

Going Out and Coming Back

by Alexander Borinsky

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What kind of people am I thinking of, as I say this?
Of me, of you, of all our theatrical little dominions,
of the freedoms that are none, of the unfreedoms that
are not taken seriously, of these destroyers who never
pass up a chance for a joke, of the people who are
desolate?

Robert Walser, "A Sort of Speech"

Samantha, 13-14

Molly, early 30s, single mom

Jess, early 40s, versatile enough for pajama pants and business suits

Beth Ann, late 30s, put-together, firm, with mischief and a little hardness under a perfect graciousness

Martha, mid-50s, birdlike, with energy but a nervous voice

Diane, late-50s, pretty in an effortless way, believes in wellness

Sue, late-50s, generous, warm, very sincere, slightly broken

Some Notes:

Part Two should feel less magical than Part One. Part One is a glowing, twinkling memory. Part Two is a handful of mostly lusterless pieces.

In Part One, for instance, you probably don't need any props. In Part Two, people should accidentally get icing from the cake on their fingers.

In one staging of this play, the women did a dance as a stand-in for playing the trombone. That sort of thing can work.

PART ONE

(Sam on a largely empty stage, with a bass trombone. She plays a few notes – a warmup, a few toots – and then speaks to us.)

Sam. A lot happened that year. Two-thousand...six. They reopened the old gym at my school – the new gym now – and gave us new uniforms. My dad wanted me to run for student council secretary, and I told him that seventh graders didn't run for secretary, but he made me posters and wrote me a speech. Ryan Schwartz, who was in sixth grade, beat me by a landslide. My mom got angry at my dad and shouted at him and slammed a plate of chicken down so hard it cracked. My brother found out that they were going to send him to Afghanistan. I found out that Dylan Wiles told my friend Katie that he thought I was hot. Then we all went to the airport and my brother went to Afghanistan. I gave a talk to my social studies class about the Korengal Valley, where my brother was, and I showed them pictures my brother had sent. There was a mudslide in the Philippines, and during the assembly Dr. Smith tripped on the stairs up to the stage and fell flat out and got a bloody nose. Everyone was listening to that Fergie song, and I was embarrassed because I wasn't quite sure what she meant by London Bridge. Dylan Wiles asked Melissa Ridley out. We didn't hear from my brother for nine days and then it turned out that one of the guys in his company had been blown up. My dad found out about a women's trombone group at a music festival on Sharp's Island, a Sousa festival, like a four-day-long Fourth of July thing, where you go and play Sousa with all these other bands, except this one is a group just for women. He told me he thought I should sign up, and my mom didn't say anything, but he really wanted me to go. He said it was important I had some strong female role models, and that it'd be really fun, and something different. My brother changed his Facebook picture to a picture of an eagle in front of an American flag sort of scowling at you, and I guess when I saw that I decided I would sign up and go.

(She plays a few more toots – maybe she repeats, as if practicing, the opening notes of a piece – and then we hear the piece, “Stars and Stripes Forever,” for trombone ensemble, blast loud and clear and gorgeous through the sound system.)

I took a bus – five and a half hours – and made it to the island around three. The bus came over the top of the bridge and there it was – there's a cute little town around the bus station. Someone from the festival met me and gave me a ride to the house where we'll all be staying – tall, all in pink and green, with a gravel driveway.

I.

Sam. I think they all know each other.

Sue	Diane	Martha	Sam	Molly	Beth Ann
<p>God, Martha, it's so good to see you! Come here, come here... (Hug.) Oh, boy, I can't believe we're all... Beth Ann! Look at you!</p> <p>Oh my God, you look so wonderful, you're just <i>glowing</i></p> <p>Oh, come here... (Hug.)</p> <p>Danny's your...?</p>		<p>Sue!</p> <p>(Hug.) Oh...</p> <p>I know, we're... Beth Ann! You're pregnant!</p> <p>Have you... How is it <i>going</i>? How are you <i>holding up</i>? Is Danny...</p>		<p>Hi everyone.</p>	<p>Hi, ladies...</p> <p>I know, I...</p> <p>Oh, he worries and worries and worries about me. Oh... (Hug.) He doesn't like it when I leave the house. He thinks I'm going to fall over</p> <p>My son. My son Danny. He's</p>

That's adorable.

(Beat.)

God, hi Molly, I'm so sorry, I didn't even see you there.

Of course, you already know everything about

Haha...
You two are our *hosts*.

(Beat.)

Danny's right to worry, though. You just have to be so careful, you can never be too careful.
Here. I'll take a hug, too. (*Hug.*)

(Beat.)

Hi, Molly.

(Beat.)

(Beat.)

No, no, Beth Ann's pregnant! That's totally

Yeah, well I'm lucky, I

Oh... No...

(Beat.)

eleven. My husband doesn't worry about me for a second.

(*Hug.*) Oh...

(Beat.)

I am pregnant.

Molly gets to keep an eye on me during the year, make sure I

(Beat.)

How *are* you...?
Oh, come here....
(*Hug.*)

Yes, it's so good...

Uh-oh. Uh-oh.
Look who's here.
Diane McNair.

We were thinking
about it, but we
couldn't start
without you, Diane.

(*Hug.*) Oh...

Sue Fielding.
Martha Crouch.
Beth Ann Nolan.
Molly Harris.

Trouble? Do I smell
trouble? Are folks
making trouble
without me
already?

Oh, come here.
(*Hug.*)

One by one we're
making it. We
survived the year
and we're making it
back, one by one.

Hi, Diane.

How *are* you
ladies—
(*Hug.*) Oh...
It's so good to see
you all.

Haha!

Oh... Hi, hi, hi.

Oh, Diane...

The woman knows
how to make a
entrance, say what

I can't believe we're all in the same room together again.

And there's supposed to be a new...

You must be Sam!

Well aren't we pregnant.

Is everyone...?

A new!

Hi Sam!

God, she's so young. You're so

You should be an *actress*, Diane.

Jess's here, she's just on her phone, in the back. I told her she ought to get one of those headphones, if she's going to... She's going to end up with brain cancer.

Yeah, I'm...

Hi, I...

Hi Sam, I'm Molly.

you will.

We are pregnant.

Yeah, who's the new...

Hi, Sam.

<p>I know.</p>	<p>young.</p>	<p>Let's not... We're overwhelming her. Sorry, sweetheart, we don't mean to overwhelm you</p>			
<p>Haha, Diane, you're going to scare her off.</p>	<p>Oh, she can take it. I can tell she's tough stuff. Don't mind us too much, we're all a little crazy, but our hearts are in the right place. You'll see...</p> <p>Hahaha, Beth Ann...</p>				<p>Diane can speak for herself. I don't know who you're calling crazy, Diane.</p> <p><i>I'm</i> certainly not crazy.</p>
<p>(Beat.)</p> <p>There's so much to catch up on!</p> <p>(Beat.)</p>	<p>(Beat.)</p> <p>I know.</p> <p>(Beat.)</p>	<p>(Beat.)</p> <p>Lots.</p> <p>(Beat.)</p>	<p>(Beat.)</p>	<p>(Beat.)</p> <p>I know.</p> <p>(Beat.)</p>	<p>(Beat.)</p> <p>(Beat.)</p>

Sam. I'm definitely by far the youngest. It's a big house – Martha told me it's the same one they've rented for the last six years. Beth Ann isn't staying with us, since she lives on the island. Molly lives on the island, too, but she's staying with us anyway – just to get away, I guess, she says. Sue came all the way from New Hampshire. Everyone insisted that I have my pick of room. I picked the one at the very top – the ceiling is slanted on one side from the roof. From up there, I can hear everything.

Sue. You look hungry, Diane. Are you

Diane. I think I'm okay. I

Sue. You know they're putting a whole snack station up by the pavilion. For when people get hungry during the...

Someone from the wind and string group got her church to donate a whole

Diane. That's amazing.

Sue. So if you're hungry, you can

Diane. That's very good to know. (Beat.)

You look amazing. You just look amazing.

Martha. She does.

Sue. Oh, thanks...

Martha. I think I might go swing by that snack station, Sue. Did you say it was...

Sue. Just up by the pavilion. On the side by Caldecott Road...

Martha. Does anybody want anything?

Molly. What? No, I'm fine.

Beth Ann. I'm fine.

Sue. I'm fine.

Diane. I'm good, thanks.

Jess. I'm fine.

Martha. Sam?

Sam. Oh... I'm fine. Thank you.

Martha. Look at those manners.

Sam. We played a little bit together that first night, and I met Joshua, our conductor. Then we all walked up to the pavilion for a big buffet with a lot of the other groups. There were some welcome speeches, and some music, and pasta and burgers and potato salad...

Diane. Respectable. Perfectly respectable. Nothing stunning, but

Beth Ann. Well I always thought you deserved credit, you know, for taking all that on. That you'd be willing to take all that on all by yourself, you know?

Molly. Yeah... I guess you never know *what* you're going to do. You never know...

Beth Ann. No, I mean Bob and I thought about this one for a long long time before we

Molly. Yeah?

