don't close your eyes. You stay awake.

**THEO**

I'm sorry—eyes eyes eyes—

**ROSE**

You need a doctor. Junior, you asshole, look for that phone!

**THEO**

I'm a red turtle! Eyes. Those people...I know them. I've seen them before.

**ROSE**

What people? You're seeing things. He's seeing things, Junior.

**JUNIOR**

Like mother like son.

**ROSE**

Them lizards—

**JUNIOR**

...are real, I know. Real as the people he's seeing.

**ROSE**

That stuff ain't supposed— it don't make you groggy. He's overdosing! Find that damned phone, Junior!

**THEO**

I'm OK. Look, I'll stay awake. I'll stand up. See? Healthy. No hospital. My baby's not in a hospital.

*(THEO rises, goes toward the audience, examining them. He's unstable.)*

**THEO**

I'm Christopher fucking Columbus. I see the people. Look at me, Saint Junior! Everybody said the world was flat, but he knew...*he knew* the world was round. Everybody says bang bang and I say no, no, not true—no bang bang.

*(THEO runs offstage, vomits. He returns with a piece of PVC pipe, holds it to his eye and looks at the sky.)*

**THEO**

My teacher, Miss Kinsler, you remember her, don't you, Junior? You remember her tits probably. Miss Kinsler used to call me star child. And you know why? Cause she was sure I was from another planet...an alien. Couldn't imagine how I ever came from you. Remember that little red Tasco telescope, mama?

*(ROSE laughs a little.)*

**ROSE**

Bet we still got it somewheres.

**THEO**

I asked for a microscope. You came home with a Tasco telescope.

**ROSE**

I got 'em mixed up.

**THEO**

Barely caught the craters in the moon. But that was it. Beginning. My whole life—boom—defined by your mistake. I'm thirsty. Oh. Oh. I taste like sick.

**JUNIOR**

Rose, get the boy some water. That's what he needs, some food and water and he'll be fine. I nursed a lot of people through stuff like this—you included. I know what I'm talking about.

*(THEO is obsessed with his tongue and teeth.)*

*(ROSE rises.)*

**ROSE**

*(to Junior)*

I ain't getting this water because you told me to. I'm getting it because my son is thirsty.

*(ROSE exits toward the trailer.)*

*(JUNIOR is making a mess of the deer.)*

**JUNIOR**

This is a young one. Meat'll be tender.

**THEO**

Was she pregnant?

**JUNIOR**

Huh?

**THEO**

The deer. Preg-o. *It's in there.*

**JUNIOR**

Ain't the season.

**THEO**

Good, good. We shouldn't cut pregnant things.

**JUNIOR**

Sounds like a philosophy to live by, Columbus. Hand me that bucket.

**THEO**

You can't have my bucket.

**JUNIOR**

I need something for these innards. Can't just leave 'em on the ground. Attracts dogs.

**THEO**

The bucket's mine. You can't have it.

**JUNIOR**

Do what I tell you, boy.

**THEO**

I ain't no boy. Bye bye boy.

*(Split scene.)*

*(ROSE enters the trailer, turns on the light, grabs the Big Gulp, tastes it, grimaces, pours the flat Mountain Dew in the aquarium.)*

Poor fish. Better off dead.

**ROSE**

*(ROSE exits to the kitchen.)*

*(JUNIOR goes for the bucket.)*

*(THEO steps in front of him.)*

I said no, Saint Junior.

**THEO**

I need that bucket. Stop fooling.

**JUNIOR**

It's mine.

**THEO**

It's sure as hell *don't* belong to you. It's in *my* yard and that makes it mine.

**JUNIOR**

**THEO**

*(Lord of the Rings)*

YOU SHALL NOT PASS!

I want *that* bucket.

**JUNIOR**

Get something else, lobster man.

**THEO**

I'll take it if I have to.

**JUNIOR**

Try.

**THEO**

*(JUNIOR steps forward.)*

*(THEO hits him in the leg with the PVC pipe.)*

Damnit, boy! That hurts!

**JUNIOR**

Good. Fight. Fight fight fight—

**THEO**

Get out of my way!

**JUNIOR**

*(JUNIOR steps forward again.)*

*(THEO hits his other leg.)*

Ahaha! Hurts, doesn't it? That's what *fight* feels like.

