

The Beatrice Factor

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ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

Living room of Leonard Will's
townhouse in Philadelphia.

AT RISE:

A doorbell rings several times in the
blackout. LIGHTS UP as SISSY comes
cautiously into the open doorway. She
is overdressed for the hot day and
wheels a small suitcase. There are
stacks of books strewn about the room.

SISSY

Yoo-hoo! Hello? Anybody home?

(SISSY sets her small suitcase down and moves
past the boxes to the computer on the desk)

Oh, dear, dear Leonard, am I really here at last?

(In a mixture of Southern and bad Italian accent,
SISSY dramatically speaks to the computer.)

Leonardo, "Salute in lor signor, cioe Amore."

(MARGOT appears unseen at the door just as SISSY
begins to speak. She is dressed casually and
carries an empty box. She stops as SISSY begins
to speak in Italian, then breaks into applause.)

MARGOT

Bravo! Bravo! You're very good. I'm very impressed.

SISSY

No one answered the bell. I rang it several times.

MARGOT

You can't hear a thing down in that basement.

SISSY

I am so sorry for walking right in here unannounced but the
door was open.

MARGOT

People have been walking in unannounced all week. Relax,
unless you were just laying on some ancient curse.

SISSY

Oh, that was just my very poor imitation of Virgil's Dante.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Dante, Virgil, excellent, you can find him right over here.

(MARGOT starts to sort through books)

Today's been a nightmare with one woman selling make-up only a TV evangelist could wear and another guy with a vacuum cleaner than ran at the speed of light -- now that scared me. Which is why I'm so happy you're here.

SISSY

You are?

MARGOT

You're not selling anything are you?

SISSY

Oh, no, I was never even allowed to sell my own quota of girl scout cookies. Mama would say, "No daughter of mine is going to sell door to door while I can still write a check."

MARGOT

Smart woman.

SISSY

I didn't think so at the time.

MARGOT

It's dangerous out there.

(MARGOT is moving books when they fall over.)

Hell, it's dangerous in here. Would you mind?

(MARGOT hands SISSY a box and starts piling books into it while she continues talking.)

You know when I die I expect to be buried in a band-aid box and tossed into the ocean. One, Two, three. Poof.

(Phone rings.)

Would you get that.

MARGOT runs out leaving SISSY momentarily frozen. As the phone keeps ringing, SISSY talks to it as she hunts it down under all the pillows, books, etc. on the couch.)

SISSY

Now you just keep ringing. I'll find you. Well, here you are. Hello? Hello. No one's here, but I can take a message? Just a minute while I find a pen.

(SISSY is searching in her bag for a pen.)

I'm back. Now who did you want to call?

(MARGOT comes back in.)

Margot should call Jackie ASAP!

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

(Taking the phone.)

Thanks. Jackie, where the hell are you? No, those phone numbers didn't work and yes, it always matters where you are, especially when you were supposed to be here. Fortunately you're saved by -- what's your name?

SISSY

Sissy, but really, I can come back later.

(SISSY starts to leave but MARGOT gestures for her to stay.)

MARGOT

Look, Jackie, Sissy's dropped in and she's moving the books you were supposed to be moving if we knew where you were to move them.

(MARGOT hits the potable phone.)

Damn these things. Jackie, are you on one of those God awful cell phones because it sounds like you're in the middle of hell. (Pause) Honey, can you please just skip all the angst and get old with the rest of us.

(Shakes the phone again out toward SISSY.)

You can't have a decent conversation on one of these. Jackie, it sounded like you said you just joined the army which could - what do you mean it's true! Are you crazy! You joined up and called me first. Thanks. I know I'm your favorite Aunt but if you think I'm getting in the middle of this you're crazy. No! Please, don't hang up on me. Yes, I promise to listen to you. No, I won't say a word until you're done. Yes, I do have food here, and coffee, and no, I'm not going anywhere. Yes, I know I'm wonderful and Jackie, I hate surprises. (hangs up) *Merde!* Don't you hate how you tell kids to grow up and then they go out and do it? I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

SISSY

You seem awfully busy here, maybe I should come back later.

MARGOT

(Grabbing SISSY.)

No, wait. I'm not very good at this decorating business but I have a feeling you are.

SISSY

Me?

MARGOT

What do you think about this rug? Don't hold back.

SISSY

It looks very old and very beautiful.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

It's old, but being colorblind I think Leonard only bought it because it was big enough to cover this spot on the floor. I don't know. How do you really feel about it?

SISSY

Leonard is colorblind?

MARGOT

All the Will men were colorblind from birth which was fine as long as you dressed them before they went out. Now let's stop and get acquainted before the shooting starts.

SISSY

Shooting?

MARGOT

Sorry, that was one of my little Margot jokes. I'm Margot Will and I'm told I have a very warped sense of humor.

SISSY

I'm Cecilia Longfellow Sweet and I'm told I have no sense of humor at all. And no, I guess I didn't think that was a joke.

MARGOT

Well Cecilia, I can see you'll learn fast. Now if you'll just get the end of this table and I'll get the other, I promise you will be rewarded for indulging this obviously deranged woman. Ready, set, lift.

(They move the coffee table.)

Great, I do like the rug, now sit and relax. You must be exhausted.

SISSY

Thank you, but I admit I have never met anyone before who expected to be buried in a band-aid box.

MARGOT

If they can send a man to the moon, Cecilia, they can bury me in a band-aid box. Hungry?

SISSY

Please call me Sissy.

MARGOT

Please call me Margot and if you're bilingual and can pack books you must be starving. Take off your jacket and relax.

SISSY

Thank you, but my accent is strictly Alabama con brio.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Does that mean you don't eat?

SISSY

Oh, no, as you can see, I eat all the time.

MARGOT

Now see, that shows a very fine sense of self-deprecating humor --- my personal favorite -- which means we forget thgat polite finger food and can get right to the good stuff. Brie? Antipasto? Shrimp?

SISSY

No, no, thank you, I really couldn't.

MARGOT

If you can't eat you can still drink. You know you've got to keep those liquids flowing or you'll dehydrate. Juice, water, lemonade?

SISSY

Nothing.

MARGOT

I know exactly what you're here for.

SISSY

I swear we were just friends!

MARGOT

(MARGOT has disappeared during SISSY's outburst and returns with a carafe of coffee.)

You are going to love this incredible iced Frangelica, freshly ground, brewed, chilled and loaded with sweet cream and shaved chocolate. Did I miss something?

SISSY

(Opening her eyes and breathing again.)

It does sound heavenly.

MARGOT

Everyone has their weakness. I stopped fighting the small ones years ago.

SISSY

"Let me count the ways."

MARGOT

Browning, right? How do I love thee?

SISSY

I have this terrible habit of ending up in verse, or worse.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

I can never get past the first line. How do I love thee, let me count the ways -- I'm lost.

SISSY

"I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight.
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace."

MARGOT

That's it, don't stop, coffee needs more ice.
(Tasting the coffee and running off.)

SISSY

"I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight. "

MARGOT

I love it.

SISSY

"I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise."

MARGOT

Louder!

SISSY

(SISSY gets louder as she gets carried away.)

"I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
with my lost saints, - I love thee with the breadth,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! - and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death."

MARGOT

(SISSY has almost collapsed with emotions as
MARGOT returns with ice. She pours the coffee)
Sugar and cream?

SISSY

Yes.

MARGOT

(Raising her glass in toast.)
Here's a toast to poetry.

SISSY

To poetry.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

And great coffee. (pause) And Leonard who loved them both.

SISSY

Oh, how foolish of me taking so much of your time.

MARGOT

Stay was long as you want. I've got gallons and I like the company.

SISSY

I thought I might still have time to see the Liberty Bell.

MARGOT

It'll still be cracked when you get there.

SISSY

And the Betsy Ross house too.

MARGOT

Look, it's hot as Hades out there and as my dear old grandmother used to say, it's not the heat that'll kill you -

SISSY

It's the humidity!

MARGOT

Exactly.

SISSY

Was your grandmother a Baptist?

MARGOT

No, she was Orthodox...

SISSY

Oh?

MARGOT

Orthodox Jewish?

SISSY

Isn't that amazing.

MARGOT

Actually before World War Two there were a lot more of them.

SISSY

I meant a Baptist and a Jewish person sharing the same stories with their granddaughters. Like Jesus and Paul out there together all over again.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

I'm sorry, I just assumed you and Leonard were colleagues.
Were you?

SISSY

Not in the traditional sense of the word.

MARGOT

Exactly what sense of the word would that be?

SISSY

Actually we met online in one of those little chat rooms.

MARGOT

Really? Tell me more.

SISSY

Ours was devoted to that amazing Italian poet Dante Aligheri
whose works have been a passion of mine for years.

MARGOT

And Leonard's.

SISSY

We communicated for several time about the poetry, and had
talked recently about putting together some type of web site.
It would be called "Vita Nuova" for others who also shared
our delight in his beloved Beatrice.

MARGOT

Beatrice, ah perfect love with the perfect woman -- he named
three cats after her.

SISSY

The web site is really more my idea. I have some of the plans
for Vita Nuova with me if you'd like to see them?

MARGOT

So you two never actually met?

SISSY

We have spoken on the phone - about the web site of course -
and I must say your husband's voice, so deep and rich,
reminded me of Mr. William Buckley in its timbre.

MARGOT

Whoa! I've got to sit down and think about that.

SISSY

I met Mr. Buckley once, years ago of course, though I can
assure you I have never met your husband face to face.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Why do you keep saying that about Leonard being my husband?

SISSY

You introduced yourself as Margot Will. You're obviously familiar with this apartment which does have his name on the mailbox. The rug, the poetry, his voice..."Let me count the ways". I think I'll just be on my way now thank you.

MARGOT

I'm his sister, Margot Will?

(Phone rings.)

SISSY

Ohhhh.

MARGOT

Same last name. No wife. (phone)

SISSY

I'm embarrassed to say I didn't know he had a sister.
(phone)

MARGOT

I didn't know he had a chat room. (phone) Damn I forgot to shut off that machine.

MACHINE

(Answering machine starts. Both women freeze.)

This is Leonard Will. You've reached 624-0964. Please leave your message at the tone and I'll return your call as soon as possible.

MARGOT

He does sound like Buckley.

(MARGOT runs off as JACKIE runs into the room.)

JACKIE

Now, don't tell me I'm crazy because I do know what I'm doing. -- Excuse me. Who are you and where is Margot?

SISSY

I am Cecilia Longfellow Sweet and she just took a phone call in there.

JACKIE

Oops! She didn't say who it was, did she?

SISSY

No.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

You didn't hear a name? A clue. A woman screaming?

SISSY

I'm afraid I didn't.

JACKIE

Merde! Is this Margot's iced coffee 'cause I need something strong and this woman makes great iced coffee. (Pause) Not even a first, last or someone really pissed off name?

SISSY

I'm afraid not.

JACKIE

Have you ever been so tired you think you'll fall asleep standing up? Because that's the way I feel right now. Like that disease that sounds like "narcotics"? You know it? I am so fried.