Beth Ann. Yeah. We thought about it long and hard and then we decided.

You know whenever he runs into you in the grocery store he runs home and says, "Guess who I ran into in the grocery store: Molly Harris, homecoming queen."

Molly. That was a long time ago.

Beth Ann. Well, but that's what he says. Every time. "Guess who I ran into – Molly Harris, homecoming queen."

Molly. That's very sweet.

Sue. Quiet, Diane. It's delicious.

Sam. But mostly we talked. Martha told us a story she'd heard about a little girl who...

Martha. It was the most terrible thing.

This woman I know from the neighborhood told me that her sister had this daughter—
she must have been three or four—

and she was giving her a bath one day and she noticed that she had
breasts,

like real breasts,

and by the time she was six she had these huge, just

Molly. Oh god. I'm sorry. I'm laughing. It's awful that I'm laughing. I'm sorry.

Martha. No, it's... I'm serious.

She was *traumatized*, she

Molly. Oh, god.

Sue. Molly...

Martha. Really. Really really really.

It's these chemicals they put in things nowadays.

Really. I'm serious.

Can you imagine?

It's...

(Soon everyone is giggling.)

I'm being entirely serious.

Sam. Diane is my favorite so far, I think.

Diane. Let's all say something brave we did this year.

Beth Ann. Subject myself to you ladies again.

Diane. Oh, come on, Beth Ann.

Beth Ann. I'm serious.

Molly. Skull Mountain. Six Flags Great Adventure.

Martha. I didn't do anything brave.

Diane. That's can't be true, Martha.

Martha. Well maybe I did but I don't think so. That potato salad didn't agree with me

Jess. I saw a therapist. First time.

Diane. Sue?

Sue. I...

(Beat.)

Diane. I think Sue is capable of great things. She just needs a boost sometimes. Don't you think?

Sue. I don't know.

Diane. You just need a boost and you'll accomplish great things.

Sam. Towards the end of the dinner, one of the really big groups goes up on stage and plays for a while. I know some of the songs, but definitely not all of them. I didn't know Sousa wrote so much music.

(We hear strains of Sousa, beginning to swell, as...)

II.

(They come to a semicircle at the front of the stage. Pantomime opening cases, assembling pantomimed trombones.)

Sue. When I play Sousa I feel proud. I feel like I'm telling the world that my country is important to me.

Martha. People usually think I'm very serious. When I play Sousa I feel like I have a sense of humor.

Beth Ann. When I play Sousa I feel sexier than I usually do. Or maybe that's not it. Maybe I just want to fuck someone while those big notes are vibrating in my body. I'd never – I wouldn't usually use a word like that, but that's how I feel. It's the only word for it.

Diane. When I play Sousa I usually cry. It's like grace. Like being in on the secret. I want to cry at the generosity of the one who's let me – *me* – in on the secret. Who's blessed me with grace.

Molly. I can't really call myself a musician. I'm not—I'm just not a musician. When I play Sousa, I feel that I'm a different me; I'm the me who followed my dream and became a musician, and my whole life is music.

Beth Ann. When I play Sousa I feel like I'm wearing a big bright pair of red boots and a tall top hat, like Abraham Lincoln but bigger. I can't really explain. It's fun.

Jess. When I play Sousa I wish the song could go on forever. I wish the whole world could hear me, and I imagine everyone is jumping to their feet.

(They pantomime playing as "Stars and Stripes Forever" blasts through the sound system. Then a few remain onstage disassembling trombones as the following begins.)

III.

Sam. After dinner a bunch of us decided to walk along the beach on the way home. It was warm and dark and you could see the stars and hear the ocean. All the way home, and even from the porch – so, so many stars.

(Martha and Molly are entering the house. Jess is just a little behind them.)

Jess. Goodnight, you guys. I'm headed to bed.

Molly. Oh, goodnight, Jess.

Martha. Goodnight, Jess. The other ladies coming behind you?

Jess. I think so. They were just behind me but I think they stopped for a little to just put their feet in the water.

Molly. That sounds nice.

That sounds so nice.

Jess. I'm just pretty beat.

Martha. It's been a long day. Long days here. It can be tiring.

Jess. I'm just totally beat. Such long days here.

Martha. That's for sure.

(Beatlet.)

Jess. How are you ladies?

Martha. Fine. We're just fine.

Molly. I'm good.

Jess. Good.

(Beatlet.)

Martha. Well, get some rest, Jess.

Jess. Thanks, Martha.

Molly. Oh, goodnight, Jess!

Jess. Goodnight, you guys.

Martha. Goodnight.

(Jess smiles, goes. Beat.)

Molly. I really shouldn't have drunk so much.

I haven't drunk in forever.

(Beat. They smile at each other. Molly takes off her shoes, wiggles her toes.)

It would have been nice to put my feet in the water. That would have been just right.

(Beat. Sue, Diane, and Beth Ann enter.)

Diane. Those bugs! Those bugs are eating me alive. They just love the taste of my blood.

Sue. I've got some aloe, if you want it.

Diane. My blood must be just delicious, just foie gras gourmet blood, because those bugs are eating me alive.

Beth Ann. Well here, shut the door, or you'll let them all into the house, too.

Diane. God, you're right, I'll let them all into the house.

Sue. I'll just get you some aloe, Diane.

Diane. I'm going to let them all into the house and I'll just be one big bug bite in the morning. You'll have to spend all day just *scratching* me.

Beth Ann. I'm sure we can all look forward to *that*, Diane.

Diane. Oh, you know, Beth Ann...

Beth Ann. Well, I ought to head home.

Martha. Is it okay to be out driving this late? You're not going to get

Beth Ann. I've got a family waiting for me.

Molly. They're waiting up for you?

Beth Ann. No, but, you know...

Molly. Oh.

Martha. You sure it's okay to be driving this late? I don't want you to get

Beth Ann. It's fine.

Sue. Safe home, Beth Ann.

Beth Ann. Thank you.

(Beth Ann lingers a moment.)

Goodnight, everyone.

Keep that screen shut, Diane. Or they'll eat you alive.

I'll see you all bright and early.

Martha. Goodnight. Drive safe.

Molly. Goodnight!

Diane. Goodnight, Beth Ann.

Sue. Goodnight.

(She goes. Beat.)

Sue. Have you ladies had a good night?

Molly. Yeah. We have.

Martha. We have. It's been a good night. It's so good to be back here. As always...

Sue. It is.

(Beat. Crickets.)

Martha. I think it's bedtime for me, too. I'm beat.

Molly. Oh, goodnight, Martha. Have a good night. Sweet dreams. Thanks for...

Sue. Goodnight, Martha.

Martha. You okay, Molly?

Molly. I'll be fine. I might go back out there. Just so I can put my feet in the water. I'd really like to do that, just for a bit.

It's not too late, is it? Have I missed my chance?

I might just go out and put my feet in the water. It's not too far. I think I can still do it, right?

Martha. Well

Sue. It's so warm out. It's gorgeous.

Diane. It's gorgeous.

Molly. I think I might go do that.

Martha. If you're determined to go out, just be careful, Molly. That undertow isn't joking around. And you know, if you *have* had something to drink...

Diane. Oh, she'll be fine...

Sue. I might want to go sit outside for a bit, too. Would you come out and sit with me on the porch, Diane?

Diane. Oh, Sue, I'd love to...

Martha. Goodnight, ladies. Really be careful, Molly.

Molly. Oh, I will, Martha. Goodnight. Thank you...

Sue. Goodnight, Martha.

Diane. Goodnight, dear.

Martha. You have our cell-phone numbers, right? In case you go out?

Molly. Oh, I'll be fine.

Martha. Well remember we've got rehearsal in the morning. Even if you go back out for a bit... You need your sleep.

Molly. I know. Thanks, Martha. Goodnight.

(Martha smiles, goes. Beat.)

Molly. Oh, don't mind me. I know you two might want to talk.

Sue. No, it's okay...

(Beat.)

Do you want to come out on the porch, Diane?

Diane. Yes. Let's go out on the porch. That'll be so nice. Let's go out on the porch.

Sue. Okay.

Molly, are you...?

Molly. I'm thinking of going back out. Just for a little bit. Just so I can put my little toes in the water. That's all. Don't mind me. I'll probably go out anyway in a little bit, and try to put my toes in the water.

Sue. Okay.

Diane. Goodnight, dear. If we don't see you. Sleep well.

Molly. Thanks, Diane. Goodnight, you two.

Sue. Goodnight.

(Sue and Diane go out on the porch. Molly looks at the door for a while, wiggling her toes.)

IV.

Sam. Our first full day! I overslept!

Martha. Are you going to drive over, Beth Ann? I can drive some folks in my car.

Beth Ann. Sure. Sure. Let's saddle up, everyone.

(A bustle of mugs and bowls and a newspaper being put on the table. People going in and out to get things.)

Diane. Don't leave me. I've got to go grab my water bottle. I'll be just a...

Molly. I've got to run up and get my trombone. Yours still at the hall, Beth Ann?