**THEO**

Son—now, you need to calm yourself. I don't wanna fight you—

**JUNIOR**

*(THEO hits him again.)*

You want my bucket? Take it!

**THEO**

*(Again.)*

*THEO—stop!*

**JUNIOR**

*(Again.)*

Son—

**JUNIOR**

*(Again. In the back. Hard.)*

*(JUNIOR falls to his knees.)*

Boy...you can't...do this to...an old man.

**JUNIOR**

You had no right—you *had no right!*

**THEO**

*(Again.)*

**THEO**

Nobody should ever do what you did!

*(Again.)*

**JUNIOR**

STOP! < > I'm sorry! < > I'm sorry, son! < > Please, stop—

*(Again.)*

**THEO**

I don't even care about the fucking *drugs*. Maybe I should—but they feel good, yeah, people do what they have to do to medicate—I get it. I get it! You never loved us enough. You're a vile, hateful person. I've lived my whole life being constantly *disappointed* by you. I left because I didn't wanna become you. Because of the man you are...I became something. Something more, something better than you ever could be.

*(THEO raises the pipe over his head.)*

**JUNIOR**

And I thank God for that.

**THEO**

But I ain't no better, daddy. Look at me! Look me in the eyes.

**JUNIOR**

Son, you ain't the kind of man to beat an old crippled—

**THEO**

Yes I am! You made me this way.

**JUNIOR**

Please—now, son—

**THEO**

I'm the *same* man as you—

**JUNIOR**

You're high! Put down that pipe!

**THEO**

Same as Saint Junior—

**JUNIOR**

Please, I can't—

**THEO**

You can't what? Take it?

**JUNIOR**

I *can't* take it. I'm sorry for all I did. You wanna kill me? Go ahead! Put Saint Junior out of his misery once and for all!

*(Silence.)*

*(THEO lowers the pipe.)*

**THEO**

Oh daddy...daddy, I did it bad. I did it bad.

*(THEO rolls into a ball and is completely quiet.)*

*(After a moment, JUNIOR checks on THEO.)*

**JUNIOR**

Son? Theo?

**THEO**

I did it bad—

**JUNIOR**

You scared the shit out of me.

**THEO**

*(turns over)*

Her name is Rebekah.

**JUNIOR**

I don't know no Rebekah.

**THEO**

I do. I know her, pops. She's a hot 23 year old research fellow and I wanted to fall in love with her.

**JUNIOR**

I don't understand what you're saying, boy—

**THEO**

After Polly delivered the second baby—

**JUNIOR**

Baby? There was a baby?

**THEO**

No, there was a *body*. Twice, dad. Twice.

**JUNIOR**

Oh god, son. I'm sorry. I didn't know.

**THEO**

I thought it was a sign for tabula rasa. The balloon? Boom? Dad, it's easier to start over than keep going. I'm trying to love another woman.

**JUNIOR**

< > You cheated on Polly?

**THEO**

Stretching the balloon. You follow?

**JUNIOR**

No, I do not follow.

**THEO**

Nothing's happened. The balloon won't pop. But, in my mind, pops, you see, *everything* is happening. Pow. I have another life. I have kids with Rebekah. My kids. My blood. Young and bouncy Rebekah who adores me. I have a new life, not this life--this life with and its ugly parts.

**JUNIOR**

Theo, are you fucking another woman?

**THEO**

No, but I could. I want to. I'm the same as you.

*(Silence.)*

*(They look at each other.)*

**JUNIOR**

Oh son, we are *not* the same. There ain't no sin in imagining.

*(THEO starts laughing. His laughter grows. Eventually, JUNIOR starts laughing.)*

*(The two men laugh where the muscadines once grew. This is the first time they've seen each other in years. They laugh with their whole bodies, like two boys who just heard a dirty joke.)*

*(This goes on for a good long while.)*

**THEO**

Why is this funny?

**JUNIOR**

It's probably not funny.

**THEO**

Then why are we laughing?

**JUNIOR**

I can't tell you.

*(They laugh a while longer until THEO stops abruptly.)*

*(ROSE exits the trailer, turns off the light.)*

**THEO**

Dad, tell me how to get Polly back. I want it back the way it was.