SISSY

I believe it's called narcolepsy.

JACKIE

Narcolepsy, exactly. Fall asleep standing up, right?

SISSY

My cousin Eugene was narcoleptic and it severely limited his occupational choices.

JACKIE

Did I tell you I just joined the army? Even made me take a drug test which is pretty funny since only a complete idiot would get high and THEN join the army.

SISSY

I can tell you they did not want Eugene in the Army, Air Force or the National Guard. Though the Coast Guard was interested but Eugene, like me, never did learn to swim.

JACKIE

Now I have to tell my mother and she hates surprises.

SISSY

Most mothers do.

JACKIE

She takes it all personally even when they have nothing to do with her, if you know what I mean.

SISSY

I'm afraid I do.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

It's not like I'm going in the army to make her mad. I'm twenty-two, graduated from college and I've been talking about this for years, not that anyone's been listening. So wouldn't you want a really smart, sensitive and strong woman helping to make those important decisions about peace and war? No, don't answer because it's too soon to think about anything but getting through these next few days. Hours. Maybe minutes. Look, All I know is I think I can make a difference. Isn't that what we're supposed to do?

SISSY

I'm sure they're just thinking of your safety.

JACKIE

I read somewhere that the bathroom is the most dangerous place on earth, which is pretty scary when you consider half the world is just dying to get one of those put in. But I guess it's like my Daddy said, you never know what's waiting out there to break your heart and ruin your life.

SISSY

That was very poetic. I think it was from Mr. Thomas Wolfe.

JACKIE

Did you know they make you swear on a bible when you join the military?

SISSY

My cousin was in the Navy, my Uncle was in the air force and my husband is a minister so we are very familiar with both swearing and bibles.

JACKIE

The ocean makes me seasick and my eyesight's not perfect so it had to be the Army 'cause I ain't no Marine, if you know what I mean.

(MARGOT is now standing at the doorway)

I want to go into Army Intelligence.

(JACKIE sees MARGOT)

And I don't want to hear any of those Margot jokes right now, thank you.

MARGOT

My lips are sealed, now what the hell's going on here.

JACKIE

Tell her about your family!

SISSY

What about my family?

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

This woman has a brother and an Uncle in the military and they're both alive. They are both alive, aren't they?

SISSY

Actually my uncle left after his tour in Korea and my cousin is retired. But technically, they are alive.

MARGOT

I will respect your decision.

JACKIE

Great.

MARGOT

But I don't have to like it.

JACKIE

Should Jackie join the army? Thumbs up or down. Vote now. Wrong! My life is not a democracy.

MARGOT

And I can't speak for your mother.

JACKIE

That was her on the phone wasn't it?

MARGOT

Yes.

JACKIE

Oh, *merde*.

MARGOT

She's been worrying about you.

JACKIE

Double *merde*.

MARGOT

We both have, you can't just leave without telling anyone where you're going.

JACKIE

I'm not a little kid anymore. I am a woman. W-O-M-A-N.

MARGOT

Women don't just walk out of the house and join the army without talking about it.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

I tried to about it to her, and you, for years, but no one wants to do anything but talk me out of it.

MARGOT

So you just went and signed up without her.

JACKIE

I'm legally of age. Right?

SISSY

I really I think I should probably be on my way.

JACKIE

(Sitting SISSY down on the sofa.)

Let me ask you something honestly.

SISSY

Honestly, I think I should get to the Liberty Bell.

JACKIE

I want to join the army, become an officer, help make peace, maybe even change the world, but my mother won't even see it as an option. Is that fair?

SISSY

Our need to be right is not one of our most desirable traits as a parent.

JACKIE

Exactly! Let me shake your hand. Thank you. Now why wasn't this woman my mother.

MARGOT

Sissy met Leonard online in the Dante chat room.

JACKIE

(Still holding SISSY's hand.)

Really? In a chat room? How wicked.

SISSY

Leonard could describe Dante's great love for his beloved Beatrice until you just cried with the beauty of his pain.

JACKIE

I can believe that. Were you at the service?

SISSY

I just came in today from Washington. D.C.? I was going to surprise my online friend but it looks like he isn't home yet. What time do you expect your brother?

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

Margot?

SISSY

He is back from his vacation? Isn't he?

JACKIE

She's waiting for an answer.

MARGOT

Sissy, did you come here expecting to see Leonard in the flesh.

SISSY

You see, my husband was conducting one of his workshops.

MARGOT

Oh, you have a husband!

SISSY

He is a minister.

MARGOT

Thank God.

SISSY

Charles is in Washington running one of his "Communicating for a Successful Marriage" seminars and since Philadelphia is so close I thought it would be a good time. Your brother did go snorkeling in the Galapagos?

MARGOT

You knew about that?

SISSY

I knew he was quite excited about returning to his little paradise. Did it go as planned?

MARGOT

Yes he did go snorkeling in the Galapagos.

JACKIE

But it wasn't like he planned.

MARGOT

Jackie! Go to the kitchen.

SISSY

Have I come at a bad time?

MARGOT

I think you should sit down.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Excuse me but I feel something is terribly wrong here.

(SISSY runs to her bag and starts to pull out
some bells which jingle)

Something is incredibly wrong here isn't it.

MARGOT

Sissy --

SISSY

Ommmmm....

JACKIE

Is she going to be sick?

SISSY

I have been having a series of panic attacks ...Ommmmm..... I must stop this one before it accelerates...(rings bells which tinkle) the sounds of these little bells and the breathing seems to help me keep calm. Ommmmm.....I am beginning to feel that I will not be seeing Leonard Will today. Ommmmm.....

MARGOT

Not today.

SISSY

Or tomorrow.

MARGOT

Or tomorrow.

SISSY

Ommmmm.

MARGOT

When I heard you speaking Italian I just assumed you were a colleague of Leonard's and you knew what had happened.

SISSY

What...had...happened.

(Ringing the bells more furiously)

JACKIE

About the accident.

SISSY

When he was snorkeling?

MARGOT

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Oh, Lord, no.

(SISSY is ringing the bells and "OOohm-ing")

MARGOT

Get a paper bag from the kitchen so she can keep from hyperventilating.

JACKIE

Paper or plastic?

MARGOT

Just do it!

(JACKIE runs off and SISSY starts to ring less and breathe more naturally.)

SISSY

He's gone then.

MARGOT

They found the body floating near a reef. I guess it was one of his favorite places to swim. They say they might never know exactly what happened.

SISSY

I personally have never felt that swimming underwater was a very safe thing to do. I mean we don't have gills, we are meant to be on the land. To walk upright and --

(Picking up a picture)

Is this Leonard?

MARGOT

That was taken on his sabbatical three years ago.

JACKIE

(JACKIE returns with a huge plastic garbage bag)

This was all I could find.

MARGOT

She's all right now. You are all right?

SISSY

He has very nice eyes. A strong chin. Even with that tree in front of his face.

JACKIE

He hated cameras. Thought pictures stole the soul sort of thing.

MARGOT

We had a service last week, but I just haven't had time to go through his address book.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Then he really is gone, forever.

JACKIE

(JACKIE holds up the urn on the table.)

It's pretty isn't it?

SISSY

Lovely.

MARGOT

Are you all right?

JACKIE

You want some water?

MARGOT

Something stronger?

SISSY

Just give me another moment and I can say a proper hello.

JACKIE

He hated the idea of being buried underground. It was a real Edgar Allen Poe thing.

SISSY

(SISSY goes up to the urn and holds it up.))

Hello, Leonard Will. So we meet at last. How ironic that one who struggled so much with the tragic loss of his own sweet wife should meet such a terrible end.

MARGOT

What wife?

SISSY

His own dear dead Kate.

JACKIE

What dear dead Kate is she talking about?

SISSY

His grief was so heartfelt it almost made me forget my own.

MARGOT

Jackie, go to the kitchen and get something.

JACKIE

What?

MARGOT

Anything!

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

I want to know what dear dead wife she is talking about.

MARGOT

Now!

SISSY

Would you mind? I feel moved to recite a poem I have always loved.

MARGOT

Oh, no, please, recite what you need to.

SISSY

- when Time is over -
And I have ceased to wonder why -
Christ will explain each separate anguish
In the fair schoolroom of the sky-

KATE arrives while SISSY speaks. She
applauds. She is dressed very
professionally.

KATE

I swore I wouldn't cry again so let me just say, thank you.

MARGOT

Sissy was a colleague of Leonard's.

SISSY

I didn't realize he was gone.

KATE

It's shocking isn't it.

SISSY

This too too mortal flesh.

KATE

Amen girl, you are the one with the ear for poetry.

SISSY

I'm Cecilia Longfellow Sweet, but please call me Sissy.

KATE

It is a pleasure ---

MARGOT

(MARGOT breaks in before KATE can respond.)

-- Sissy's from Alabama.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Then we were neighbors!

SISSY

You still have people in Alabama?

KATE

White or black if they are McClintons - they are my people.

SISSY

What a coincidence.

KATE

Believe me, it was no coincidence!

MARGOT

Sissy met Leonard on the internet in a Dante chat room.

KATE

I know all about the circles of hell cause I'm a lawyer but I personally preferred Mr. Shakespeare. Got that from my mother who named me Kate, though no one's tamed me yet. Has Jackie called back?

SISSY

Isn't that another coincidence.

KATE

No one's tamed you either?

SISSY

Leonard's wife was named Kate too.

KATE

Of course. That's me. Kate McClinton Will.

(SISSY starts ringing her bells again)

Leonard's one and only wife. Honey, you don't look good. Why is she ringing those bells? Margot, you look worse. Will someone please tell me what's going on here?

MARGOT

Leonard told her you were dead.

KATE

I am divorced ten years but I am not dead no matter what my daughter says.

MARGOT

You know Jackie loves you.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Oh Lord, he had a daughter too.

(SISSY takes off through the revolving kitchen door. The bells are ringing wildly in the kitchen. JACKIE flies out the other side but keeps the door opened.)

JACKIE

I think that woman's going to be-- Mom! Ooops-- I better go --

KATE

You stay right here.

JACKIE

Now she's stopped.

(There is a momentary profound silence. JACKIE ducks back in the kitchen.)

MARGOT

Thank God!

KATE

Jackie Sojourner Truth Will how long have you been in there? Margot, what is happening here?

JACKIE

(Opening the door.)

That woman doesn't look right at all.

KATE

Thinking I'm dead makes me not look so right either. ---

JACKIE

(Blocking the doorway.)

Mom! Do not leave this room.

KATE

It's not like we didn't have a respectable divorce.

(KATE shouts through the door.)

It was all very respectable. Jackie loved him, hell, I loved him and he raised this girl like his own when her own daddy died in Viet Nam leaving me alone, pregnant and unmarried.

JACKIE

You told me you and daddy married before he left.

KATE

I was going to tell you the truth when you were old enough.

JACKIE

Well I guess that time is now, thank you.

(JACKIE disappears into the kitchen.)

(CONTINUED)

KATE

What is happening here?

(KATE tries to push on the door.)

Jackie? Let me in there?