Beth Ann. In my car.

Sue. I've got to get mine, too, Molly.

Molly. Oh I'll get it for you, Sue.

Sue. No, no.

Molly. I'll get it. Stay right there.

(Beat as all this happens. They're all ready to go.)

Beth Ann. Is Sam coming along with us?

Martha. She might have been still sleeping, the sweetheart.

Beth Ann. D'anyone wake her up?

Sue. I heard her, I heard her. She's up.

Diane. Oh, get along, girls, I'll wait for her.

(calling up) Samantha, dear, take your time, I'm not going anywhere. We can walk over together.

Samantha. (off) Thanks!

(They go. Clomping of feet around upstairs. Sound of a shower turning on. Jess enters.)

Jess. Oh, God, Diane, you startled me.

Diane. Miss Jessica! What are you still doing here? What's your excuse? Aren't you coming to rehearsal?

Jess. Oh, God, you startled me. I—I actually was thinking about sitting this one out. I've got—it's complicated. God, my heart is racing.

Diane. We're not an army, Jess. We can't do it without you. Just won't sound the same without your toot.

Jess. Oh, boy, I know. Excuse me a moment, I'm just going to get a glass of water.

(She goes, comes back.)

Diane. Everything okay, dear?

Jess. What? Oh. Yes. Yes. Everything's... It's just – complicated. It's fine. My daughter's just having a bit of a rough summer. And I'm sort of the damage control expert.

Diane. Boo. No fun. No fun at all.

Jess. Whew. Yes!

Whew.

Diane. Want to talk about it? A little sister love?

Jess. No, that's... That's okay. Thanks.

Diane. Well just know, Jess, that...

(Diane hugs Jess. Holds her a while. Jess half hugs back.)

Okay? Just know that you've got people here for you. For any kind of support, you know?

Jess. Thanks.

Diane. Okay?

Jess. Thanks.

Diane. Because that's what this is all about right? I mean, it's about the music, but it's also about... Right?

Jess. Right.

(Beat.)

Right.

(Beat. Jess looks at her glass, then finishes her water, goes into the kitchen, we hear her rinsing the glass, and then she comes back.)

I guess I should head over, huh?

Diane. Oh just wait for Samantha and me. We can all head over together.

Jess. Is she...?

Diane. Overslept. She should be ready soon. She's a sweetheart.

Jess. She is.

(Beat.)

Jess. But you know, I think I might just head over. Just, you know, to clear my head. I might just head over.

Diane. Oh. Okay, Jess. Okay.

Jess. I'll see you there.

Diane. Okay.

(Jess goes. Diane sits for a while. Footsteps above, drawers opening and closing. Samantha comes down eventually.)

Diane. You ready, dear?

Samantha. I think so.

Diane. Oh, you're ready, darling. You're ready. I can tell you're ready.

(They go.)

(The same semi-circle of women, the same pantomime of taking out trombones and assembling them, except now there is one real trombone. It plays its part of one of the Sousa pieces. Then, the same (mostly) pantomime of disassembling the trombones, cleaning spit out of mouthpieces, etc., as...)

V.

Sam. Joshua is nice to me. I think I'm one of the best players, actually. But it's a long rehearsal, and my lips are tingly by the time we're done. On the way home, I'm walking with Martha, and Beth Ann comes over and says really quietly that all these other women

Beth Ann. Are so unselfconscious.

Martha. What do you...

Beth Ann. Molly has no self-control, and never has. Diane is better, but she just talks too much.

Martha. Oh, I don't...

Beth Ann. Sam, these ladies are far from perfect.

Maybe I'll hide one of Diane's sandals in the shed,

Martha. Oh, that's horrible!

Sam. Martha squeezes my hand a little bit.

Martha. That's horrible!

Beth Ann. Just as a little punishment? I'm kidding,

Sam. Beth Ann says.

Beth Ann. You don't think I'm serious, do you?

Still, Sam, if you feel like you're growing up into anyone but me or Martha, kill yourself.

Sam. Oh, I...

Beth Ann. I'm just kidding!

Sam. I help Sue make dinner.

Molly. Okay, people, she wants us working on these cocktails.

Jess. She doesn't have to ask *me* twice.

Beth Ann. Sue Reynolds encouraging drinking. I never would have imagined.

Was I complaining? Who was it gave you a thrashing last year in our little contest?

Perhaps it's all for the best. Keep the three of us woozy – no risk of a repeat performance from last year.

Jess. What are you talking about, Beth Ann?

Beth Ann. That dinner last year? The famous chicken dinner?

Sue. Out! Out! Your job is to have a drink and relax.

Molly. If you insist.

Sue. I *do* insist. Now get working on those cocktails.

I can hear you out there, Beth Ann. Don't think I can't.

Samantha. Sue, I think the water's about to boil over. Should I turn it down?

Sue. What's that, dear?

Samantha. The water's boiling over. I was going to turn it down.

Sue. Oh, thank you, Sam. I'll be right over. We should be able to go ahead and strain those.

Last year?

<p>Jess. What are you implying about our chicken dinner?</p> <p>Beth Ann. Catastrophe, honey. Complete. I'm not implying it, I'm saying it. Sue Reynolds, get back in the kitchen where you belong.</p> <p>Molly. Well <i>that's</i> not very nice, Beth Ann.</p> <p>Beth Ann. She knows I'm joking.</p> <p>Molly. I mean about the dinner. We spent a lot of time on that dinner.</p> <p>Beth Ann. Oh, don't take me seriously. You didn't take that seriously, did you, Jess?</p> <p>Jess. No...</p> <p>Beth Ann. I hope you weren't taking that seriously.</p>	<p>We're going to have a rematch of last year, Beth Ann. I'll make you take that back.</p> <p>(Sue laughs.)</p>
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Sam. The macaroni and cheese – my mom's recipe – is a big hit. Sue and Diane go out walking together. I fall asleep early.

(A few beats to listen to the crickets.)

VI.

Sam. In the morning, I'm up in time to have breakfast with everyone.

(They stand around eating bowls of cereal. Jess is in the next room, often audible. They stand around and listen to her as they eat.)

Jess. Hey Bill. No, no, it's fine. What is it this time? Is she...

What? No, it's fine, they're all out, I can talk.

What? Say that again.

Yes, but I think *you* should talk to her this time. She needs to learn that she can talk to *you* sometimes, too, when she feels this way.

I... I understand that, but you're not listening to what I'm saying.

No, no, I... I mean, sure, I'll talk to her this time, but in general...

Hi sweetie. Hi baby. What's that?

No, it's just not a very good connection, honey, so you have to speak up.

Honey, I've told you this already. Daddy and I—

No, no, I'm not angry, I'm just a little frustrated, you know? Because I thought...

Listen. Baby.

What? Daddy said I what?

No, honey, no, I'm not trying to distance myself. Of course I'm not trying to...

What?

Then why did he say that? I don't know why he said that, honey, you have to ask *him* that. I love you. Of course I love you.

You have to believe that, sweetie. You just have to trust...

I know it's hard. I know. We're all...

What?

What?

I think maybe you should try to calm down a little bit and maybe we can talk tomorrow.

Okay?

Okay?

No, Maddy, Maddy, no, listen—

You can't—

I'm just going to hang up, Maddy, if you keep yelling at me, it's not productive...

Maddy. Maddy. Listen.

Listen, Maddy, I can't keep doing this. I can't keep calling if you're just going to yell at...

Hello?

(Jess comes in, gets a Diet Coke.)

Jess. I'm so sorry. You should all go on without me. I'll catch up.

(She goes back into her room. Another pause, then,)

Jess. Bill. No. No. This is it. I can't—

What? I didn't say anything, she won't even listen to—
She told me you said I was trying to distance myself, Bill.
I said she told me you said I was trying to distance myself.
I'm *not* trying to distance myself, Bill. I'm just trying to help her be a little more self-sufficient. She can't cling so much to me, I can't—
Well she clings to me and then she just yells at me. It's not...
No, it's not a question of principles, Bill, it's a question of what I can take. I can't... I've reached my limit. I can't do it anymore.
Then *you* talk to her, Bill. *You* talk to her.
Can I just... I haven't been able to enjoy a minute of this trip, and I just need to have these few days to myself, I really, desperately need, Bill...
I REALLY NEED THESE FEW DAYS, BILL. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO BE ANY CLEARER ABOUT IT. I NEED THESE FEW DAYS, BILL. I NEED A *BREAK*. IT'S HARDLY – IT'S ALMOST OVER, BILL, AND I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO ENJOY A SINGLE MOMENT OF IT.

(Beat.)

Martha. You driving over, Beth Ann? My car's here, so...

Beth Ann. Sure. Sure. Saddle up, everyone.

(A bustle of plates being put on the table. People going in and out to get things.)

Diane. Oh! Don't leave me. I want to grab some extra water. I'll be just a...

Beth Ann. Here, Sam, take my keys out and let everybody in. I'll be out in just a minute.