**JUNIOR**

I can't tell you that. I don't know.

**THEO**

Mom always comes back.

**JUNIOR**

Only cause she don't got nowhere else to go.

*(ROSE enters.)*

**ROSE**

What the hell you doing on the ground?

**JUNIOR**

< > Looking for something.

**ROSE**

Your mind?

**JUNIOR**

Help me up, son.

*(JUNIOR rises with THEO's help.)*

*(THEO takes the water from ROSE, chugs it.)*

*(ROSE places her hand on his head.)*

**ROSE**

You're burning up, Theo!

**THEO**

The house is on fire, mama.

**ROSE**

What?

**JUNIOR**

It's a metaphor, woman. Don't you listen? I'll cook this deer steak and make some eggs to go with it. Don't that sound good?

*(THEO dashes offstage and vomits.)*

**JUNIOR**

Best thing for him. Get it out of his system.

*(THEO vomits more.)*

**JUNIOR**

I can't handle this. I got a weak stomach.

*(JUNIOR grabs the mutilated steaks from inside the deer carcass, hobbles toward the trailer.)*

*(THEO hurls one last time.)*

**THEO**  
*(O.S.)*

Mama, my heart's beating real fast.

**ROSE**

It's the meth.

**THEO**  
*(entering)*

I don't like feeling my heartbeat....I'm scared of what's gonna happen.

**ROSE**

I've been scared of what's gonna happen long as I can remember. And you know what? Not much happens. But I keep being scared anyways.

**THEO**

I'm afraid of dying. Like right now. Dying right now. Before I see Polly again.

**ROSE**

Come inside. Mama bear will take care of you.

**THEO**

I can feel my heart...*(laughs uncontrollably)* and it's so fucking full of love right now it might explode.

**ROSE**

I reckon that's cause you're on the brink of losing everything, son.

*(THEO guffaws.)*

*(ROSE steadies him and they walk toward the trailer.)*

*(Lights fade.)*

*(Once they are offstage, THEO's cell phone rings in the darkness—Star Wars.)*

8. WEPT

*(Later, around 4 AM.)*

*(The stars are at their brightest.)*

*(THEO is sprawled in one of the recliners, watching an episode of "The Cosbys.")*

*(He is still in his underwear and has a wet washcloth on his forehead.)*

*(ROSE is sitting at the dining room table.)*

*(THEO laughs occasionally.)*

*(After a few moments, ROSE begins to slap at some of the lawnmower parts on the table, hoping to kill lizards.)*

**ROSE**

*(whispered)*

Sons of bitches!

*(Though she's procured a long curtain rod with which to smack lizards, ROSE takes care to do this quietly so THEO doesn't notice. She silently shoos the lizards away.)*

*(ROSE chases one to THEO's recliner. The lizard is on his head. She tries to shoo it away with the curtain rod.)*

*(THEO starts. ROSE scurries back to the table, curtain rod in hand. THEO rises and turns off the TV.)*

**THEO**

Nancy Reagan would be so disappointed.

**ROSE**

Huh?

**THEO**

Nothing. What are you doing?

**ROSE**

Lizard pole. Making sure you don't get bit.

*(THEO laughs.)*

**THEO**

Don Quixote tilting at windmills. Where are my clothes?

**ROSE**

Outside. < > I can get 'em.

**THEO**

It's OK. I'm hot. I wanna go outside. What time is it?

**ROSE**

About four.

**THEO**

Whoa. Did I fall asleep?

**ROSE**

You've been sitting right there laughing at the Huxstables for 'bout three or four hours.

**THEO**

I was awake?

**ROSE**

Well...your eyes were open. < > Don't worry, son, I've lost track of entire days.

*(ROSE rises, curtain rod still in hand, goes to THEO and hugs him.)*

*(It lasts a while.)*

**THEO**

*(still embraced)*

This is a funeral hug—did somebody die? What's going on?

*(ROSE smiles from ear to ear.)*

**ROSE**

I'm just...God, I'm so happy! My son is home.

*(THEO smiles a bit, breaks away from ROSE and unconsciously stands beside the photo of John Lee.)*

**THEO**

My mouth is so dry. Did I eat sand or something? Polly! Where is Polly? Did she call?