JACKIE

(JACKIE comes back out.)

She's making fish noises.

KATE

(KATE comes back out of the door.)

She's not going to jump off that wall is she?

MARGOT

She's just OOOhnm-ing.

KATE

Cause I can't take another death right now so you tell her to come back in here and face this not-so-dead wife like a man. Hell, I'll tell her myself.

MARGOT

(MARGOT blocks the door.)

You stay put. (pause) Jackie?

JACKIE

(JACKIE goes back in and then comes out.))

She's just standing there -- looking almost asleep.

KATE

Tell her Leonard met me at a peace rally. I was really mad and I was really pregnant. We started talking and the rest is history. It was a good marriage. Do you hear me. There is nothing to regret. Oh, let me tell her that myself!

JACKIE

Now she's come in from the patio and she's walking past me and she's standing right here. Tell her yourself.

(SISSY walks in slowly past the women and over to her suitcase.)

SISSY

I am so sorry Kate. I am so sorry Margot and ...I am just sorry.

(SISSY picks up her suitcase and starts walking as KATE now blocks the front door.)

KATE

Don't be sorry, honey, it's not your fault I'm alive. And don't you think about leaving now cause it must be a hundred degrees out there.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

I feel like such a fool.

KATE

Join the club.

MARGOT

We all cared about Leonard.

KATE

Exactly. Please, don't go. Not this way.

SISSY

(SISSY sets her bag down.)

I came here today thinking I really knew him. But I didn't know anything about him at all.

KATE

I tried to be a good mother, but when my best wasn't good enough I always had Leonard to turn to.

JACKIE

You've been fine, Mom.

MARGOT

You're a great mother Kate. Jackie's joining the army has nothing to do with you.

KATE

Joining what army? You said she called from Market Street --

MARGOT

That's where the recruiting office is.

JACKIE

It's not the front lines Mom.

KATE

And you just let her do it?

JACKIE

I called Aunt Margot from the recruiting station after I enlisted in the Army.

KATE

Well you can just UN-LIST right now.

JACKIE

I took the physical this morning. It's settled.

KATE

You don't need a physical and nothing is settled.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

I signed up. I've got the papers right here.

KATE

I'm a lawyer, I can fix anything, now I'll take care of everything and you just relax.

JACKIE

I've got all the papers right here.
(JACKIE goes to get her papers.)

KATE

Believe me, we all do crazy things when we're grieving.

JACKIE

I'm not going into the army because Daddy's dead.

KATE

You're a college graduate with a brilliant future ahead of you. What other reason could you possibly have? We'll finish all this up later, now let's get back to why this woman thinks I'm dead.

(JACKIE puts her papers back in her bag and heads for the door.)

Jackie Sojourner Truth Will, where are you going?

JACKIE

(JACKIE stops in the door.)

Thanks for those stirring words of support.

(JACKIE goes out and slams the door behind her.)

MARGOT

I think-- "later" -- has just arrived.

BLACK OUT

SCENE TWO.

A few hours later.

SISSY is sitting on the couch eating as MARGOT comes into the room with a tray full of desserts. KATE stares out the window.

MARGOT

Fresh fruit and angel food cake for dessert for everyone who cleaned their plate.

KATE

Can't wait.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

I couldn't eat another bite. It was all wonderful.

MARGOT

Kate?

KATE

Give Margot a couple of fishes and she'll feed north America.

MARGOT

You can't fool me.

(Looking at the plate of food.)

You moved your food around but you didn't eat.

KATE

Do I look like I'm starving.

MARGOT

I'm sure Jackie isn't either.

SISSY

Your daughter seems like a wonderful young woman.

KATE

If she's so wonderful why is she out there alone?

MARGOT

Everybody doesn't run on Kate time.

KATE

Now what's that supposed to mean?

MARGOT

This is not a surprise.

KATE

It is to me.

MARGOT

There were signs.

KATE

Like what?

MARGOT

She joined the target shooting team at college?

KATE

She has a good eye.

MARGOT

She became a black belt in Karate.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Self-defense is a must for young women today.

MARGOT

She saw that World War Two movie three times and kept telling your father how proud she was he'd fought the "good" war.

KATE

That may be true, but she never sat me down, looked me in the eye and said -- "Mama, I'm going to join the army."

MARGOT

Not even you would have that much courage.

KATE

What's that supposed to mean? No one likes war. I thought it was just a phase. Like juggling. Remember, she was ten and saw this guy on TV. Leonard rushed out and bought her three dozen eggs and I cleaned up the floor when she decided it wasn't her thing. Who's going to clean this mess up?

MARGOT

This is about her, not you or Leonard and she's not ten years old.

KATE

Don't be profound Margot Will cause I'm in deep shit here.

SISSY

I hope you won't mind if I say something--

KATE

You can say anything you want if your only child ran off and joined the army too? 'Cause this is a matter of life and death.

(SISSY stands frozen. She opens her mouth but nothing comes out.)

MARGOT

Sissy?

KATE

Honey, what is it?

SISSY

(Pause) My son is dead. Five years. He was our only child.

KATE

Oh, Lord, cut my tongue out and send me home silent.

MARGOT

I'm sorry and she's sorry too.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Tell me what happened.

SISSY

You send your child away to college thinking it's the safest place in the world, then some poor boy with a gun and more problems any college could help comes into his room and shoots him dead. Then turns the gun on himself and takes all his reasons to the grave. I'm not sure there's any safe place left in this world.

KATE

Lord I never get used to it.

SISSY

People do survive the army. They survive losing a child -- even Mary knew that.

KATE

Well I'm a whole lot more mortal than the Virgin Mary. And you're a whole lot more woman than I'll ever be.

MARGOT

Martin tried to tell you she was serious, but you wouldn't listen.

SISSY

Who is Martin.

MARGOT

Her husband.

KATE

Eight beautiful years.

MARGOT

The man's a saint.

SISSY

Was he the reason you and Leonard divorced?

KATE

Oh, no. There was no reason you could put your finger on and say -- that's it, this marriage is over!

MARGOT

But they were always friends.

KATE

Jackie got to keep her two parents. That was important. Leonard loved being a father and I couldn't have any more

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

KATE(cont'd)

children. I remember him getting right in the playpen with her. And reading her fairy tales...

MARGOT/KATE

...in three languages.

KATE

In the end we had more passion protesting than we did in bed. I finished college, law school, then I took a job in the prosecutor's office and I guess we just changed.

SISSY

But not together.

KATE

No, not together. He hated my job. Hated those terrible stories I needed to share and couldn't. And you can see how well I hold my tongue.

SISSY

He hated your job?

KATE

Couldn't stand to hear about the violence. The guns. He hated this century. The only thing he thought worth saving was baseball and Margot put his Phillies jacket right in there with those ashes.

SISSY

Does Martin love your work?

KATE

Martin's a social worker so he's seen it all.

MARGOT

It isn't pretty, Kate.

KATE

I know but at least I feel like I'm doing something, making a little peace in the world so it might not be so terrible for someone else. Even if I can't change it all, it helps me sleep at night.

SISSY

Your daughter said almost the same thing when she told me why she wanted to join the army and change the world.

KATE

Well see, that's where she's wrong. I do it with words and the law, not guns and war. There's a big difference so we can stop talking about it right now.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

(Pause) It's wonderful you found love twice when most people have trouble finding it once.

KATE

Finding's easy, it's the keeping that'll kill you.
(SISSY starts to take in the dishes.)
Hey, don't run off before we hear about your man?

MARGOT

Sissy didn't come here to talk about her husband.

SISSY

Oh, I'm sure our life is very ordinary compared to yours.

KATE

Doesn't matter what you do. Give us a look 'cause I know Alabama women never travel without pictures.

SISSY

Well I do have a a few.
(SISSY becomes very animated as she takes out a booklet of pictures from her suitcase. It is quite large.)

KATE

I told you. Now he's a fine looking man.

SISSY

And that's him with our son, Charlie Jr. They were quite a pair.

MARGOT

Where's his church?

SISSY

He gave up his congregation after Charlie died to counsel couples in trouble.

KATE

So who counsels the one who counsels?

MARGOT

Forgive my friend. She has no home training

KATE

Well she didn't come here looking to repair the crack in the Liberty Bell. Or did you?

SISSY

My husband is all any good woman should want?

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Wanting doesn't necessarily make it so.

MARGOT

Behave, Kate.

KATE

I am just a naturally curious person who wants to know exactly what you came here looking for today?

MARGOT

I've been thinking that both of you should stay here tonight!

KATE

Margot's always thinking, that's why I love her.

MARGOT

There's plenty of room, lots of beds, and I'd love the company.

KATE

She's right about the beds. I bought them.

SISSY

I guess I could call Charles and tell him I've changed my plans. He should be in his room by now.

KATE

I promise no more questions.

MARGOT

Liar.

SISSY

I ordered his favorite meal from room service complete with rice pudding for dessert. I don't know where he could be.

(SISSY goes to the phone)

KATE

That's it! I've got the reason Leonard lied to her about me being dead.

SISSY

You know why he lied to me?

KATE

You never met before, and he didn't expect to meet you in this life. You're a woman of character, principle and you're beautiful. It's obviously the Beatrice factor.

SISSY

What Beatrice is she talking about?

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Dante's Beatrice.

SISSY

Dante only saw his beloved Beatrice twice, the first time when he was only nine.

MARGOT

Leonard never saw you at all.

SISSY

No.

KATE

Perfect. I rest my case.

SISSY

I don't understand.

MARGOT

Leonard was always looking for the perfect relationship. One that would never disappoint.

KATE

And we know that wasn't me.

SISSY

Well it is certainly is not me.

KATE

But you cared for him.

SISSY

In a professional way.

KATE

The truth?

MARGOT

Kate!

KATE

She came with an overnight bag.

MARGOT

She was going to stay at a hotel. You were going to stay at a hotel, weren't you?

KATE

Look Sissy, I'm sure you know a great deal about grieving a dead child, but I know about grieving a dying marriage.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Kate, she never said anything was wrong with her marriage.

KATE

Alabama women can't lie to one another. She cared for him.

SISSY

I did care for him.

KATE

Maybe even lusted in your heart just a little?

MARGOT

You're badgering her.

KATE

I'll just get another cup of coffee so we can chat all night.

SISSY

I did have impure thoughts about our relationship.

MARGOT

No matter what she says, you don't have to tell us.

SISSY

Since our son died my husband Charles has run around the world with his little pot of God's glue fixing up couples in trouble. I tried to go with him, but after my panic attacks worsened, I just crawled inside that little glowing screen and let him go off alone. At first he protested, but soon we were both happier in our own little worlds. Then Leonard came and the darkness didn't seem so comfortable anymore. I hungered for his messages, missed his responses. After I told him about our son's death, his messages became more frequent, more compassionate. For the first time I felt the stirrings of life as I remembered it. Everywhere. I am not ashamed to say that I have imagined myself being held by a stranger I have never met across miles I have never crossed until today. I have dreamed of the two of us sitting in a room like this, talking about Dante until the sun rose and the moon set. I have lusted in my heart for a man who is not my husband. And for that I bear all manner of shame.