(The same semicircle, the same pantomime of opening cases, assembling instruments... except this time with three real trombones. The three trombones play their respective parts of the same Sousa piece. Then the same dismantling, etc., as Sam speaks.)

VII.

Sam. I'm getting the hang of the part that was tripping me up in the Fairest of the Fair. Joshua says that if I say ta-da-ka instead of ta-ta-ta I can get the fast notes to come out crisper. He said we sounded wonderful, though, that we should take tomorrow morning off. Time is moving so quickly. I like everyone by now, I think, but I think Diane is still my favorite. I don't know why. She's just very funny sometimes, the things she says. There was a string and wind ensemble we went to hear tonight. They were okay. The music was a little boring. Beth Ann and Sue stayed home and made us all dinner that was ready when we came back.

Molly. Oh God this is so romantic!

Jess. I know, right? Candles, and...

Diane. No one's gonna take care of us, my dears, so we've got to take care of ourselves.

Sue. I always forget how... I forget how much a little thing like a candle can change everything.

Diane. Oh, it's not just the candles. It's the candles, but it's the fireflies, and the ocean air, and the summer night, and the lanterns, and the specialness of this gathering to all of us, that keeps us coming back year after year...

Sam. How many years *have* you been coming here?

Diane. How many years, Sue? Sue's the oldster here.

Sue. Oh God, Diane, don't make me count.

Diane. Centuries and centuries, dear.

(Laughter)

Sue and I were coming here when dinosaurs roamed the earth!

(Laughter.)

Back when we were still getting around in horse and buggies. And all wearing hoop-skirts.

(Laughter.)

We took the Oregon Trail to get here, didn't we, Sue?

(Laughter.)

Sue. We did, we did.

Beth Ann. Went on out there, couldn't take it, and came right back, didn't you?

Diane. That's it. Came right back to where we didn't have to skin our own deer.

Beth Ann. The things you two must have seen, huh? The rest of us can only imagine.

Diane. You can only imagine. The things we've seen...

(Beat.)

Martha. This chicken is delicious, Beth Ann.

Beth Ann. Oh, it's nothing special.

Martha. No, it's wonderful.

Jess. Really. It is.

Sue. Delicious.

Molly. Mmmm.

(Beat.)

Diane. But... Here we are. Here we all are.

(Beat.)

Molly. It is so, so nice to be here, you guys. It is so, so nice. We are so lucky.

Martha. It's a special place.

Molly. Some girlfriends of mine and I used to get together every summer and we'd all pitch in and find a house, just a nice house, and all spend maybe a week there or something.

And we went

one summer we went down to Isle of Palms, off South Carolina,

and it was this amazing, it was just this amazing, amazing place, really just like a five, maybe seven minute walk from the beach, and we all

Martha. Would you pass those string beans, Jess?

Jess. Oh. Sure. Here.

Martha. Thanks.

Molly. Anyway. I don't want to go on and on about it, but I just wanted to say

Beth Ann. We'll all be as old as Diane and Sue, sitting here all night!

Sue. Oh, hush, Beth Ann.

(Martha laughs, she and Beth Ann look at each other.)

Beth Ann. I'm just saying... right?

Molly. Anyway, no, I really don't want to go on and on.

But it was just that one year it ended up not happening, you know? Or, just, the usual emails didn't really go around about it, and I figured everyone was just too busy, or it wasn't meant to happen...

And then later I found out that they'd all decided to go, and get that same house again, and they just hadn't told me about it...

And so that was just...

(Beat.)

People are so weird, you know?

(Beat.)

Sue. People are. It's so true, Molly.

Jess. Very true. I'm always surprised by people.

Sue. Especially musicians, like us.

Jess. Oh, yeah...

Diane. That's for sure!

Sue. Oh, we're off our rockers.

Diane. Musicians!

Martha. Musicians!

Beth Ann. Trombones...

Sue. I guess we age into it, don't we? Crazy, but gracefully crazy.

Diane. Gracefully crazy. That's it.

(Beat.)

Sam. Did you always play, Sue?

Sue. Since I was a teenager.

Sam. Always alto?

Sue. Always alto. I've always been an alto kind of a girl.

Martha. You get such beautiful clear notes, Sue. I'm always so jealous.

Diane. Sue leads a very musical life.

Sue. I do. I'm blessed. My daughter plays clarinet and my husband was an oboist. He played every morning before he... Every morning he used to play. That was his first love, the oboe. It was the oboe and his kids. And then me.

(Beat.)

Molly. It sounds wonderful. I always wanted to bring more music into my life. It sounds wonderful, Sue.

(We listen to the crickets.)

VIII.

Sam. We perform tonight! Our last day. I can't believe it. No rehearsal this morning, which is nice. Joshua told us we needed to rest up and relax. I sleep in, but other people are up early, though, and Sue says that we should go blueberry picking.

(Sue, Martha, Diane, Jess.)

Sue. I think it's a great idea.

Martha. I agree. I think we should go. Our last day here.

Jess. Our last day. I think we should definitely go.

Diane. Are they open today?

Jess. They should be. I can call.

Martha. Why don't you, yeah, why don't you call.

Jess. I'll call.

Martha. What do you think, Diane?

Diane. A little sun, a little sisterhood, all the blueberries we could want? I think it's a wonderful idea.

Sue. I just love the energy you bring to things, Diane. It makes me so happy. I just love it.

Diane. Aw, you're sweet, Sue. I need some appreciators like you back home.

Sue. Don't we all!

Martha. I'm going to be on hydration patrol. I want everyone drinking water. I heard a story about a girl who *died* when she

Sue. Do you think everyone'll come?

Martha. Sure. Well—who else? Who else is there?

Sue. There's Samantha.

Diane. Oh, Samantha'll come.

Sue. And I don't know where Molly is. Or Beth Ann.

Diane. I don't think Beth Ann'll come.

Martha. (defensive) Why not??

Diane. I'm not – Martha, I'm just saying that I think she might want to spend part of the day with her family. She can go blueberry picking whenever she likes. But now that I mention it, I have no idea. I don't know if she'll want to come.

Jess. I just called. They said they're open.

Sue. Oh great. Great.

Diane. Terrific.

Martha. Let's – shall we go?

Sue. I'll see if I can find Beth Ann.

Martha. I'll call Beth Ann.

Diane. She at home?

Martha. Yeah, she went home.

Jess. Is Molly...?

Martha. I... don't know. Do you think she'd even want to come?

Diane. Well we should ask her, right?

(Has anyone seen my...?)

Martha. I... I guess. I – I guess you can ask her. Sure. Yeah. Ask her.

Sue. Something wrong?

Diane. (Yeah, I can't find my...)

Martha. No, no. Nothing's wrong.

Sue. I'll give Beth Ann a call.

Martha. Okay. Thanks. But this isn't an official thing we're doing, you know, we don't have to invite...

Sue. What is it you're looking for, Diane?

Diane. My sandal. One of my sandals. I found the one but I can't seem to find the other.

Sue. Where did you last see it?

Diane. Well, they were together. They were right here together, I thought...

Sue. Maybe one of them got kicked... Got separated...

Jess. You're looking for your sandal, Diane?

Diane. Yes, dear. You haven't seen it, have you?

Jess. No. No. They must have gotten separated, and...

Diane. Sure. Sure.

Jess. And maybe someone picked it up thinking it was theirs.

(Molly enters.)

Molly. Hey everyone, where's everyone going?

Sue. We were thinking of going blueberry picking.

Martha. We're just leaving now.

Jess. Would you like to...

Molly. Blueberry picking!

Martha. We're just now walking out the door.

Jess. Would you like to come?

Molly. I'd love to come.

Sue. Well, we were just leaving, you're just in time, so get your things together.

Martha. Is everyone bringing sunscreen?

Diane. Oh! I don't have mine.

Jess. I have some, you can use mine.

Sue. We definitely want sunscreen.

Jess. Oh, yeah, skin cancer runs in my family. My grandmother—

Sue. Unh. It's just awful.

Jess. My grandmother almost *died* of—

Diane. You haven't seen my other sandal, Molly, have you?

Molly. Your other what?

Sue. Did you look everywhere, Diane?

Diane. I did. I looked everywhere. I was upstairs, in the bathroom...

Molly. Your what? What are you looking for, Diane?

Diane. My sandal. One of my sandals. I looked everywhere, and I can't—

Martha. Are we almost ready to go?

Diane. One minute, Martha, I'm so sorry, I can't find my other sandal.

Molly. Are we taking a day trip? A blueberry picking day trip?

Sue. You're welcome to borrow my sneakers, Diane. I've got a pair of — they're my running shoes — but you're welcome to borrow them.

Diane. I may do that, Sue... I just want to look one more...

Sue. Just for a few hours, Molly. Blueberry picking, strawberry picking. It's a gorgeous day.

Molly. It is. It certainly is. Mind if I come?

Sue. Sure.

Jess. Sure.

Martha. Well is there – will there be room in the car?

Sue. Well sure, we can squeeze, can't we?

Martha. I'm not sure if there'll be room in the car.

Jess. Did we ever get hold of Beth Ann? Is she...?