**ROSE**

Not yet.

**THEO**

Have you seen my phone?

**ROSE**

You look so much like your granddaddy.

**THEO**

Phone?

**ROSE**

Act like him too. He was smart as a whip. Couldn't nobody beat him at Black Jack.

*(THEO turns to look at the photo.)*

**THEO**

He counted cards?

**ROSE**

I don't know what he did, but he never lost. < > He hated it that I smoked cigarettes. I skipped school to smoke them cigarettes and as a punishment, my daddy didn't whoop me—he died. I came home smelling like menthols and mama said he was gone. That was that.

*(ROSE stares at the photo.)*

**THEO**

Mom, I need to call Polly.

**ROSE**

Your daddy threw your phone into the jungle of lawnmowers. Don't you remember?

**THEO**

I do *not* remember that. < > We can just call it from your phone.

**ROSE**

Got disconnected day before last.

**THEO**

I'm gonna get my clothes.

**ROSE**

I'll get 'em for you.

*(ROSE pokes the recliner for lizards.)*

**ROSE**

Safe and sound. Take a load off.

**THEO**

I don't need you to wait on me.

**ROSE**

Shouldn't go outside in your underwear. You'll catch cold.

*(ROSE exits to the yard.)*

*(Split scene.)*

*(THEO looks around him—this is the first time he's been alone in his childhood home since he was a young man.)*

*(He looks at the Spain photo, takes it off the wall, remembers a funny story involving a drunk Spaniard and his mother who kept saying "Si, Si," no matter what the drunk man said. He laughs and hangs the photo back on the wall.)*

*(He notices the eight track tapes.)*

**THEO**

Eight tracks. Wow.

*(ROSE picks up THEO's clothes, heads back to the trailer.)*

*(Theo's cell phone rings in the darkness. ROSE hears it, drops the clothes, scrambles offstage to find it.)*

*(THEO notices the fish tank.)*

**THEO**

Oh, little fellows. Not good. Shit.

*(THEO sees a bucket on the dining room table filled with lawnmower parts. He grabs it, dumps the contents on the floor and exits toward the bathroom.)*

*(After a few rings, Theo's cell phone stops.)*

**ROSE**

*(O.S.)*

Shit.

*(ROSE emerges from the darkness, picks up the clothes.)*

*(THEO's cell phone rings again.)*

*(ROSE sighs, drops the clothes, runs toward the sound.)*

*(JUNIOR enters from the kitchen.)*

**JUNIOR**

Steak and eggs coming right— whatthe?

*(JUNIOR notices the lawnmower parts on the floor, starts picking them up, placing them on the dining room table.)*

*(THEO enters carrying a bucket full of water.)*

**JUNIOR**

The hell are you doing?

**THEO**

“He who is generous will be blessed.” Also a Proverb.

*(THEO dumps the water in the aquarium.)*

*(Theo’s cell phone stops.)*

**ROSE**

*(O.S.)*

Damnit.

**THEO**

Fish like to swim. They need water to do it.

**JUNIOR**

I had them parts organized and you just dumped it all on the floor!

**THEO**

Organized?

**JUNIOR**

Yes. Put ‘em back in there. < > Where’s your mama?

*(ROSE reappears, picks up the clothes.)*

**THEO**

Scoring some smack.

**JUNIOR**

That ain’t funny.

**THEO**

She’s outside.

*(The phone rings again.)*

*(ROSE drops the clothes, storms off.)*

**JUNIOR**

How you feeling?

A little exposed.

**THEO**

Well...I hope you're hungry.

**JUNIOR**

Starving.

**THEO**

How you want your eggs?

**JUNIOR**

Fried, please. Two.

**THEO**

Can't promise the yokes. *(lifts his hands)* Clear a spot at the table. We'll be downright civilized.

**JUNIOR**

*(JUNIOR exits.)*

*(THEO begins the impossible task of uncovering the hidden dining room table.)*

Gotcha! Hello...hello. < > I can't hear you...hold on a minute.

**ROSE**

*(O.S.)*

*(POLLY enters, cell phone to ear.)*

Hello? < > Theo? < > Are you there?

**POLLY**

Can you hear me now? I get better recep—

**ROSE**

*(entering)*

*(POLLY and ROSE see each other.)*

Hello.