KATE

No matter what you think, it is not a crime to feel the way you did.

SISSY

I cared all the more after he told me how his dear dead Kate died.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Tragically I hope?

SISSY

Terribly.

KATE

And I had a big noisy funeral?

SISSY

People came from all over to sing your praises.

KATE

Hallelujah!

MARGOT

You have no shame.

KATE

Shame, never. Everybody hopes they'll be remembered after they die, but now I know I was. Hallelujah!

SISSY

That's exactly what he described. You were remembered and loved. I printed all of those descriptions out and put them in this notebook with all the emails which I will now burn.

KATE

Hey, not so fast. I want to read those descriptions.

(SISSY hands them to KATE)

All of these? Margot? Look, I was missed like hell.

MARGOT

Leonard never took on an assignment he wouldn't finish. If he killed you off, he would have done it with imagination.

SISSY

He must have missed you. Maybe even still cared?

KATE

We were friends.

SISSY

These are powerful words of grief.

KATE

I loved him in a way I will never love anyone again. But when it was over, it was over. These words were his gifts to you.

SISSY

Me?

(CONTINUED)

KATE

He knew what you needed just like he knew me. I was there for him there and maybe this time, you were the only one there for him.

SISSY

I am a married woman. I took vows. My head is swimming. I have lusted in my heart for that man and that is the same thing.

KATE

Oh honey, in a court of law they are not the same thing.
(DOORBELL RINGS)
Don't move. I knew that girl would come back here.

MARGOT

Kate let me get that door before you say something stupid.
(doorbell rings)

KATE

Absolutely not, you have to have a little faith in --
(KATE opens the door. NEELY stands there very pregnant.)

NEELY

Hello, I'm Neely Frank and I'm here --

KATE

(Interrupting.)
-- if you're looking for Leonard Will he's dead.
(KATE closes the door.)

MARGOT

Kate, please, ask the girl in, it's still hot out there.
(MARGOT opens the door. NEELY has not moved.)

NEELY

Global warming.

SISSY

What did she say?

MARGOT

Won't you come in?

NEELY

(NEELY steps inside.)
Though some people are still saying we can't be sure that global warming is the cause of this heat, for me it is a signal that mother earth will exact her revenge.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Great! A pregnant soothsayer.

MARGOT

Forgive my friend, would you like to come in a moment?

NEELY

Thank you.

SISSY

Would you like some water?

NEELY

That would be wonderful.

MARGOT

I'll get it.

(Whispering to Kate as she passes.)

At least she's polite?

NEELY

I have this small bag outside, too.

KATE

(To MARGOT.)

Looks like she's planning on staying longer than a glass of water.

MARGOT

I'll be right back.

KATE

Coward.

SISSY

I'll get that bag for you. Why don't you just sit here and put your feet up. I know how heat can make those ankles swell when you're -- swell.

KATE

Pregnant?

NEELY

I'm due in three weeks.

KATE

How many do you have in there?

NEELY

They say it's just one, a girl, I'm just BIG. Thank you for asking.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Here's your bag.

NEELY

Oh, thanks. You can just drop it there.

KATE

So what was your name?

NEELY

Neely. Neely Frank. Her name's Willa Rose. Willa after her father's family and Rose after Rosa Luxemburg.

MARGOT

The revolutionary shot by her friends?

NEELY

The exact same woman of courage.

MARGOT

I hope yours gets out more. Here, you can't afford to dehydrate.

NEELY

Thank you.

(Drinks her water.)

You must be Margot.

KATE

How did you know that.

NEELY

Because Margot's funny and you must be Kate.

KATE

Because I'm not.

NEELY

You're not Kate?

KATE

Not funny.

NEELY

I'm sorry to have such stereotypical responses to our first meeting, but I can only go by those descriptions Leonard gave me, and yes, I know the dear man has passed on to another consciousness.

KATE

Is that the same as dead?

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Oh my heavens, you didn't meet him on the inter-net too?

NEELY

Oh, no, I was one of his students and, as you can see, we have remained extremely close.

KATE

Are you travelling alone or do you always go out walking in ninety degrees heat with an overnight bag for the hell of it?

NEELY

I'm not sure I understand.

MARGOT

I think Kate means is the baby's father with you.

NEELY

Not exactly.

KATE

Why doesn't that surprise me.

NEELY

He's already passed on - but you already know that.

MARGOT

Why would we know that?

KATE

That does surprise me.

SISSY

I need to sit down. (bells ring and "ommmms" when appropriate)

NEELY

Missing at first, but now, just ashes and memories.

KATE

I don't like where this is going.

MARGOT

Why would we know that about the father of your child?

NEELY

And that memorial service was incredible. I am not ashamed to say that I cried, for my baby and myself. But it was exactly as he would have wanted it, especially the cello.

KATE

Honey, the only service we have had is her brother - otherwise known as Leonard Will my ex-husband.

(CONTINUED)

NEELY
Exactly.

SISSY
That baby is Leonard's?

MARGOT
Can't be.

SISSY
Ommmmm...Ommmmm

MARGOT
Because Leonard never had sex with any students --

KATE
Except me and he wasn't my professor.

MARGOT
My brother was very puritanical about his role as a teacher
and --- any impropriety -- what do you mean you agree?

NEELY
I agree completely about the sex.

SISSY
Thank the Lord.

NEELY
This has nothing to do with the flesh.

KATE
Well that certainly clears up everything.

SISSY
Sex with no flesh?

NEELY
Exactly.

SISSY
I don't understand. (ring...ring). I met Leonard online in
the Dante Chat room and we had no sex we also had no baby.

NEELY
Why is she ringing those bells.

KATE
Because she's trying to figure out who the hell you are!

NEELY
Sissy!

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

How do you know my name?

NEELY

Leonard talked about you all the time.

SISSY

He did?

KATE

To you?

MARGOT

About what?

NEELY

You're designing web page for La Vita Nuova.

SISSY

Exactly. I have it right here in my bag, how did you know that?

NEELY

The New Life. Pretty appropriate, don't you think?

KATE

Okay, I think this has gone on long enough.

NEELY

I feel that way most mornings myself.

KATE

Who are you and why are you here?

NEELY

I'm Neely Frank and I can swear on a stack of bibles that Leonard Will did not have sex with me.

KATE

Then exactly who is the father of your baby?

NEELY

Leonard Maurice Will of course.

KATE

She knows his middle name.

SISSY

I didn't know he had one.

KATE

We were married for six years before he told me.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

He hated it.

NEELY

I guess I'm a little disappointed that he didn't mention me or my condition before, but since this baby was really all my idea I guess I can't blame him for waiting until she was really here. Of course now he isn't. Here I mean.

KATE

But he did help with this "idea"?

NEELY

He was a full partner in the discussions and I went with him when he donated his sperm.

KATE

And to think I just came by to pack up some books.

MARGOT

You are telling me that my brother donated sperm to you so you could have his child but you didn't have a relationship.

SISSY

You had no relationship?

KATE

You weren't planning to get married?

NEELY

Oh no, it wasn't like that. He knew I wanted a baby and understood who I was --

MARGOT

Who are you?

NEELY

I mean he respected my need for independence and no, we never talked about marriage.

SISSY

He didn't say anything?

MARGOT

Nothing to me. Kate?

KATE

Wait a minute! Isn't this a little too convenient, you showing up after he's not here to defend himself.

(CONTINUED)

NEELY

He seemed really excited to have this baby that I hope will now carry Leonard's spirit into the next century and hopefully, into a better world. He told me if I ever needed anything and he wasn't around that I should -- well, here, he wrote it all down in this letter.

(NEELY hands the letter to MARGOT and starts to recite it from memory as MARGOT overlaps reading it)

If you need any help please ---

MARGOT

...contact my sister Margot Will, or my ex-wife Kate McClinton Will or my colleague Professor Cecilia Longfellow Sweet and they will help you.

SISSY

Could I see that letter please?

NEELY

I never expected to need any of you, all of you, so soon.

KATE

And you can see we were all ready for you.

SISSY

--and they will help you. What do you think he meant by that?

NEELY

But I am awfully glad...(clutches her abdomen) you're all here. Now...

MARGOT

What's wrong with her?

KATE

I'm a lawyer, don't ask me.

(NEELY doubles up in pain and SISSY grabs her as she drops to the floor)

But I don't think it's good.

NEELY

Oh,no.

SISSY

You did say you were due next month, didn't you?

NEELY

This really hurts. Please, somebody call 911.
(NEELY groans)

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Oh, I hate this part.

NEELY

Somebody call 9-1-1.

KATE

Makes my teeth hurt.

MARGOT

Go to the kitchen right now Kate!

NEELY

Owww.

SISSY

Just take a deep breath and relax. My mother was a mid-wife.

NEELY

That's easy for you to say. Ohhhhh.

SISSY

Relax and breathe.

KATE

And whatever you do, don't push!

SISSY

Margot, get those little bells in my purse.

(MARGOT runs to get the bells. NEELY moans and KATE stands with her hands over her ears saying, "OHMMMMMM.")

MARGOT

What do you want me to do with them now?

SISSY

Ring them!

MARGOT

How long?

SISSY

Until she stops screaming or I start.

(NEELY screams, MARGOT rings the bells into the blackout as KATE continues OHMMMMing and SISSY commands NEELY to "Relax and Breathe" right into the blackout.)

END OF ACT

(CONTINUED)

ACT II:

SETTING:

The Will living room. Midnight.

AT RISE:

The stacks of books are gone but there clothes and food everywhere.

SISSY wears a nightgown and matching robe. She is on the phone and working on her laptop computer.

SISSY

I have been ringing room 601 for over an hour. Yes, I realize no one is answering and no, I do not consider "unless he's dead" very amusing. Reverend Sweet has always gone to sleep by eleven and it's now almost midnight. Of course, I know his sleeping habits, I'm his wife. His only wife, thank you and believe me there have never been any exceptions to the sleeping rule!

(The computer makes a little bell sound to announce mail. MARGOT appears at the doorway.)

MARGOT

Message from Leonard?

SISSY

You did actually see his body?

MARGOT

I actually brought them his toothbrush, hairbrush, anything they wanted. They already had his ring and the DNA checked out. After a few days floating in the water, I wanted to remember my brother the way he was. Those ashes are Leonard.

SISSY

I was the one who had to identify our son. It is a memory I spend hours trying to forget.

MARGOT

I'm not much of a computer person myself. Not that I hate technology. I have a touch tone phone and email.

SISSY

Did you really think there might be a message from Leonard?

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Only if you believe a guy who was dragged kicking and screaming out of the fourteenth century would find some magical way to send email from...you know.

SISSY

Heaven?

MARGOT

Wherever.

SISSY

I do not believe that a knowledge of electronics is a prerequisite for entrance God's heavenly kingdom.

MARGOT

Now that's the first encouraging news I've had since Leonard magically disappeared.

SISSY

I do not consider God a magician.

MARGOT

Here one minute...gone the next. Seems like there's got to be a rabbit named Leonard out there somewhere.