Martha. I think she's going to stay at home. She said Bob was going to help her with something or other. We might not have room in the car.

Molly. I don't have to come if there isn't room.

Diane. (passing through the room) What are you guys talking about? There's plenty of room.

Martha. It's a small car, Diane, that's all.

Diane. I might need to borrow your shoes, Sue, if that's okay. I don't know where this doggone little sandal might be.

Sue. Sure, Diane. Just give me a minute. I'll just run up...

Martha. We all set to go?

Sue. Sure, I'll be right...

Diane. She's just grabbing some shoes I can wear. I don't know where that sandal could have gone. That's really irritating.

Martha. Let's pack 'er up, then.

(She's smiling at Molly. Samantha comes downstairs.)

Sam. Oh! Hey guys. Is everybody...?

Martha. To the car, young lady. No questions asked.

Sam. Oh, where are we...?

Martha. What did I say, dear? No questions. Out!

(Sam laughs and goes. Diane and Sue return.)

Sue. Is it unlocked, Martha?

Martha. Yep. Trunk should be popped if you want to stick anything in there.

Sue. Great. Thank you, Martha.

Diane. These are so comfy, Sue, you'll have to tell me where you got them.

(They're out.)

Martha. I didn't mean to be...

Molly. Oh... No...

Martha. It's just... *you* know.

Molly. Sure. Sure. Mm-hm. Sure.

Martha. Okay dear. Well. Enjoy the afternoon. I'm sure it'll be nice to have a break from all of us.

Molly. Oh, don't worry about me.

Martha. Okay dear. See you tonight.

IX.

(Then they – Martha, Sam, Sue, Diane, Jess – are picking blueberries in floppy hats, standing in the same semi-circle as when they play their trombones. They pantomime the picking. This is simple and lovely. The sound of cicadas. Some time. Maybe Diane sings to herself quietly a bit, smiles. Some time.)

Diane. This is nice.

Sue. It is.

Martha. It is.

(Long beat. Cicadas.)

Martha. I'm feeling bad, suddenly. About...

Sue. What?

Martha. Well I didn't want to *shut her out*, you know?
But at the same time, life is so short, and...
You know?

Diane. Sure.

(Long beat.)

Martha. And I have a right sometimes, don't I, to make my life as I want it?
Don't I?

Diane. Sure. Of course.

Martha. Right? I mean, I just...

Diane. Sure.

Martha. But still. I feel...

Diane. You've got to forgive yourself sometimes, Martha.

Martha. I guess. I just feel...

Diane. It's okay, Martha.

(Long silence.)

Jess. I think I could head back soonish. No rush.
It's hot.

Diane. It is hot.

Sue. I could head back soonish / too.

Martha. Sure.

(Cicadas... and they're gone. Lingering beat. Martha alone.)

Martha.

Aren't blueberries very delicious?

Aren't the best blueberries just a little bit tart, and don't they just pop a little bit in your mouth when you in a very subtle way press them between the rugged surfaces of your back teeth?

Aren't blueberries, I hear from sources with authority, quite good for your health?

Isn't there really no better way to spend a summer day than in a field, with one's face in shade under the brim of a floppy hat, picking blueberries?

Isn't conversation sometimes very difficult?

Isn't it hard, sometimes, to bring the things one decides upon when one is alone and quiet and sad to bear on one's daily life with other people?

Aren't blueberries very delicious?

Didn't we make a good choice, the best choice, the most perfect choice today, in choosing to come here to pick blueberries?

Isn't it true that there really wasn't anything we could possibly have done that would have been better, and contributed, so to speak, to our general wellbeing and sense of fulfillment, as much as picking blueberries?

Isn't this the best row in the whole orchard to be picking blueberries? The very best row of all possible rows?

Aren't we making the right choices? If not all the time, because who could do that, but at least most of the time?

And isn't the color of blueberries magnificent?

And isn't the sky gorgeous and blue today?

Aren't days like today the reason we were born?

Aren't blueberries probably the most delightful of fruit, really the best of all fruits?

Aren't we lucky? Aren't we blessed?

Aren't we lucky and blessed to be here today, picking blueberries?

(Beat. Cicadas. Then everyone returns with a real trombone case, and someone brings Martha hers. They assemble the trombones – real trombones – and play the Sousa together. It may not be perfect, but it is loud and rich and heartfelt.)

X.

Sam. And then it was over, somehow, we all packed up our things out of that house, somehow, and Sue swept, and Martha vacuumed and Molly mopped, and people got rides to the airport, or the bus station, and the house was locked up with a big padlock...

In August my brother came home for a while, and we played soccer in our yard with the little plastic goals from when we were kids, and in October he went back. Dylan Wiles got kicked out of school for getting a hold of some kind of drug and leaving it in his locker. My friend Katie got a new dog. She's a mutt, mostly German Shepherd.

Beautiful. Her name is Gloria. My mom asked me to go on a walk with her one day and told me that she and my dad were going to try separating for a while. She's found an apartment in our neighborhood, a few minutes walk from the house, and she wanted to know if there were any kids in my class who might want to make a little extra money and help her move. It was the Sunday she was supposed to move that we got an email.

There'd been an explosion near my brother's base and nobody had been killed, but there was lots of shrapnel and a lot of it had gone in my brother's face, including his eyes, and it didn't seem like he'd ever be able to see again. He was going to come home. My mom told the kids I asked to help that she didn't need them anymore, that she would just wait on moving. They kept my brother in a hospital in Germany for a while. There was a shooting at a college in Virginia. 32 people. My dad had a letter to the editor in the paper, about a restaurant that was closing after forty years. He cut it out and put it on the refrigerator. My brother came home. It was strange.

My mom called the kids again and moved.

I had my first kiss. Eddie Stiles. It was... awkward. But nice. Really nice. Though – he wears cologne.

My brother and I went to a Tenacious D concert. He'd never heard of them before, but he really liked it. He laughed a lot and held my hand and let me lead him around.

Afterwards, he gave me a taste of bourbon that he had in a flask.

The house got messy, because mom wasn't around. Though sometimes, when Dad wasn't home, she'd come over and clean. He would never say anything about it. My brother fell one night on the stairs, coming home, and cut his chin. We stayed at home together all weekend and put on *Buffy*. I explained the parts he couldn't see, and he got really into it. I wrote a big paper on *Pride and Prejudice*, which my teacher really liked. She said she gave a copy to Dr. Smith.

And then summer came. And I signed up for the Sousa festival again.

PART TWO.

I.

Sam. That second summer the bus came up over the top of the bridge and there was the island again. I was suddenly so nervous coming back. Would it be the same at all? Would I be... I don't know, it was a stupid thing to worry about, but... would they like me again?

A lot was the same...

Martha. I think I might go swing by that snack station, Sue.

Diane. You don't want to save yourself for the big welcome buffet?

Sam. ...and a lot was different. I had the same room, way at the top of the house. The bedspread was uglier, though. Yellow. Joshua was his same serious self. Though – he looked a lot older than I remembered. Jess didn't come back. Molly's pregnant. And Beth Ann

Martha. Beth Ann!

Beth Ann. I know. Again. I know.

Sue. Beth Ann! You're pregnant again!

Beth Ann. I know. I couldn't help myself, I guess. The new one was just teething and I looked at Bob and said

Diane. Oh, Beth Ann!

Beth Ann. I want another one!

Sam. Our first day back Martha says we should seize the day and go blueberry picking, the same place we went last year. I end up eating more than I bring home. When we get back...

Beth Ann. You're killing me. It's a quarter after three, rehearsal's at three thirty, and I wanted to have this little celebration for Molly. A little baby shower.

Martha. Sorry, Beth Ann. We didn't realize it took so long to... you have to weigh everything you picked, and then they charge you based on... I guess I'd forgotten from last year...

Sue. And but how about *you*, Beth Ann, you're

Diane. Of course! It should be for both of you!

Beth Ann. Oh, forget about me. I just want Molly to feel a little bit... celebrated, you know?

I'm going to go get her.

(Beth Ann goes.)

Sue. This is exciting. This is so exciting.

(They all stand in silence for a little while. Then Beth Ann leads Molly in. She steps out into silence for a half-second, and then—)

All. Congratulations! / Surprise! / Molly, congrats! / Molly, dear! / etc.

Molly. Oh my! Is this...?

Beth Ann. An early baby shower sort of thing. A congratulations.

Molly. Oh, gosh! Well you didn't have to...

Diane. Well, Molly, are you going to cut the cake or not?

Molly. Should I cut the cake? I guess I should.

Diane. Where's everyone else?

Beth Ann. I think you're hallucinating, Diane. We're all here.

Diane. Are we...? Gosh, you're right, Beth Ann. I'm – it's still strange to me that Jess isn't here.

Martha. I can't say she ever really impressed me... I don't think I ever really had a sense of her...

Diane. Oh, Martha...

Sue. *Poor girl.*

Molly. Oh, poor Jess. I wonder how she's doing...

Sue. Here. This telephone here can be Jess. We'll just imagine Jess has turned into a telephone.