**ROSE**

**POLLY**

Hi.

**ROSE**

Theo's inside. I was bringing him his clothes.

**POLLY**

His clothes?

**ROSE**

< > It's been an eventful evening. What happened to you?

*(POLLY's covered in mud.)*

**POLLY**

The car—the road—I took a wrong—I think I ran out of gas? I've been trying to call Theo all night.

**ROSE**

His phone was...indisposed. What is all over you, child?

**POLLY**

I slid down...an embankment? It's really dark here at night. Where's Theo?

**ROSE**

He's inside. He's better. Now.

**POLLY**

Better? What happened?

**ROSE**

He...well...he tried to break himself apart. That's how / he put it.

**POLLY**

Oh god—

**ROSE**

Nothing like that...he...he caught us smoking it and...I guess cause you left—

**POLLY**

He smoked meth?

**ROSE**

Swallowed it. A shit ton of it.

**POLLY**  
*(fascinated)*

Really?

**ROSE**

Yep.

**POLLY**

But he's OK?

**ROSE**

He will be once he sees you. < > Polly...I'm sorry we caused all this.

**POLLY**

It's not you. I mean, yeah...it really fucking sucks that you're a tweeker, but we have our own issues...

**ROSE**

What do you mean?

**POLLY**

I probably shouldn't, you know, betray confidences.

**ROSE**

I understand.

**POLLY**

He's OK?

**ROSE**

I think so.

**POLLY**

I shouldn't have left him here alone.

**ROSE**

Forgive me if I'm prying, but why *did* you leave?

**POLLY**

< > I wanted him to stop me.

*(ROSE laughs.)*

**POLLY**

What's so funny?

**ROSE**

Sweetheart, don't ever leave a man unless you mean it.

*(The table is cleared. THEO places the prayer hand napkin holder in the center.)*

**THEO**

Civilized.

*(POLLY sees the deer.)*

**POLLY**

Oh. Ohhh. Oh no.

**ROSE**

Junior thought it best to not waste it. He's cooking up something if you're hungry.

**POLLY**

I'll pass, thanks.

**JUNIOR**

*(O.S)*

Theo, come help me out for a minute, would you?

*(THEO exits into the kitchen.)*

**POLLY**

Theo's inside?

**ROSE**

Uh-huh.

*(POLLY turns toward the trailer.)*

**ROSE**

You better know what you're gonna say to him. Trust me, you don't wanna come back and not have anything to say.

**POLLY**

I'll tell him I'm sorry.

**ROSE**

Don't say that. Anything but that.

**POLLY**

What should I say?

**ROSE**

You're asking me for advice?

**POLLY**

He's your son.

**ROSE**

But he's your husband.

**POLLY**

< > I just want to see him fight for this. For us.

**ROSE**

Theo's a tender heart. A quiet, funny boy. Always has been. You're lucky to have a man who *ain't* a fighter.

**POLLY**

Rose, I don't think he wants this baby.

**ROSE**

What makes you think that?

**POLLY**

I have done everything during this process. He never talks about her without prompting. We haven't...we don't...well, it's been a *long* time, Rose. You understand what I'm saying?

**ROSE**

More than I care to tell you. Let me ask you something. Do *you* want the baby?

**POLLY**

More than anything.

**ROSE**

Why do you want a kid so bad?

**POLLY**

< > I'm tired of feeling like a failure.

**ROSE**

A kid ain't gonna help you there. You ain't known self-doubt till you've raised a baby.

**POLLY**

It's not just that. I want us to be a family...to expand beyond the two of us, you know?

**ROSE**

Then why did you run away? I'm ain't taking his side. Nothing like that. I'm just saying...right when the shit was hitting the fan...you left. You can't expect Theo to fight if you're not willing to stay and fight too. < > What scares you most about being a mama?

**POLLY**

< > She's not gonna be mine. She's not *from* me. How am I gonna love her? I mean, *really* love her. What if I don't? What if I don't love my baby?

**ROSE**

Have you held her yet?

**POLLY**

We saw her through the glass in the maternity ward. The agency says it's best—

**ROSE**

...to wait. I'm sure. (*going to her*) Listen to me now—even if she was yours, these things / take time.