SISSY

Did Leonard believe in heaven?

MARGOT

He thought Hell was teaching Freshman Comp.

SISSY

And what do you believe in?

MARGOT

It wasn't a good century for believers, but I'm still optimistic.

SISSY

You must think I'm just one of those foolish southern women they're always writing about who believes in anything.

MARGOT

I believe whatever it is, it isn't foolish. I also believe you pulled that girl back from childbirth.

SISSY

Some women have false labor and some don't. I prayed she fell into the former category.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

I prayed it was just food poisoning.

SISSY

Another joke?

MARGOT

Seriously, after our cousin nearly wiped out half our family with her deviled eggs and I now consider mayonnaise so dangerous, I am forced to make and eat my egg salad sandwiches INSIDE the refrigerator.

SISSY

You do make me laugh out loud.

MARGOT

I just shared a very personal moment in our family history.

SISSY

Your students must adore you.

MARGOT

I'm not sure "adore" is the right word.

SISSY

I admire those who can making learning more a joy than a chore since I am not particularly amusing inside or out of the classroom.

MARGOT

I think I'm pretty ordinary.

SISSY

No, you're extraordinary, taking me in without a thought.

MARGOT

Really, Sissy, Leonard was the teacher.

SISSY

Look how you turned a a few fish and some loaves of bread into a feast for us all.

MARGOT

I made you wash all the dinner dishes.

SISSY

When that girl doubled up in pain, you gave her your own bed.

MARGOT

Technically it's Leonard's bed which seems appropriate.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

And you never asked Kate to do a thing.

MARGOT

Until Jackie comes through that door in one piece, I wouldn't trust Kate with a bath towel.

SISSY

I know what the problem is Margot Will, you can't take a compliment.

MARGOT

That's not true.

SISSY

I've seen it happen before and I can see it's true now.

KATE

(KATE comes out dressed but carrying a towel.)
Can you believe that man is still using the same towels we got for our wedding! I mean he was using them. Damn! I hate mortality.

(KATE throws the towel. MARGOT smiles as she bends down to pick it up.)

MARGOT

We're so glad you're up again, and clean, aren't we Sissy.

KATE

Who can sleep with that child wandering out there. Is that air conditioning working? I'm soaking through everything.

MARGOT

She's not a child and those are hot flashes.

SISSY

I'm sure your daughter's just fine.

KATE

You don't know that, Sissy, but thank's for sharing.

MARGOT

I'm so glad you're here. Sissy's been saying I can't accept a compliment and I need someone to say something really bad about me.

KATE

I can do that.

MARGOT

Okay. Fire away. Kate?

(CONTINUED)

KATE

But I won't because tonight I want you to be as miserable as I am. But take it from me, this woman's jelly, mashed potatoes, a pushover, which is the only reason why my daughter told her she's joined the army before me.

SISSY

I think Margot makes a person want to open up.

KATE

Maybe a little too much.

SISSY

Just now I found myself saying the most surprising things.

MARGOT

I did not encourage Jackie to join the army, Kate.

KATE

Well think about this. If you don't start discouraging her soon, some poor mother might be sitting *shiva* for a dead child because of something stupid my child did wearing that damn uniform. How will you live with that!

MARGOT

Is that what you're afraid of?

KATE

I don't know.

MARGOT

You think Jackie's going to join the military and become some heartless killer?

KATE

I don't know!

MARGOT

Because somewhere in that hard head of yours you'd better know that she could never be any less than the woman you raised. She just wants to make peace in the world, Kate, maybe not our way, but it might be right for her. Or is that what you're really afraid of? That your daughter really knows herself better than her mother. Is that the difference?

KATE

The difference is you're her Aunt, and she's my only child. (pause) God, that was unfair.

MARGOT

You're right. I am her Aunt.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

What can't I keep this tongue still till the worst is over.

MARGOT

That's what makes you such a good prosecuting attorney.

KATE

No one could love Jackie more than you. Where are you going?
I need you to forgive me.

MARGOT

It's going to be a long night.
(Goes to a cabinet and holds up a bottle.)
Blackberry something?

KATE

Sounds good to me.

SISSY

Nothing for me.

KATE

I just want Jackie to understand how hard it is to be her
parent right now.

MARGOT

And she just wants you to understand how hard it is to be
your child. Here, swallow your pride.

KATE

Damn you Leonard! Why'd you go off and die before I got this
child all figured out.

MARGOT

(MARGOT raises her glass in a toast.)
To *shiva*! A full week of tears and fattening food.

SISSY

But no mayonnaise.

MARGOT

I can see why my brother liked you.

SISSY

Did you already say Kaddish?

KATE

Listen to her. This is no ordinary Alabama woman.

SISSY

Is this candle part of sheeeva?

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

I let Jackie light the first one when we came back from the memorial service. I couldn't bear to let it burn out.

KATE

And I can almost see Leonard standing there naked in the doorway -- water dripping all over this floor -- singing out that Ginsburg poem he loved when he was sad.

MARGOT

Another drink and she'll be dancing naked with him.

KATE

"Lord, Lord..."How did that part go, somebody save me.

MARGOT

I'm only good for reciting the Gettysburg Address no matter how many of these I drink.

SISSY

"Lord Lord an echo in the sky the wind through ragged leaves the roar of memory..."

KATE

The woman's channeling Leonard. Don't stop now.

SISSY

"Caw caw all years my birth a dream caw caw New York the bus the broken shoe the vast highschool caw caw all Visions of the Lord
Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord Lord Lord caw caw caw Lord"

MARGOT

Whew! That deserves another drink.

KATE

They say that candle can bring the soul of the departed to life, but you did it all by yourself. How about a little sherry? Even my Baptist grandmother drank at funerals.

SISSY

Maybe just one small glass.

KATE

You have moved me more than the whole week of weeping. Didn't she Margot?

SISSY

Have you already said Kaddish for Leonard?

KATE

Did you hear her? That's no ordinary Alabama woman.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Here is the best cooking sherry in this house!

KATE

Leonard loved that poem, but you must have known that.

SISSY

No, he never mentioned Ginsburg. My son Charlie was the one who dragged me off to hear him. Charlie thought he might want to be a poet and I'm sure he would have been very good. He was very good at everything. It didn't seem a very practical thing to think about being at the time.

KATE

That's where you got those little bells?

SISSY

The bells were a from the "Meditations for those who are sleepless" web site.

KATE

I know that web site. Margot?

MARGOT

Don't start, Kate.

KATE

The signs are all there.

MARGOT

Leave the signs alone.

SISSY

I'm a Libra myself, though I don't know how much of that I truly believe.

(MARGOT and KATE are now circling SISSY)

MARGOT

You may be right.

KATE

See the circles under the eyes.

MARGOT

I see them.

SISSY

I've had all my life. You can even see it in my elementary school pictures.

KATE

A little bloodshot.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

I swear I never drink.

MARGOT

She took all of Leonard's mystery books from the book sale.

SISSY

Mysteries are my weakness, like cookies.

MARGOT & KATE

Insomniac!

SISSY

Between the change of life and the changes in my life I haven't slept a full night in years.

KATE

Now we can put on a little music.

MARGOT

I'll get out the cook books.

SISSY

How could you know that?

MARGOT

We're charter members.

KATE

But not Leonard. He'd sleep straight through the 1812 Overture complete with exploding canons.

MARGOT

And fireworks.

KATE

Amen.

(Holds up Leonard's picture, kisses it gently)

He was a good man.

SISSY

Was Leonard as generous as Margot?

KATE

Worse. He'd give you the coat off his back, then convince you to take the coat of yours.

MARGOT

But he was also cheap.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

True. His closet is filled with clothes older than that girl carrying his baby.

SISSY

But you both loved him?

KATE

As a student, lover and friend. Margot?

MARGOT

Of course we loved each other.

SISSY

Being an only child I envy such closeness between a sister and brother.

KATE

She loved him, Sissy, but that didn't mean they were close. Like Superman and Clark Kent, you'd never get these two in the same room together.

MARGOT

My sister-in-law is exaggerating.

KATE

And if it wasn't for answering machines they never would have talked at all.

MARGOT

We didn't fight.

KATE

But they should have.

MARGOT

Kate!

KATE

Look, this woman thinks you and Leonard were sipping coffee, sharing feelings and howling at the moon together when you and I know it wasn't that way.

SISSY

She said they didn't fight.

MARGOT

Our relationship was complex.

KATE

It was messy.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Honestly, you do not have to explain.

KATE

Honestly, she does.

MARGOT

Damn you!

KATE

She's getting angry. Good!

SISSY

Isn't that bad?

KATE

Not all the time. Those Wills hated getting angry. Thought the world would disappear if you disagreed. But it's part of life, too.

MARGOT

There's no one left too disagree with.

KATE

Can't make it worse to talk now then.

MARGOT

I'm not a talker. You are.

KATE

You've been carrying that stone in your heart since he died.
(KATE is rearranging the room like a courtroom
and puts MARGOT in a chair.)

MARGOT

What are you doing?

KATE

Making some peace.

MARGOT

Kate!

KATE

Order in the court! This is Kate's court of last resort. I'm the attorney and she's the judge. Let's start rolling that damn stone down the hill together.

(Strutting as if in a courtroom.)

Now, Margot Will, if there was one thing about your life with your brother you could change, what would that be?

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Nothing with you is easy.

KATE

Love is messy, you taught me that the first year I married your brother. The court is waiting. Talk. Do the names Rose and Harry ring a bell?

(KATE rings the bells.)

SISSY

Who were Harry and Rose?

KATE

Rose and Harry Will were their mother and father. Gentle as lambs, tiptoed around each other like they were wrapped in cotton. They met in England where they were sent to escape the war and they did. But everyone else didn't. Did you know that Margot and Leonard were the last living Wills in this world?

SISSY

No. He never spoke of it.

MARGOT

He couldn't. Rose and Harry could either. They died within forty-eight hours of each other. Too much evil in the world for their dear hearts. Now with Leonard gone, there's just Margot.

SISSY

And that new baby.

MARGOT

We never talked about those times. They couldn't. But their pain was always there. Then after our parents died, Leonard and I just drifted apart like those constellations we loved to name when we were kids. We became voices on each other's answering machines and we only lived five miles apart, but it might as well have been five hundred. I can't count all the nights we spent alone eating by ourselves, going to the movies in a single seat, wondering how the other one was doing but never finding the way or the words to come together. Now all I have is some stupid message he left on my answering machine. "Hey, kid, you won't believe the cab ride I had here." Then he laughed and told me every minute of that trip as if we were right there together. A lifetime where our life should have been. One big polite space keeping us apart. If I had the chance to do it over again, I would have done it differently. I hope I wouldn't have taken our time for granted. Wouldn't let us move so far apart. Wouldn't have this tape to call my brother.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

He knew you loved him.

MARGOT

Thanks for sharing, but you don't know that.
(MARGOT exits.)

KATE

Margot? Damn this tongue.
(KATE goes to get another glass of wine and Sissy stands holding up a picture of Leonard.)