(Laughter.)

Martha. Sue!

Sue. I'm serious! Here she is – Jess.

(Beat. They look at the telephone.)

Martha. (chuckling) Sue...

Diane. Well but what about Joshua? Isn't he going to come? Celebrate the new baby in the family?

Beth Ann. Oh, Joshua shmoshua, let him be, we see enough of him as it is we don't need him here for this. This is just for us.

Sue. (to Sam) You have a fork, dear?

Sam. Thanks, Sue.

Diane. Beth Ann, you're just blushing head to toe. What's gotten into you about Joshua?

Beth Ann. Nothing, I just—

Molly. Nothing's gotten into her, she – Here, Sue, here –

Sue. Oh, I just want that little piece, thank you. Thank you.

Molly. I just think she just means we ought to be able to have some time for just us, you know? Without, you know, without Joshua, or anyone. I think that's important.

Sue. Sure, sure I understand that.

(They stand around eating cake, aware of the time.)

Beth Ann. Well, five minutes and we should head over.

(General mmms of acknowledgement.)

I had a little speech sort of thing I wanted to share with you all, but somehow it doesn't seem appropriate anymore. I guess I just wanted to express my excitement for Molly. She's got one beautiful son and now I'm sure she'll have another beautiful baby, and she's got quite a beautiful boyfriend, too, who I've had the pleasure of getting to know in the last few months... And I can't say I ever expected that I'd... but... And I know he just adores Molly, which really is just the main thing, the only thing, the most important thing. And who knows if there'll be wedding bells soon, but even if not I'm just so happy for the two of you.

Molly. Thank you, Beth Ann.

(Pause.)

Well, I should just say...
And I don't want to go on and on.

But I'm so grateful
And it's been lovely having Beth Ann in my life more this year.
And
And I mean she's got two beautiful children already, and one on the way, too,
Which is...
So congratulations to that, too, definitely...
But what I'm trying to say is
Here, now, when I look around at all your bright eyes and beautiful faces,
I'm just so glad to have you to come back to.
As a source of
A source of strength
And I just know that it's these connections that last
So many friendships just
Just disappear
I mean, I know from experience
I've had...
But I'm just so grateful to have all of you
Because I know you'll all be in my life for a long time to come.
So thank you.

(Longish beat.)

Martha. Are you going to drive over, Beth Ann? I can drive some folks in my car.

Beth Ann. Sure. Sure. Let's saddle up, everyone.

(A bustle of plates being put on the table. People going in and out to get things.)

Diane. Oops. I've got to get my water bottle. Don't leave me...

Molly. My trombone's upstairs. Yours is at the hall, right, Sam?

Sam. Yeah, I left mine.

Molly. I need to start doing that. Be right back everyone.

(Beth Ann, Sue, and Sam are standing, waiting, as people bustle about.)

Beth Ann. Take my keys, sweetheart. I'll be out in just a minute.

(Beth Ann gives her keys to Sam, and others follow her out the door. Diane comes down. Sue and Beth Ann are still lingering.)

Diane. I couldn't find my stupid...

Beth Ann. We ready?

Sue. We'll meet you outside, Beth Ann. Just in a minute.

Beth Ann. Okay. But no dawdling.

Sue. Sure. Just a minute.

(Beth Ann goes.)

Diane. You forget something?

Sue. No, I just...

Diane. Oh.

Sue. I just...

Diane. Well, we shouldn't keep them waiting, should we?

Sue. No, we shouldn't. I just wanted to see if we could find some time maybe after rehearsal... I know everyone tends to go their own way after rehearsal...

Diane. Well, I don't know if it's a good idea to create a little clique, you know? We've got to be a part of a community here. And I don't want everyone else to feel like we're shutting them out. You know?

(Beat.)

Sue. Oh. No. Sure.

Diane. Shall we?

Sue. I don't know, Diane, I'm worried about you. Is everything okay?

Diane. What, with me?

Sue. Yeah. You seem a little bit

Diane. Oh, baby, everything's fine with me. You know me. I'm pretty hard to get down. I'm a pretty tough lady.

Sue. I know. You just seem...

Diane. What?

Sue. Never mind.

(Beth Ann enters.)

Beth Ann. We are baking, ladies. Baking.

Sue. Sorry, Beth Ann. We're coming.

Diane. We're coming, we're coming! We don't want any melting to happen! We're coming.

(Diane, Sue, and Beth Ann go. They form the familiar semi-circle, but three of the real trombones, and one of the people, are gone – back to three trombones. Sue stands there, does not participate in the pantomime. Three threads of a new piece.)

II.

Sam. The hall where we practice is the same, the pavilion where all the bands play is the same, the beach is the same... maybe it's a little more humid than I remembered. Though – last year it felt like we played *all the time*, and this year... maybe I'm not remembering right, but it doesn't feel like we play as much this year. Which is fine, I guess.

I've been so glad to see Diane again. I missed her. She is as nice to me as she always has been. She says I look like *such a teenager*. I think Beth Ann and Molly are kind of friends now. Which is funny. And nice.

At dinner I bring the phone to the table, because we've decided that the phone is Jess. Everyone thinks that's so funny.

(They are sitting after dinner, drinking seltzer water from big glass bottles. Beat. We're listening to crickets.)

Martha. It's funny, you know. This is so... *sharp*.

Molly. It's so different. I've never thought about seltzer as something you might, you know, *make*. Or something that might be different from what you'd buy in, you know, in a grocery store.

Beth Ann. It's nice. It's really nice. It's really different.

Molly. Thanks for bringing it to us, Sue. I'm going to go home all inspired to make seltzer.

Beth Ann. Yes, thank you, Sue.

Sue. Sure.

(Beat. They sip. Crickets.)

Diane. My girlfriend Emmie was always asking me, you know, is seltzer bad for you?

Molly. *Is it?*

Diane. Well hold on. This came up because... Well she was asking me if seltzer is bad for you.

Molly. Okay.

Diane. And I explained it to her this way.

I said, what's the most important thing the body does?

Molly. Breathe.

Martha. Instinct.

Beth Ann. Heart. Heartbeat.

Diane. Sort of. What's... what's the most important part of your body?

(Beat.)

Sam. Your brain?

Molly. Your heart.

Diane. And what does your heart do?

Martha. It pumps... it pumps blood.

Beth Ann. Circulates energy. Keeps you warm.

Diane. Right. And, but, what does it, what does it circulate?

Beth Ann. Blood.

Martha. Blood.

Diane. But what is the blood carrying?

Molly. Oxygen.

Martha. Energy, right?

Diane. Well but where does that energy come from?

Molly. Oxygen.

Martha. Oxygen, right.

Diane. Right. And what is it we're getting rid of when we're taking in oxygen?

Beth Ann. With our hearts?

Diane. Well, no, not with our hearts, with our... What is it we're trying to get rid of?

Beth Ann. CO₂.

Diane. Right. CO₂. Right. So your heart's job is to send oxygen to all parts of your body, and then, with our, well, with our lungs, we get rid of CO₂... and if our hearts are the most important part of our body, and spreading around oxygen is most important thing your body does, and getting rid of CO₂ is part of that...

Martha. The most important thing! I never thought of it that way.

Diane. If that's the most important thing our bodies do... And so what's in seltzer? What is it we put in seltzer?

(Beat.)

Sam. Oxygen?

Diane. No...

Sam. Oh.

Beth Ann. Close. It's CO₂, actually. Carbon dioxide.

Sam. Oh.

Diane. Right. CO₂.

(Beat.)

Diane. So... So when we drink seltzer, we're sort of fighting, you know, sort of fighting what our body really basically *does*... It's funny when you think about it.

Molly. That *is* funny. I never thought of that.

Beth Ann. Mmm.

(Crickets.)

Martha. Does anyone like the piece Joshua picked for us this year?

Molly. I don't.

Diane. I don't.

Beth Ann. I don't.

Sam. It's okay.

Sue. It's fine.

(Quiet. Crickets.)

III.

Sam. Sue wasn't here this morning. I think she might have gone home. Diane had told me that she was having trouble, that her mother was sick. Or that she was distracted. I think she said she was getting remarried? I don't know. Something. That maybe she shouldn't have come this year, that she was overextending herself. One of the glass seltzer bottles was still on the porch, and I imagined that it was her. In the middle of the night, I thought, Sue turned into this beautiful glass bottle, and the light's just perfect on it now, in the morning.

We know the routine in mornings now. Beth Ann and Martha drive us. People are tired. It's an okay rehearsal. My part is hard, and I get a little frustrated. After, Martha goes to the beach. Beth Ann goes back to her house, she says she has some things to do. Everyone else stays at home.

I go up to my room to read, but I can hear everything...

(Molly alone, watching Oprah. We listen to Oprah as she sits and watches. Goes to the kitchen, gets a bag of baby carrots, sits eating them. After a while, Diane comes in, there's a tight smile between the two of them, and Diane gets a glass of water from the kitchen. Diane goes back into her room. Then pokes her head out.)