**POLLY**

The others, we had names for them—Olivia or Oliver, depending. I loved *those* babies. I can't bring myself to love this one because I don't know if I deserve her.

**ROSE**

Listen, now. < > I never told Theo this, and you won't either. You understand? < > When I got pregnant, I almost...well, I went to a clinic. I got up on the table and the doctor touched me down there with his cold hands and I remember the flash that ran through my mind—"what if"— what if I never met this child. What if. So I walked out of there and me and Junior got married. When I had him, it didn't happen like everybody says. They put him in my arms and I just thought what a damned mess I was in. I guess he was about six months and, god, he was a colicky baby. I tried everything to get him to sleep—singing, walking, peek a boo—hours of that

crap—nothing would quiet that child. He had a grade-A set of lungs, I'm telling you. Only time in his life he was ever loud. And I remember standing there, looking into that bassinet in his screaming little mouth... and I regretted walking out of that clinic. I did not love my baby boy. As a matter of fact, I hated him. And god, I felt so damned guilty for feeling that way that I just broke. I cried louder than him. A flood gate broke loose in me and I wept. That's the word for it. Wept. And Theo stopped crying and just looked up at me with those big tender eyes. < > I knew I wasn't alone. My son was there and I wasn't alone no more. < > That kind of love...you can't control when it comes. You can't will it to happen. But it *does* come, even if you don't think you deserve it. And when it does, you ain't alone no more. < > You're gonna be a damned fine mama.

*(POLLY hugs ROSE.)*

*(JUNIOR and THEO enter with three plates of steak and eggs. They set the table with coffee, silverware, etc.)*

**ROSE**

I'll send him out.

*(ROSE exits toward the trailer.)*

*(POLLY picks up THEO's clothes, tries not to look at the deer.)*

**POLLY**

Oh, you poor, poor baby. I'm sorry.

*(JUNIOR and THEO sit at the table.)*

**JUNIOR**

Well...I bet when you imagined coming home, you didn't think you'd be sitting in your underwear eating road kill with your drug addict daddy.

*(ROSE enters the trailer.)*

**ROSE**

When did we get a dining room table?

**THEO**

Complete with a Jesus hands napkin holder. No napkins, but plenty of forgiveness.

**JUNIOR**

Bon appétit, baby. < > Sit down. Let's eat. It's getting cold.

**ROSE**

You better fix another plate.

**JUNIOR**

You that hungry?

**ROSE**

Polly's outside.

*(THEO hesitates, then dashes out the door.)*

**JUNIOR**

Well...dinner ain't getting no younger. Pull up a chair. Let them kids kiss and make up and we'll have a little date.

*(ROSE sits, eats.)*

*(THEO stops when he sees POLLY.)*

**POLLY**

Put some clothes on, Theo Turner.

*(POLLY throws him his clothes.)*

**THEO**

It's too hot. I almost died.

*(THEO tosses them back at her.)*

*(ROSE spits out her eggs.)*

**ROSE**

Shell.

**JUNIOR**

Hey, I tried.

**THEO**

You smell funny. What happened to you?

**POLLY**

The car...stalled. I think it might be something to do with hitting the deer. I've been stumbling around the woods for the last three hours trying to find a signal.

**THEO**

What? Why did you even go?

**POLLY**

I wasn't really gonna leave. I was just looking for a McDonald's. I needed a junk food binge.

**THEO**

There used to be one a couple miles—

**POLLY**

Yeah, I didn't find it. Are you still fucked up?

**THEO**

Probably. I can still feel my heart beating like crazy. But I think that's just cause you're back.

**ROSE**

You have always been the provider of my misery.

**JUNIOR**

Rose, don't start with that crap again.

**THEO**

I was scared—

**POLLY**

I'm scared—

**THEO**

Let me say this.

**ROSE**

I've got something I need to say.

**JUNIOR**

Here we go.

**THEO**

I was scared.

**ROSE**

I used to be afraid.

**THEO**

I was afraid of losing something. Again.

**ROSE**

But I ain't scared no more, Junior.

**THEO**

But loving means always being on the brink of losing, right? That's what mama said. I think.

**ROSE**

I don't have nothing to lose. You were right. This baby is another chance.