SISSY

You know it's funny...all this time we were writing to one another and I had this idea in my mind that Leonard was a tall, thin man with a full head of dark wavy hair and here he is --

KATE

Shorter, fatter and bald as winter.

SISSY

And a Jew. I never imagined that.

KATE

Which is the biggest surprise?

SISSY

Jesus was a Jew after all.

KATE

A connection that hasn't helped his descendants much. Sorry. I'll switch to water.

SISSY

I guess you're not a believer either?

KATE

I'm a card-carrying Christian but there's a lot of blood on that cross, and some of it even has our family name on it.

MARGOT

(MARGOT appears in the doorway, she is wearing a flowing kimona type robe. She strikes a very dramatic pose.)

Ta-daaaa!

KATE

Well girl, look at you.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

A little lavender water on the face and a change of clothes -- and I am ready to face the world.

KATE

Sissy? You're staring at Margot...and I don't think its love.

SISSY

Your robe is so beautiful. I've never seen anything like that before.

MARGOT

Leonard brought it back for me from his last trip.

(MARGOT holds out her arms and we see how big it is on her.)

He always thought I was his BIG sister. Here you try it on.

SISSY

No, I couldn't.

MARGOT

You have to. It's magical.

SISSY

I don't know.

KATE

Just white magic honey, go ahead.

MARGOT

It'll make you feel like dancing.

SISSY

No. Really.

(MARGOT starts to slip it on SISSY.)

KATE

Don't fight her. I can tell by the look in her eye you'll lose.

SISSY

It feels so...

MARGOT

Heavenly?

SISSY

Exactly!

(SISSY is whirling around. She seems to be floating as the robe floats about her.)

I've never felt anything like this.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Then don't stop 'cause right now whirling's not my thing.

SISSY

I couldn't.

MARGOT

Let me put on some music.

KATE

Leonard loved music.

MARGOT

Brahms, Beethoven, Bach?

KATE

(Holding up records.)

Bob Marley? Glenn Campbell? The Beatles? No accounting for this taste.

MARGOT

And they're all vinyl.

KATE

Here's a good old fashioned waltz. One, two, three...

SISSY

I couldn't.

KATE

(Holding her head.)

Blackberry wine and waltzing don't mix so you dance with her.

SISSY

No! I shouldn't.

KATE

Shhhush. Alabama women are the finest dancers on the planet. Buckle up and let's go.

(KATE puts MARGOT and SISSY together in a waltz position)

You lead Margot. God will understand. Now, one, two, three...

SISSY

(SISSY breaks away.)

No! I haven't danced since our son died.

KATE

No dancing, no sleeping. Seems like a whole lot of punishment for one woman. Even God says we have to go back to life.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

What can I say?

MARGOT

Keep the robe on, I'll slip on something else.

SISSY

Someone would be very lucky to have you in their life.

MARGOT

Is that a polite of saying what's a nice girl like you doing dancing all alone?

KATE

Oh, hell, this woman was married. It was the summer of love and she dragged Danny Simon down from the depths of law school to top of a mountain in Maine...the commune from hell.

MARGOT

I figured one less lawyer wouldn't be missed.

SISSY

You lived on a commune?

MARGOT

For a year without the benefit of marriage. Then in a fit of in sanity we decided to make it legal.

KATE

Sleep with lawyers, wake up with contracts.

MARGOT

Do you remember my parents singing "Hey Jude?"

KATE

I remember all of us going straight up that mountain like we were in the Sound of Music. Then Jackie -- who was a gorgeous little flower girl even if she is my own. Jackie saw something moving in that grass and took her little city ass straight down that hill.

SISSY

What happened?

MARGOT

Oh, no. Eleven months and twenty-two days after our wedding, he said he needed to go off and find himself.

KATE

In Katmandu. Stubborn man.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

You would remember that part.

SISSY

Did you try to stop him?

MARGOT

Why could I do?

KATE

Now I would have dragged his butt back till he came to his senses.

MARGOT

I went to talk to him but it was too late.

SISSY

He found someone else?

KATE

Worse. Cause with her big hair down to her waist and a heart full of love, she would have won, in a fair fight. But it wasn't fair.

MARGOT

How could I argue with someone who was so damn happy without me.

KATE

He was too far gone from this world to share it with a mortal but I still would have tried to talk some sense into him.

MARGOT

I know when I've lost Kate. Maybe that's the difference between us.

SISSY

I need to find my telephone. I have to call our hotel.
(SISSY is looking for her phone and when she finds it she dials it furiously.)

KATE

I thought you were staying here?

SISSY

My husband has not been in our room for hours.

KATE

He's probably just gone out for something.

SISSY

I ordered his favorite meal from room service.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Wrong answer, Kate.

SISSY

Hello? Room 601 please.

KATE

Or a drink.

MARGOT

Two for two.

KATE

What's she so upset about.

SISSY

I also left him a note with that meal and it told him I was coming to Philadelphia to consider the state of our marriage.

KATE

Oh, that kind of note.

SISSY

I said I was trying to heal the wound in my heart.

KATE

That wound wasn't called Leonard?

SISSY

Keep trying please. No, I never mentioned Leonard to anyone.

KATE

Good move.

SISSY

Now he's not in his room, he's not answering his phone and if something's has happened to him, that note will be our last words to each other. Excuse me, but no, I do not wish to leave a message on his voice mail!

(SISSY slams the phone.)

KATE

So I guess you and Charles didn't meet on a commune?

SISSY

Oh, no, we met in the back of my daddy's Chevrolet. It's not exactly as it sounds.

MARGOT

Sounds a lot more fun than my commune.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

My Daddy was a preacher and we were going to Montgomery when our back tire blew. The boy they sent to fix that tire was Charles and he always says that blow out saved him from a life of eternal damnation.

KATE

Sometimes staying together needs time apart. He'll be back.

SISSY

You don't know that anymore than I do -- but I love you for sharing.

(NEELY comes wandering out half asleep from the bedroom in an oversized nightshirt.)

NEELY

I'm sorry, is it morning?

KATE

You're too young to be an insomniac.

MARGOT

Can't you sleep?

KATE

Don't ask questions unless you want answers.

NEELY

I just got really hungry for an egg salad sandwich with olives. Billie says I've been eating so many eggs I'll probably end up hatching Horton.

SISSY

Billie?

NEELY

Yes?

KATE

Now just who is Billie?

NEELY

My roommate.

KATE

Interesting.

NEELY

I guess I forgot to mention it.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Anything else you forgot?

NEELY

I can make the sandwich myself.

KATE

Margot can handle the food, we need to talk.

MARGOT

Convince me I don't hate this look in your eyes.

KATE

(whispering) Do not give it another thought. Kate has it all under control.

MARGOT

That's exactly what I was afraid of. Sissy?

SISSY

Nothing for me.

NEELY

I was hoping to get some family medical history?

KATE

Leonard had a strong heart and I'm sure your baby will too. Now you just sit down and put those little tootsies right up here while Margot gets into the refrigerator to make one her famous egg salad sandwiches.

NEELY

I'd love some tomatoes on that sandwich if it's not too much trouble. I like to get as many food groups in as possible. You know I really wasn't sure you all wanted me to stay?

(NEELY clutches her stomach)

KATE

Hold the egg salad!

NEELY

I'm fine. She's just dancing. Want to feel?

(SISSY goes over and puts her hand on NEELY's tummy)

SISSY

Oh, I think she is dancing.

KATE

Oh, hell, there's a sucker born everyday.

(KATE goes over to feel NEELY's stomach.)

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

What do you think?

KATE

I think I forgot how perfect strangers want to come up and feel your baby move.

NEELY

And you just want to let them.

KATE

Don't get too trusting. Not with this baby. Ever. Margot? Did you have dancers in your family cause I think this baby's kicking like hell to come out.

(MARGOT comes and puts her ear to the belly.)

MARGOT

Wheat or rye?

KATE

She's talking about your egg salad sandwich. The correct answer is rye. Leonard only had chicken salad on wheat. Egg salad was always rye.

MARGOT

Don't let her intimidate you.

NEELY

Wheat.

MARGOT

No more dancing till I get back out here.

(MARGOT exits.)

NEELY

You're really good friends, aren't you?

KATE

We have shared some fine moments in the history of the world.

NEELY

You know there have been several attempts at Utopian societies and I believe that this one could succeed.

KATE

Which one?

NEELY

All of us.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Honey, I got one good husband at home, five law partners at work, a daughter somewhere out there who hates me and enough miscellaneous relatives for a small town. That is enough utopia for this woman. But since we're speaking about utopia here, just how do you feel about the institution of marriage.

NEELY

I guess philosophically speaking I'm pretty monogamous.

KATE

How 'bout practically speaking?

NEELY

I told you that Leonard and I were not --

KATE

I'm talking about the difference between raising this baby alone or maybe having some help.

NEELY

My mother said marriage was a joke but she's stayed with my father thirty years.

KATE

Do you have some help?

NEELY

I still don't know if she's happy.

KATE

Everybody's got their own way to happy.

SISSY

Was Leonard worried about you raising this baby alone?

NEELY

He expected to be involved. I mean he didn't expect to be dead.

SISSY

No one expects to be dead.

NEELY

Leonard told me he was proud of helping to bring a new life into this new century. He also said you'd be kind to us.

KATE

Leonard lied.

SISSY

I think we're all just concerned.

(CONTINUED)

NEELY

I didn't come here asking for money if that's what you think.

KATE

What did you come here for?

SISSY

I think Kate means was there some reason you came tonight?

KATE

Or any night?

NEELY

I came here because I thought the women who loved him would care about his baby. Obviously I was wrong!

MARGOT

What the hell is going on. I leave the room for five minutes and come back to the dress rehearsal of Twelve Angry Women.

KATE

We're just giving Neely the gift of our expertise.

MARGOT

Did she ask for it?. Neely, if you're going to be a part of this family you have to learn that Kate hates a vacuum and egg salad is better on rye.

NEELY

(MARGOT hands NEELY a sandwich.)

I'm not as hungry as I thought.

MARGOT

Don't let her intimidate you. Let me. Eat!

NEELY

I'm sorry everything is such a mess.

MARGOT

You've had a little more time to get used to the idea of having this baby than we have.

KATE

And not just any baby, but my ex-husband's. And her special online friend. We all got a stake in that baby.

NEELY

I'm sorry your daughter's gone. I'm sorry I came here.
(NEELY exits.)

(CONTINUED)

KATE

(KATE follows her to the door.)

I'm not angry with you. I'm just damned confused! Where'd she go?

(Yelling in to the door.)

Okay I'm sorry I yelled.

(Quiet)

Did you hear that. I just apologized.

(Quiet)

This is not something I do well.

(Quiet)

I'm a strong and forceful personality. That's what they write on all my job evaluations and if Leonard didn't tell you that he didn't tell you Kate.

MARGOT

Shhhhhh.

KATE

Why are you shhhhhhush-ing me when I'm trying to make it right with that girl.

MARGOT

Quiet! I think there's someone outside.

SISSY

I hear something.

MARGOT

Leonard kept his old baseball bat around.