Diane. I'm sorry, this is, I don't want to be... Do you mind turning it down a bit?

Molly. Sure. I'm sorry.

Diane. Sorry. Thanks.

(Diane goes back into her room. Then comes back out, goes to the kitchen, looks around in the fridge. Shuts the fridge. Looks around the kitchen. Peers into the living room, sees them by Molly's side. Takes a step towards them, goes back, gets a bowl, goes to above Molly, takes some carrots, puts them in the bowl, is about to put the carrots back by Molly's side, but then changes her mind and brings them back to the kitchen, puts them in the refrigerator. Goes back into her room with the bowl, shuts the door. After a few moments, Molly reaches for the carrots, and doesn't find them. Gives up and goes back to the television.

Beth Ann comes in.)

Beth Ann. Where did all the other girls go?

Molly. Martha's at the beach.

Beth Ann. Ah. You the only one here?

Molly. Diane.

(She points. Beth Ann nods. Beth Ann goes into the kitchen, opens the fridge, brings out the carrots. Puts a little squirt of Ranch dressing in a dish. Goes back into the living room. Leans over and gives Molly a kiss on the head. Molly is surprised. Beth Ann giggles, comes around and plops on the couch beside her.)

Beth Ann. I'm in such a good mood, I don't know why. Something Danny said this morning – it hit me that he's growing up so fast. They grow up so fast, don't they?

Molly. Yeah.
How's John-John? Is he

(Diane enters. She goes to the fridge to look for the carrots, they're not there.)

Diane. Molly, are—?

(She sees Beth Ann and the carrots, goes and has one, dips it in the Ranch dressing. Stands chewing noisily. Then is going to go back to her room, doesn't, and sits down heavily beside the other two. Silence. They all crunch carrots noisily.)

(Diane gets drawn into the show, too. They furrow their brows together. Diane is reaching over Molly to dip her carrot in the ranch dressing. She takes a little too long – Molly looks at her hand and gives it a slap. Diane is startled. Molly giggles. Diane looks at Beth Ann, who giggles too. Then Molly offers her hand for Diane to slap. After a moment of hesitation, Diane does. Then Beth Ann offers her hand to be slapped. Molly does. A round of general hand slapping – weird and indulgent and satisfying.)

Diane. Oh good God.

Molly. Jesus.

Diane. Jesus.

Beth Ann. We are so...! We're just so...!

(Laughter. It fades into smiles, and they shuffle in closer together on the couch. They watch the show together, smiling, eating carrots.)

IV.

Sam. I hadn't remembered days like this – long stretches with nothing to do. It doesn't seem like everyone's *around* as much – though I don't know where else they'd be. The beach is as beautiful, though, and the weather's good. I finish *Harry Potter*.

That night my brother called me and we talked for a while. Just after dinner I went up to my room and practiced the parts I'd been having trouble with. And I got better. I always forget that. That there's always a way to get better.

And then... and then all of a sudden, it was almost over. The next night was our big show. We *had* done something, I realized. Made music, all together. It was... It was really, really nice.

(Everyone perks up and listens to the sounds of the end of the performance – the last perky trills, followed by applause. Maybe it sounds far off. Then, crickets, as everyone smiles and heads to their places.)

Everyone leaves tomorrow. I tried going to bed after the show, since it was already pretty late. But I couldn't sleep. And... and I always wondered if everyone started acting differently after I went to bed. Which was stupid, I know, but... I went downstairs. Diane and Beth Ann were playing gin rummy.

Diane. Samantha! Why are you not in bed?

Beth Ann. We've got a budding insomniac in the house. Never hurts to start young...

Diane. You get up to bed right now and get some sleep. Or you come right over here and help us keep score.

Sam. I just couldn't sleep.

Diane. Well you come right over here, dear, right this minute. Have some of our pita chips.

Can I pour you a little bit of white wine, Sam?

Sam. Oh, I...

Beth Ann. Diane!

Diane. Oh, just a little bit. Just to taste.

Beth Ann. Absolutely not.

Diane. There's barely any left anyway.

Beth Ann. Excuse her, Sam. She's...

Sam. It's okay.

Diane. Did we finish all this ourselves? Good God. I didn't think we'd finished all this ourselves.

(Beat.)

Beth Ann. If you keep me waiting, Diane, I'm going to take it as a forfeit of your turn.

Diane. You're right, you're right, I can never focus on more than one thing at once. Or at least not lately. I'm such a...

(A silence as she focuses on her turn. Beth Ann smiles at Sam. Sam crunches noisily on the pita chips. Another lull.)

Sam. Where do you live, Diane?

Diane. Where? In New Jersey.

Sam. Oh, where?

Diane. In a little, it's a little township called Westwood. It's very pretty.

Sam. Oh. And how far away is that from...?

Diane. Oh, it's not far away. My husband works in the city, so we have to be...

Sam. Oh. Uh-huh.

Diane. And it's not as bad as all the comedians say, you know, about New Jersey.

Beth Ann. Your go, Diane.

Diane. Oh, forget our cards, Beth Ann. I can play cards with an old fogey like you any time. But I don't always get to talk with young people, with a young lady like Sam...

(Beat. A smile.)

Sam. It must be nice to live in New Jersey. So close to New York.

Diane. It is. It really is.

Beth Ann. I bet Sam imagined you living in some glorious treehouse, you know?

Diane. I'd love to live in a tree house. I'd love to live in a tree house.

Beth Ann. My father grew up on a farm, and—

Diane. Oh, but the things we've seen in New York! It's amazing. It's like being just, you know, just outside the center of the universe, the amazing things you can see.

Beth Ann. How difficult it must be. For the rest of us.

Diane. Oh hush, Beth Ann! You're so cynical. There's no need to be so cynical. I always used to say that when I had children, I'd raise them to be optimists. Warrior optimists. Warriors on the field of battle, fighting to the death to defend our right to keep our spirits up...

Beth Ann. Oh, I'm not as bad as all that, Diane. I just...

Diane. So listen carefully, Sam. I didn't have any children to tell this to, and my niece is sick of hearing it, but life is good. Life is very very good, when it comes down to it, don't let anyone tell you otherwise... There's always reason to keep your spirits up...

(Beat. Sam nods, smiles.)

We've seen so many things, going into the city. What did we see? We saw... We saw Hugh Jackman, in *The Boy from Oz*, and he was just... he was just... Spectacular. Spectacular. And I mean that truly literally. I have never seen anything like it. In my life.

Beth Ann. I heard about that.

Diane. It was... It was... What else did we see? We got to see Sir Ian McKellan, in *Richard III*, that was forever ago, and you probably don't know who he is, but...

Sam. Yeah, no, I know

Diane. That production gave me nightmares. For years. And that was, that must have been ten years ago now, that we saw that, but I'm not kidding that I had nightmares about

that play for *years*. It was so dramatic, the way they did it. What he did to those children, really, is what kept haunting me...

Beth Ann. I had no idea you were such a theater nut, Diane.

Diane. Oh, no, I am. I love it. What else did we...?

Beth Ann. It's always so boring to me, I'd rather see a movie.

Diane. Oh, but it's... You've got to see the good stuff. The good stuff is so, so... Well here. We went to see *Rent*, not too long after it first came out. And my... My niece and I have probably seen *Rent* eighteen times. No, I think we counted one time and we decided we'd seen it eighteen, nineteen times. Do you know what I'm talking about, Sam? Have you seen...?

Sam. No, my friend Katie went to see the movie but my mom didn't want me to go at the time.

Diane. Go. Go. You have to go. Get the movie, go see it on... I'll call your mother and tell her I said you needed to go. It's, it's...

Beth Ann. My girlfriend saw *Rent* and said it was good.

Diane. It's, it's... Oh, but I was saying, I think we went to see it maybe two times – maybe it was just after our first time – but maybe after two times – and I said to my husband, “You have to see this.” “You have to see this,” I said. And he sort of... “No, no, don't ask questions.” I told him, “You have to see this.” And so we went. We all drove into the city and we went to see it. And... And I think it changed him. I really think it changed him.

Beth Ann. Not Larry!

Diane. No, I'm not kidding, Beth Ann. I think he's a different man now.

Beth Ann. I was only kidding.

Diane. I really think it changed him. It just taught him to be more... open-minded, you know? Just... open. To, to, to anything, to people who are different from him. To people who are gay, or who might be, you know, sick, or who might just be... who might have different backgrounds or whatever. Because I don't think he ever really understood people like that before. I don't think he... it's not like he was some sort of awful... He's my husband, and I wouldn't have married someone who... But I really think it changed him. Opened him up, to a whole new... You know?

Sam. Yeah.

Diane. So I guess... Why am I saying all this?

Beth Ann. I don't know, Diane. Why are you saying all this?

Diane. No, I had a point, I wanted to say something to Sam.

Beth Ann. You wanted her to go see *Rent*.

Diane. No. I mean, yes, I do. But there was something else.

Sam. It's okay.

Diane. I guess I wanted to say that it's amazing. That however big of a world we live in, however many different lives there are going on around us, when it comes down to it, we all have the same... fight, you know? It's the same struggle for all of us.