**THEO**

I specialize in origins. I'm not good with endings.

**ROSE**

I'm starting over.

**THEO**

So when, so when those babies, our babies, didn't—when they died, I pulled away from you.

**JUNIOR**

So...you're quitting? I'm glad.

**POLLY**

Why didn't you come after me? There's a rule. When your woman drives away into the dark and wild countryside, you follow her.

**THEO**

OK. A) I had no wheels. B) I got stupid fucked up and C) I don't think that rule exists.

**POLLY**

That rule definitely exists.

**THEO**

< > I did something, Polly—I let my mind wander, you understand? I didn't let myself be there with you. Really feel it. I fantasized about...what I thought was a better life, but it wasn't. I didn't live in my life, like, this life, and now—

**POLLY**

You're not making a lot of sense—

**JUNIOR**

I'm proud of you, Rose—

**THEO**

I'm trying to say I'm sorry. I want this. I want you. I want the us that little girl will manifest. When we went to the hospital to see her, I wasn't looking at her. I can't even tell you what she looks like. She's kinda baby-like. I was looking at you and I saw something I'll never forget. I don't think there's a word for it exactly. Maybe a German word. Germans always have good words for these kinds of things. It was like authenticity and purpose and connection and—

**POLLY**

Stop. You're still high.

**THEO**

Yes. Yes I am.

**JUNIOR**

Rose, did you hear me? I said I'm proud of you. Proud of us both. Did you try that venison yet?

*(POLLY takes THEO's hand.)*

**POLLY**

I can't believe you swallowed a bunch of meth.

**THEO**

Yeah.

**POLLY**

Stupid.

**THEO**

Yeah. I know why they do it though. Because it makes you so aware of being alive. Like scary aware.

**POLLY**

Don't do it again.

**THEO**

I wanna show you something.

*(THEO leads POLLY by the hand into the darkness.)*

**ROSE**

The steak's good. I'm leaving you, Junior. < > I ain't coming back this time.

**JUNIOR**

You say that every single time.

**ROSE**

I've been sharing this misery for a lifetime. Because that's what I thought old age was—a shared sadness. I thought one day, we would finally be that TV couple I always imagined for us...kooky old grandparents, a little crazy, but sweet nonetheless...like the Cosbys or something.

**JUNIOR**

We ain't the fucking Cosbys, Rose.

**ROSE**

I was just a girl. I was pregnant and afraid. A girl can mistake fear for affection.

**JUNIOR**

You saying you never loved me? That's rich.

**ROSE**

I got used to you. Maybe that's love. I don't know.

**JUNIOR**

We had something, Rose. You can't deny that. We still do.

**ROSE**

We had hormones, Junior. < > Daddy said I could do better than that Junior Turner. But I don't think he was right.

**JUNIOR**

That's right. You better thank God for what you got.

**ROSE**

God—whatever that is— don't want nobody to feel worthless. I might love you. But I'm still leaving you.

**JUNIOR**

So you just gonna walk out on thirty five years?

**ROSE**

I've been gone for a long time.

**JUNIOR**

Just where you plan on going?

**ROSE**

We'll go to California—both of us—we'll get on a plane and we'll clean up and play nice. Do you know how long it has been since I wore make up?

**JUNIOR**

About seven years.

**ROSE**

We'll fix up. I'll paint my face. You'll wear a shirt with buttons and we will answer all the questions that girl has for us in that interview and we'll help them kids get their daughter. But when it comes time to come back to your kingdom here, only one of us is going.

*(JUNIOR laughs.)*

**JUNIOR**

You think them kids are gonna let *you* live with them?

**ROSE**

I'm starting over.

*(JUNIOR laughs.)*

**JUNIOR**

Aww, we'll see about that. You'll be back in no time begging me for a pipe. But I ain't gonna give it to you cause I'm done with it. I've decided...I'm turning my life over to God and getting right with the Lord...so when you come back, you better expect to live a righteous life.

**ROSE**

I pray you do that, sweetheart. I pray you do.

*(ROSE exits the trailer, she goes to the tire swing.)*

*(After a few moments, JUNIOR rummages through his eight tracks.)*

*(We hear some crashing backstage and eventually, THEO and POLLY climb on to the roof of the trailer.)*

**POLLY**

Theo! We shouldn't be up here!