(MARGOT finds an umbrella.)

KATE

Give me that thing before you hurt yourself.

(There is a commotion outside. The sound of someone falling over furniture and screaming "ouch" and "darn".)

SISSY

Should we call the police?

KATE

Sounds too dumb to be a burglar.

NEELY

(NEELY comes out with a baseball bat)

Somebody's stumbling around out there and he's mumbling something like -"I'll kill ya"..I'll kill ya"? But I can't make it out for sure.

CHARLES (O.S.)

Cecilia?

(CONTINUED)

KATE

I don't think he's announcing his intentions to murder us.
(Sound of a dog barking viciously)

NEELY

Well that doesn't sound too friendly.

KATE

Get away from that window before you get hurt.

MARGOT

Shhhhhh. Listen?

CHARLES (O.S.)

Cecilia. Cecilia!

NEELY

He's saying somebody's name...

CHARLES (O.S.)

Cecilia Longfellow Sweet are you there?

KATE

Cecilia...

MARGOT

Longfellow....

NEELY

Sweet?

SISSY

Oh my God it's my husband!

(SISSY goes to the window and opens it.)

Charles, is that you?

NEELY

Her husband's breaking into this apartment?

CHARLES (O.S.)

Cecilia? Are you really in there?

SISSY

Stop this right now and come in through the front door before you hurt yourself.

CHARLES (O.S.)

Oh, Cecilia just hearing your voice has revived my spirit. I shall be there momentarily.

NEELY

Does he always talk like that?

(CONTINUED)

KATE

It's a southern thing, honey, don't even try to figure it out.

SISSY

My husband's here?

KATE

Guess he did know who Leonard Will was.

CHARLES

(knocking) Cecilia! Please open this door.

MARGOT

I'm going to the kitchen.

KATE

I'm going too and you're coming with us.

(MARGOT grabs KATE who drags NEELY out with them)

NEELY

But I didn't get to the bathroom.

KATE

No "buts" about it.

(Charles knocks again furiously. SISSY opens the door and CHARLES comes running in looking quite disheveled and out of breath.)

CHARLES

Cecilia? Is it really you?

SISSY

Who else did you expect to find here Charles? And how did you know where I was?

CHARLES

Am I truly too late?

(There is a crash in the kitchen)

SISSY

Please, don't go in there.

CHARLES

Then I am too late. (dropping to his knees) Oh, God, punish me not her.

SISSY

Charles! What has happened to you? Breaking into strange houses, praying for forgiveness, have you been drinking?

(CONTINUED)

CHARLES

I did have one sherry on the train. But I am not drunk.

SISSY

You were drinking sherry on the train by yourself?

CHARLES

I am stone sober and ready to meet this man face to face -
mano et mano.

SISSY

Charles! Your good suit is ruined.

CHARLES

My life is ruined. Nothing has not been the same since I
found your note today. I cancelled my seminar, my dinner --
took a train and walked, no ran here, getting lost several
times, and then there was this rather unpleasant dog and
those rose bushes in the garden.

(CHARLES starts for the kitchen.)

Is he in there?

SISSY

Is who in there?

CHARLES

It is nearly midnight. You are wearing a rather revealing and
unfamiliar piece of clothing and the mailbox says Leonard
Will.

NEELY

(Walking through very quickly.)

Don't mind me but I really have to use the bathroom.

CHARLES

Is Leonard in there?

NEELY

Leonard Will is dead. (exits)

CHARLES

(Dropping to his knees.)

Oh, Lord forgive me I have actually killed someone with my
evil thoughts.

SISSY

Leonard was already dead when I got here.

CHARLES

Then I did not kill him?

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

He died on his vacation.

CHARLES

Thank the Lord!

SISSY

Charles!

CHARLES

Though I am truly sorry about his death I am doubly happy that I did not cause it. Was that a pregnant woman walking through here?

SISSY

Why would you wish a stranger harm?

CHARLES

He was no stranger to you?

SISSY

We were colleagues. On the computer. It was about Dante and literature, that was all. How did you know about him?

CHARLES

Even I who have been blind to most everything about you for the past five years could see it was more than friendship.

SISSY

You could?

KATE (O.S.)

(Listening at the door of the kitchen.)

I told you!

MARGOT

Shhhhhh.

CHARLES

You'd disappear for hours composing correspondence to him and always returned with a flush in your cheek and a look in your eye I had forgotten. I must admit that I have been jealous.

SISSY

You are my husband. I would never leave you.

CHARLES

You have my name, Cecilia, but he had won your mind and sooner or later -- he would probably win your heart.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Well you have nothing more to fear.
(SISSY holds up the small vase)
Here is your rival.

JACKIE

(Bursting into the front door.)
Okay Mom, we're going to settle this once and -- oh, you're still here. Who's this? Where's Aunt Margot?

SISSY

She's in the kitchen with your Mother.

CHARLES

There are more women in the kitchen?

JACKIE

Mama, I'm ready. Come out here and fight like a woman.

CHARLES

Who is this young woman and why is she fighting with her mother?

JACKIE

I'm Jackie Sojourner Truth Will and everyone fights with my mother.

KATE

(KATE comes out of the kitchen pushing NEELY in front of her and MARGOT stands behind her.)
That is totally not true. I am trying to be fair but this is not easy. And don't tell me what your father would do because Leonard is not here.

CHARLES

Leonard was African-American?

SISSY

Actually no, he was bald and Jewish.

CHARLES

I don't know what to say.

MARGOT

I'm Margot Will, Leonard's sister and I think I'll just go and get some more chairs.

JACKIE

Don't you dare leave now.

(CONTINUED)

NEELY

(NEELY comes back out and shakes hands with
JACKIE)

Hi, you must be Jackie. I recognize you from your picture.

JACKIE

Well I can't say the same for you. Who are you?

KATE

She's soon to be the mother of your new sister.

JACKIE

What sister?

NEELY

Leonard agreed to be the father of my baby. I'm Neely Frank.
Your father was my teacher.

CHARLES

She's having Leonard Will's child?

SISSY

That's right Charles, he was her teacher, but there was
nothing improper.

JACKIE

Well I'll be the judge of that, thank you. What kind of a
student were you?

NEELY

There was nothing physical, believe me.

CHARLES

How does that happen?

JACKIE

This is a joke, right?

NEELY

Believe me this baby is no joke.

MARGOT

Leonard donated his sperm.

CHARLES

Did you know he was having a baby with this young woman?

KATE

None of us knew he was having a baby with any woman.

JACKIE

You must be having some day, Mom. I know I am.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

My night would go a lot better without thinking about that uniform in your future. You did come back to tell me that was all a bad dream.

SISSY

Jackie's enlisted in the army...

CHARLES

Some people would say that's a brave thing to do.

KATE

Not from this end of the rifle.

JACKIE

Whether you like it or not Mama, there are some good wars.

CHARLES

War is a terribly responsibility and though their may be victory declared, there is always a high price on both sides.

KATE

You must be Sissy's husband. I'm Kate McClinton Will, and I liked --

CHARLES

--- Leonard's dear dead wife!

KATE

Now anyone can see I am very much alive.

JACKIE

Believe me she is very much alive.

SISSY

How did you know that she was supposed to be dead, Charles, I know I never mentioned it.

NEELY

Leonard said you were dead?

MARGOT

Don't even begin to ask.

CHARLES

I am ashamed to say I read the messages you printed from your computer.

SISSY

My private messages?

(CONTINUED)

CHARLES

I was afraid I was losing you. That's why I followed you here today. You told me you needed to think about our marriage but I felt it was this man you would be considering. I came here to stop being a coward and fight for the woman I love.

NEELY

I think he wants to be forgiven.

JACKIE

Now there's a problem you've never had Mom.

KATE

You want me to forgive you for joining the army? Or for loving you too much to lose you.

NEELY

Leonard said you were thinking of joining the army but I didn't know you actually did it.

JACKIE

I've done everything everybody in this room -- alive and dead wanted -- now I just want to do what I want.

KATE

You don't have to throw away your life trying to make some peace with a father you didn't know.

JACKIE

I'm not Mama. I didn't know my father and I didn't love him. You did.

KATE

You're too young to know what you want right now.

MARGOT

That's not fair Kate and you know it.

KATE

Fair is you telling Jackie how you feel so I'm not standing here alone.

JACKIE

I know how Margot feels.

MARGOT

You do?

JACKIE

She loves me and she's scared for me but she's not going to stop me from doing what I want to do. Right?

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

I'm Margot the coward not King Solomon.

KATE

If this woman is quoting scripture I'm in deep shit here.

NEELY

I am personally a pacifist but I believe that family's should support their children.

KATE

Great so when your little one grows up and wants to throw her life away you think you'll just smile and say nothing, but you won't. I'm not ashamed to say I'm committed to tying my daughter up until she is at least thirty.

NEELY

I'm almost thirty.

KATE

Okay til she's forty, fifty or --

JACKIE

Talk to me, Mom. If you have a good reason let's put it out there but it can't just be you're afraid I'll get killed because I could get killed anywhere.

KATE

Who told you a stupid thing like that.

JACKIE

You did.

KATE

Margot? I'm desperate here.

MARGOT

You really want me to tie her up?

JACKIE

Talk to me, Mama.

NEELY

Look, I'm sorry your daughter is still functioning in a world where disputes are resolved through --

KATE

I am not talking theory here. I am talking about hard bullets going through soft tissue. This country sent away a boy I loved to a war they knew we'd lose. He came back a man -- dead and nobody in Washington even remembers his name.

(CONTINUED)

NEELY

I assume the world will be a different place for my baby.

KATE

Well, don't. I assumed making a "love child" with a man of peace could make a difference but read the newspapers. The killing doesn't stop. I don't know if it ever will.

CHARLES

Forgive me for offering my observation, but you should be very proud of raising a child who knows her own mind.

JACKIE

Tell him how proud you are of me.

KATE

Margot? Help me.

MARGOT

How?

KATE

I saw you talk Leonard into things he didn't want to do.

NEELY

You think I made Leonard do this to me?

KATE

I'm not talking about that baby right now.

JACKIE

Everything is not about you. This woman is going to have a baby with Daddy's sperm.

KATE

Do you have to be so damn graphic! I know where babies come from.

JACKIE

Not this one.

NEELY

I didn't have to twist "anything" of Leonard's to get pregnant. He wanted to be my donor.

CHARLES

Speaking as a man, I don't think you can force that sort of thing.

NEELY

I didn't want to meet all of you, but Billie said I had to come over and tell you about this baby.

(CONTINUED)

KATE

What the hell does Billie have to do with this baby!

NEELY

Billie and I have been together for seven years.

KATE

Thank the Lord.

NEELY

We wanted to have a baby and since Billie is Jewish we both thought that it would be nice to have a Jewish donor.

MARGOT

God knows we can use all the Jews we can get.

NEELY

Leonard said he would be honored.

JACKIE

That is so sweet about you and your boyfriend.

NEELY

Billie is not my boyfriend.

KATE

But you just said you've been together for seven years.