Beth Ann. That's for sure.

Diane. You can be you, or you can be me, or you can be Beth Ann, or Sue, or any of us, really, or you can be the King of Persia, but you still have to get out of bed in the morning. You still have to make it through the day. And whoever you are, you still have to do that. You have to do just that.

(Beat.)

And you never can assume, you know? You never can assume, looking at someone, that you know their story, that you know what's going on with them.

Beth Ann. That's for sure.

(Beat.)

Diane. Well. I'm exhausted.

Beth Ann. You must be.

Diane. And I've just talked so much...

Beth Ann. You did.

Diane. What a mess I am...

Beth Ann. No, no...

Diane. No, I am, and it's fine. It's my... I'm a mess. A happy mess, most of the time. But a mess...

Beth Ann. No, no...

(Longer beat.)

Diane. What time is it?

Beth Ann. I don't know, it feels like

Sam. It's 1:56.

Diane. Oh, God.

Beth Ann. Is that clock on the stove right?

Diane. I don't know.

Beth Ann. Is that where you're seeing that, Sam? On the clock over the stove?

Sam. Yeah.

Beth Ann. That can't be right.

Diane. It must be. I'm exhausted.

Beth Ann. Let me find my...

Diane. If I don't get to bed I am going to be one unhappy camper tomorrow. I am going to turn into a pumpkin. I'm just exhausted.

Beth Ann. You're right, Sam. It's 1:57. You're totally right. God, it's late. I've got to drive home.

Diane. But I'm just so glad I got the chance to talk with you, Sam. You know? You've got such a wonderful future ahead of you.

Sam. Thanks.

Beth Ann. Goodnight, Diane.

Diane. Are you sure you want to...?

Beth Ann. Yeah, Bob doesn't sleep well when I'm not

Diane. Because there are extra blankets upstairs, and you could sleep on this couch. I'm sure he'll understand.

Beth Ann. No, no, I'll be fine. And I'm a grown-up now, I haven't slept on a couch since I was...

Diane. Oh, grown-up, shmown-up. Well, goodnight, dear.

Beth Ann. Goodnight, Diane. Goodnight, Sam.

Sam. Goodnight.

(Beth Ann goes. Long beat. Diane stretches, smiles sleepily at Sam. Walks over and kisses her on the forehead.)

Diane. Goodnight, dear. Thank you for listening to an old bat like me. See you in the morning.

Sam. Goodnight.

(Diane goes upstairs.)

Sam. I dreamed that I was climbing up into a tree house. And it was Diane's treehouse. And I didn't see her, but it was a huge tree house, with all these rooms, and I walked all through it and looked around for her. And I couldn't find her. And then I must have overslept, because when I woke up, she wasn't there anymore. She'd... left, I guess. Her bed was made, and the room still smelled like her, and there wasn't anything in it but this little carved stone owl. And I stood there in her room, and held the owl in my hand, until I heard Beth Ann pull up outside, and then I put the owl in my pocket, and decided that it would be my Diane. And I decided that it wasn't stealing, since I'd just give it back to her next year...

Molly and Martha and Beth Ann played a little bit that morning, just for fun. A parting session with Joshua. I went back to the empty house.

(A gesture of an attempt to play – only pantomime trombones, with the few people left – but mostly just a gesture.)

V.

(As she talks, Sam begins to arrange the objects – phone, bottle, owl – in a semi-circle at the front of the stage.)

Sam. Jess. And Diane. And Sue...

(Molly bursts in. She gives Sam a big hug.)

Molly. Oh, Sam, it's all over!
I can't believe...

(Beat. She looks off. Then she looks back at Sam and smiles.)

I feel like it should be said, Sam.
You are super cool.
I'm glad you came.

(Another beat. Sam smiles, looks down.)

Hey! Do you want to come swimming?

(Martha enters.)

Martha. You. You. You were going to leave me alone with those two / turtledoves.

Molly. Oh, I—

Martha. Oh! Sam – you're leaving today, aren't you? You've got a bus this afternoon?

Sam. Yeah.

Martha. Well! Make sure you don't leave without saying goodbye.
We're going to miss you, Sam.

(Molly points at Martha, nods. They go upstairs together, giggling. Sam picks up blueberries and a piece of cake, puts them in the line with the other objects.)

Sam. And Martha, and Molly...

VI.

(Then it's early afternoon. Beth Ann emerges, puts down her paper towels and Windex, and joins Sam at the edge of the semi-circle. They enjoy the quiet together for another moment, and Beth Ann looks at the objects, smiles at Sam.)

Beth Ann. So I guess that's it, isn't it?

Sam. I guess so.

Beth Ann. God, it goes so fast. Every year. It goes so fast.

Sam. It does.

(Beat.)

Beth Ann. What time is your bus?

Sam. Four, I think.

Beth Ann. Oh. So you've got some time.

Sam. Yeah, I guess so.

Beth Ann. Well, I'm not going to abandon you.

(She smiles at Sam. Beat.)

I'd invite you over to my house, you could just curl up with a book or something, but Danny's decided to get sick, so the whole house is on lock down, it's sort of a sick zone.

Sam. Oh, I'm sorry...

Beth Ann. And John-John. And we have a dog, too, Walter, who doesn't do very well with new people, so...

Sam. Oh, no, it's okay.

(Beat.)

Beth Ann. I tell you what. We've got a whole refrigerator of food left over there, and you and I can use this time to go through it. This happens every summer, and I feel like it always just gets thrown away. But this year we'll go through it all, and see what we can save, and maybe we can make ourselves a feast. Does that sound good?

Sam. That sounds good.

Beth Ann. Terrific. Well! Shall we?

Sam. Yes. Let's do it.

(They start to take things out of the fridge, and arrange them – on a table? on the floor? The sound of a marching band passing the house, playing. They look up and listen a bit. It gets louder, and then fades.)

(Beth Ann and Sam get plates for themselves and stand before the array.)

Beth Ann. Shall we say grace?

(Sam nods.)

Let us pray.
God bless these carrots,
and God bless and these celery sticks,
God bless and this ranch dressing.
and God bless these strawberries.
God bless this teriyaki sauce,
God bless this milk,
God bless these peach yogurt cups,
God bless this cottage cheese,
God bless all these *dairy products!*,
God bless this wheat germ,
God bless this egg,
God bless this butter,
God bless this little bit of leftover salad,
God bless this lemon half,
God bless this tomato,
God bless this onion.

(Beat. She looks at the onion.)

Even though this onion is nothing special.
I've probably held twenty-thousand onions in my hand,
and I'll probably hold twenty-thousand more,
and God knows this ugly little onion is nothing special.

And even though God has is probably sick and tired of onions.
He's probably looked at thirty-two trillion onions since last week,
and he'll be looking at ugly little onions like this one until the end of time,

which is a lot of onions to have to look at,
a *lot* of onions.

even so,
God bless this onion.

(Beat. She listens.)

It's raining, Sam. Can you hear it?

(Beat.)

God bless Sam,
and God bless me,
and God bless Bob, and Danny,

and God bless John-John, and this one, too
and God bless Molly, and Martha,
and Diane, and Sue...
and Joshua, I suppose...
God bless my mother and father,
and God bless Sam's mother and father,
and God bless our President, and guide him aright,
and God bless our freedom.

I'm sure you're tired of us, God,
of all us ugly little people
with all the tiny little things we need,
but be patient with us, God.

(Beat. The rain is getting harder.)

Listen to that, Sam...

(Beat.)

Send grace to us, and to all our loved ones,
and teach us to walk in the pathways of kindness and humility.
Teach us to be our own people –
servants to you, O God
but also our own people, each one of us –

and teach us to be free.

We are free when we don't even know it, Lord,
and we are confined when we think we are free.
Even when we cannot make our lives the way we want them, Lord, we are free.

In the morning, when I kissed my child, is that when I was free?
In the afternoon, when I closed the bedroom door, is that when I was free?
In the evening, and in the night, and in the morning, again – is that it? Is that when I was free?
And am I free now, God, in offering my praise to you?

To you, God, to whom all praise is due, I offer thanks.

Amen.

Sam. Amen.

(Beat. They eat a little.)

Beth Ann. Can you smell that, Sam?

Sam. What?

Beth Ann. Smell that. That's the rain...

(They listen for a while. Then it's afternoon.)

(Beth Ann goes. Sam, alone onstage, takes the onion and looks at it. She adds it to the line of objects.)

Sam. And Beth Ann.

VII.

(Sam alone, with trombone.)

Sam. I start high school this year. I'm not sure what it's going to be like. Katie will be there with me but she... We don't hang out as much any more. It's not the school where my brother went. I don't know any of the teachers. I think... I'm excited.

(Beat.)

I think... I know a lot now. I'm pretty young, I know that. But I know a lot, I think. My brother agrees. He tells me so.

(Beat.)

And then there's you. I don't know you yet. But all of this... I think it's for you.

(She looks at us, smiles, and goes.)

(End.)