**THEO**

This is my spot. Look up.

*(POLLY does.)*

*(ROSE does.)*

**POLLY**

It's...it's...wow.

**THEO**

This is the best time to see them.

**POLLY**

They're...they never look like this in...they're exquisite.

**THEO**

I know you don't wanna hear about stars, Polly—

**POLLY**

No. I do.

*(JUNIOR pops in Elvis' "Peace in the Valley.")*

**THEO**

Well...they teach us...for instance, that the universe isn't passive or random. There's *always* causality. < > Those people, those fucked up people, despite the fact that they are now jonesing for the pipe, they *created* me. And no matter how far I spin away, I will always be my parent's child. The gravitational force of that bond has no mathematically tolerable equation. *(smiling)* And I'm OK with that. < > You know, we're probably gonna fuck up as parents too.

*(POLLY laughs in agreement.)*

*(ROSE laughs quietly.)*

*(POLLY and THEO look up to the night sky, aching to know more.)*

*(ROSE swings.)*

*(JUNIOR enters.)*

**JUNIOR**

Why don't you come inside?

**ROSE**

I'm comfortable here, thank you.

**JUNIOR**

Please, Rose. I need to...I need to say some things to you.

**ROSE**

You can say them right here.

**JUNIOR**

I ain't gonna say I regret things. Cause I don't. Not any of it. Women, drugs, whatever.

**ROSE**

You're off to a great start, Junior.

**JUNIOR**

I ain't gonna say that stuff cause you'd see right through it. I did what I did. It's over. I can't keep apologizing for it. Now, we got thirty-five years together. Don't matter if they were miserable or not. They are *our* years. They are worth something. I'm getting on that plane with you and we're doing this and then we're *both* coming back here and we're gonna clean this place up. All of it. Together. Now, please—just come inside, won't you?

**ROSE**

Why couldn't you have said that twenty years ago?

*(JUNIOR goes to ROSE, pushes her lightly in the tire swing.)*

**THEO**

We need a ceremony.

**POLLY**

For what?

The babies.

**THEO**

< > A funeral?

**POLLY**

Yeah.

**THEO**

You look pretty in this light, Rose. Dance with me? One last time?

**JUNIOR**

That's gospel. You don't dance to gospel.

**ROSE**

It's Elvis, woman. You can dance to anything by the King.

**JUNIOR**

*(ROSE laughs.)*

*(JUNIOR offers his pathetic hand. She accepts. They dance, barely moving to the music. JUNIOR sings lightly in ROSE's ear.)*

OK, I have an idea...*(points up)* You see Orion? three stars right there...*boom boom boom.*

**THEO**

Yes.

**POLLY**

That's Orion's belt. And you see that bigger, kind of red one just above it?

**THEO**

Ummm—

**POLLY**

Right there—

**THEO**

Yes.

**POLLY**

**THEO**

*(a poet)*

That's Betelgeuse. He's a variable star, which means his magnitude shifts. He's a red supergiant and he's about 400 to 500 light years away. That star is the first one.

**POLLY**

Oliver.

**THEO**

Oliver. < > And then the big one below the belt there, that's Rigel. And she's a blue-white supergiant, meaning she's a lot older and she's about 800 light years away. That's Olivia. < > That's where they'll always be. Whenever we wonder what might've been, we just look up and there they are.

*(THEO and POLLY kiss. It's been a long time.)*

**POLLY**

I wanna know *her* name.

**THEO**

Which star?

**POLLY**

< > No, our baby. What are we gonna call *her*?

**THEO**

< > Are you sure?

**POLLY**

Yes.

**THEO**

OK. < > Really?

**POLLY**

She's gonna be ours. No matter what.

**THEO**

I hope so.

**POLLY**

I know it—

**JUNIOR**

Rose, I still need you—

**THEO**

It's kinda old fashioned—

**JUNIOR**

Please don't leave me, sweetheart—

**ROSE**  
*(gently)*

Shhhh...hush now—

*(ROSE looks toward THEO.)*

**THEO**

I think we should call her—

*(Blackout.)*

*(The stars shimmer.)*

*(The King sings.)*

*(And the valley is peaceful. For now.)*

**END OF PLAY**