NEELY

Billie is really ...Beryl Anne Rosenwasser and she couldn't be the donor.

CHARLES

Who is her boyfriend then?

SISSY

Just wait a minute Charles.

KATE

Beryl Anne what?

JACKIE

Rosenwasser Mama. Beryl is her girlfriend. Right?

NEELY

Billie is my partner in life, my lover, my best friend.

CHARLES

What's she saying, Cecilia?

SISSY

She's saying she's gay.

(CONTINUED)

JACKIE

Wow. A new sister and two Aunts at once.

CHARLES

I'm not sure I understand.

KATE

A lot of people don't. Particularly in the army. Are you ready to deal with that.

JACKIE

You went to a segregated school, Mama. Things can change, you taught me that. Don't you worry, Neely, we'll all be there for you and Beryl and that baby. Right Mama?

KATE

Right.

MARGOT

A brand new Will. I can't believe this.

SISSY

And Charles and me would love to see you all if you come to Alabama.

CHARLES

Sissy, this is all very new to me.

SISSY

It's not new. You want me to tell you who are the gay people in your congregation?

NEELY

I thought you were all angry at me.

SISSY

We are all very relieved.

CHARLES

We are?

SISSY

Hearing about Billie is a blessing.

MARGOT

Amen.

SISSY

An answer to my prayers .

CHARLES

You prayed for this?

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

I prayed for her not to be alone. I wouldn't have thought of praying for Billie. But now that I know there is a Billie I can pray they can have a life together.

NEELY

Leonard said he knew Billie and I were a couple before we did. He loved and accepted me all these years even when my own parents wanted me dead.

CHARLES

Oh, please child they couldn't want you dead.

NEELY

They won't see us or talk to us. They said they hate Billie and they don't even know her.

CHARLES

They will regret missing so much.

NEELY

My own sister has to sneak over to visit me so no matter what Leonard told me, I couldn't be sure how you would all feel.

CHARLES

Believe me, your parents and siblings are already suffering.

NEELY

They said it was in the Bible and I was as good as dead.

CHARLES

God's greatest gift to us in this life is our love for one another, however difficult that price. The Bible is not our Lord's hammer to be wielded in anger or worse, pride. Believe me, a family that casts one of its own out will suffer the fires of hell right here on earth.

SISSY

I let my son go back that day too, Charles.

CHARLES

You didn't raise your voice to him, Cecilia. I did, and that is my sin. I let my son go in anger and he died alone.

(CHARLES takes his things.)

Thank you all for your hospitality.

KATE

You can't find a room in Philadelphia at this time of the night.

MARGOT

There's plenty of room here.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

It was just one terrible fight in a wonderful life.

KATE

In a court of law you are not guilty.

SISSY

You didn't know what was waiting. No one could.

CHARLES

In my heart I am as guilty as if I'd pulled that trigger. My son would never have been in that dormitory room if he hadn't been running from me and I have to accept that. He was supposed to be sleeping in his bed that night. Home with his loving parents. But I chased him out and my pride killed him. I couldn't bear to think my son wouldn't finish college right on schedule -- my schedule. Every night I hear my words like I could still take them back. "No, son, you can't take any time off now. Why? Because I say so, and I'm your father. The one who is paying those bills and I am right. Until you're paying your own way, you'd better just turn yourself around, go back and finish up like you're supposed to. When you're all done, when you have that degree in your hand, we'll talk." Charlie was a good son and he did go back, but it was never right and we never talked again. That fight was his last memory of me and I mourn it everyday. Pride is a sin, Cecilia and I fear I must bear my punishment alone.

(CHARLES walks out.)

KATE

Jackie, give her your jacket. This woman's got to go now.

SISSY

Will I see you again?

KATE

I only live around the corner.

MARGOT

Here's a key. Come in as late as you want.

SISSY

Pray for me. (exits)

NEELY

I have to call Billie. She's working the emergency room shift tonight and she'll be worried.

JACKIE

Are you leaving too?

(CONTINUED)

KATE

Martin will be sitting up wondering whether we found you.

JACKIE

You found me but you still haven't listened. I know you hate war because it killed my daddy. But I'm here, living and breathing in the lungs he left behind. It's time to deal with me, Mama. The part that keeps growing out of shoes so fast it takes your breath away. The part of me that is so stubborn it makes your teeth hurt. The way my eyes turn up like you say his did. The laugh you say made you smile. I am all of you Mama, and both my daddies, and more. Look at me for once. Jackie Sojourner Truth Will. You gave me every one of those names for a reason. Talk to this tall proud African-American woman you raised to go out and change the world my way. Nobody gets out of this alive, you taught me that, and I know it's true, but it's the living and the loving while we're here that makes the difference.

NEELY

That was a beautiful speech.

JACKIE

Mama?

KATE

I'm not angry with you, honey. I just can't wait for them to start beating swords into plowshares.

JACKIE

Does that mean you won't be coming to my swearing in?

KATE

I'll love you, I'll worry about you, but I can't come.

(KATE picks up her things and gets to the door.)

Neely, I hope we'll see a lot more of you and Billie and that baby. I'll call you in the morning, hon.

(Kisses MARGOT and starts for the door.)

You coming home tonight?

JACKIE

Neely? You want to see me sworn in cause it looks like my Mother won't.

NEELY

I'd like that.

JACKIE

Good.

(KATE exits.)

Damn her!

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

Where are you going now?

JACKIE

Home. Even Alabama women got to sleep somewhere.

MARGOT

Neely, why don't you bring Billie with you to the swearing in ceremony.

NEELY

Really.

MARGOT

If you can choose the army, then the army better be ready for your whole damn family.

JACKIE

Thanks for always raising a little hell.

(Kisses MARGOT.)

How bout a kiss from our newest Will.

(NEELY and JACKIE embrace.)

NEELY

Maybe she'll change her mind?

JACKIE

Probably not. She raised me to do what I have to and I knew she'd do the same. Nothing's simple she'd say.

(JACKIE exits. MARGOT starts cleaning up. NEELY helps her.)

MARGOT

Hey, what do you think you're doing. I can clean this up before those love birds get back.

NEELY

You believe that...about the love birds part?

MARGOT

It hasn't been a good century for believers, but I'm still optimistic.

NEELY

I can see why you were Jackie's favorite Aunt.

MARGOT

I was her only Aunt. It made the voting a whole lot easier.

NEELY

Kate said you might keep this place and move in permanently.

(CONTINUED)

MARGOT

I've been thinking about it. I always liked the view.

NEELY

I'm sorry I just showed up. Leonard said you hated surprises.

MARGOT

And we all know Leonard never lied.

NEELY

Billy said I shouldn't expect you to be like your brother.

MARGOT

That would be a mistake.

NEELY

She said you might even be better.

MARGOT

Settle for different. Then you won't be disappointed.

NEELY

(NEELY starts to leave and takes a manuscript out of her bag.)

I brought my thesis with me. It looks at the effects of modern warfare on the concept of love in contemporary poetry. Leonard was very excited about it.

MARGOT

You don't give up do you?

NEELY

Leonard said it would make me a good teacher.

MARGOT

Probably right.

NEELY

He said you he learned that from you.

MARGOT

Me?

NEELY

He said he learned all the best things about being a good teacher and a good friend from you. He said no one could ever have asked for a better sister, but you probably knew that already.

MARGOT

No, I guess I didn't.

(CONTINUED)

NEELY

He hoped we could be friends.
(NEELY starts off to bed.)

MARGOT

Neely? Thank you for bringing a new life back into our family.

NEELY

Sure.

MARGOT

Leave the manuscript. I can't promise anymore than an old history teacher's opinion, but I will read it.

(NEELY leaves the manuscript and starts off.)

What time do you like to get up? I make a great breakfast.

NEELY

Billie's coming pretty early.

MARGOT

I can cook for three as well as two. And I'm up early anyway.

NEELY

Breakfast would be nice, did Leonard....

MARGOT

-- he cooked the worst eggs in the world. Tell Willa Rose I said good-night.

NEELY

(Feels her stomach.)

She says good-night back. (exits)

MARGOT

(MARGOT finishes cleaning up. She goes over to the still burning candle.)

Well Leonard, it's been one helluva day. I might actually sleep tonight. And you must be tired, too. How about if we both get some sleep and leave those lovebirdds alone to try to fight their way through this thing one more time. And don't worry, I promise we'll talk again, real soon.

MARGOT blows out the candle. She takes the glass vase with her and turns out the hall light. A few moments of silence pass and we hear voices outside the door and the sound of the key in the lock. Sissy comes running in holding the door wide open. We hear the sound of a dog barking.

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

Run Charles. Quick! In here.

(That same vicious dog is barking.)

Come in here, quick.

(CHARLES comes in shaking off the rain from the shared poncho and looking out at the retreating dog.)

See, now we're safe at last.

CHARLES

I never knew a dog so persistent.

SISSY

Take off that old wet thing and let me get you some towels.

(SISSY goes off to get some towels. CHARLES stands awkwardly in the room. SISSY comes back and dries him off.)

You want some hot tea. You can't believe all the kinds of tea in that kitchen and they taste good, too. Charles. You're just standing there staring at me.

CHARLES

I don't believe I have ever seen you wear anything more lovely.

SISSY

Margot insisted I wear it. She thinks it's magical and -- well here, you try it on.

(SISSY slips the robe off herself and around Charles.)

CHARLES

What are you doing? It doesn't seem like something a man should be doing.

SISSY

I want you to feel its magic too.

CHARLES

I don't know about magic, Cecilia.

SISSY

It's magic even God would love. And it's so big, see it fits you, too. Well?

CHARLES

Oh, my. I don't know what to say.

SISSY

Do you feel like dancing?

(CONTINUED)

CHARLES

How could you know that?

SISSY

I said it was magical. Now let me put on one of these old records and let's see if you can remember how to dance.

CHARLES

Dance?

SISSY

You always loved to dance and I always loved to dance with you.

CHARLES

Would you still dance with an old sinner like me?

SISSY

If you would sing to me.

CHARLES

I couldn't.

SISSY

I fell in love with that voice.

CHARLES

That was a long time ago.

SISSY

I want to hear that voice again. I want to look into those eyes. Sing to me?

CHARLES

(CHARLES begins to sing very tentatively.)

Let me call you sweetheart....I just can't. I miss him.

SISSY

Everyday.

CHARLES

And you still want to try again with me?

SISSY

We're alive Charles, we loved each other once. We made a good life and a fine son. Maybe if we work real hard we can find that boy and girl again who fell in love in the back of my Daddy's Chevrolet.

CHARLES

It's such a long way, Cecilia. Where do we start?

(CONTINUED)

SISSY

You put your hand out, and I put my mine out to meet it.

(CHARLES pus his hand out and then drops it.)

Just do it, Charles, even if you don't believe, just sing now
and pray tomorrow we can believe in love one more time.

(CHARLES reaches out his hand. SISSY takes it and
they come together slowly as he finally begins
to sing.)

CHARLES

"Let... me... call... you... Sweetheart...."

LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART starts to
play in the background. Lights fade
out.

END OF PLAY