Spring 5-19-2017

Night Launch

Cavan Hallman
University of New Orleans, cavanhallman@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.uno.edu/td
Part of the Playwriting Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/2326

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Dissertations and Theses at ScholarWorks@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. The author is solely responsible for ensuring compliance with copyright. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.
Night Launch

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
In
Creative Writing
Playwriting

by

Cavan Hallman

B.A. Columbia College Chicago, 2005

May, 2017
Night Launch

Cast of Characters

Brenda Jo....... 10 through 33, a daughter looking for answers
Rosie.............. 32 through 55, her mother
Lou Ann......... 8 through 31, Brenda Jo's sister
Paul................ 33 through 56, Brenda and Lou's father

Time

Between 1966 and 1989

Setting

Florida's Space Coast
And the Mind, the theatrical place from which a character may address the audience

Act One: a ground-floor condo in Cocoa Beach
Act Two: the banks of the Indian River, across from the rocket and shuttle launch pad in Cape Canaveral

Production Notes

This is a memory play. All soliloquies should be treated accordingly. Act Two, Scene Four is not a soliloquy.

The illusion in Act One, Scene Two is known as "Asrah levitation."

"Wild Thing" by the Troggs has not been licensed. That is up to the individual production. If you choose to use an alternate song, I would suggest another top hit from the summer of 1966.

A note on casting: I imagine each character being played by a single performer, through a range of ages. It might be possible to approach this differently.

For your consideration

ACT ONE

THE MIND

1989.

Brenda stands alone in the near dark, an old transistor radio to her ear.

Her gaze is downcast, perhaps at a figure that cannot be seen.

BRENDA

T minus 10... 9... 8... 7...

(soliloquy)

There’s some debate about whether or not my son’s Jewish. It’s not a locker room thing, circumcision, all that... which did happen.

It’s the thing about blood. Mothers, and mothers’ mothers and their blood because you can always tell who your mother is at least, birth, that’s a thing -- and so Jewish people trace their history through blood. Through mothers. It seems like a very Old Testament kind of thing: blood.

I haven’t read anything from the Old Testament since, probably fifth or sixth grade, but I think blood was big. Smiting. Blood. Rage.

Fury and blood.

Sodom and Gomorrah is one I remember. It’s like the Greek myth too, with the musician who goes down to hell to get his girlfriend, but he’s not allowed to turn around or she’ll die, and -- I wonder which came first, I always wonder which one came first; what’s the causal relationship? -- and in the Old Testament Sodom’s wife, Gomorrah, she turns around when they’re being cast out of the city for doing something that made God angry -- God’s always angry about some shit -- and Gomorrah turns around and BOOM! She’s a pillar of salt. And of course that’s very memorable, but it’s also kind of complicated when you think about how valuable salt was 4,000 or 10,000 years ago. The word “salary” comes from “salt.” It was worth more than gold. So it’s a really complicated thing because Sodom just became the richest man in the... tribe? I don’t know.

The city’s gone.
But he’s rich.

But his wife’s dead.

There are some very intense contradictions in that situation.

And I remember the plagues, and the Red Sea parted.

And I remember the burning bush that told Joseph he should get married to the Virgin Mary.

And I remember Simon too, who was this mind-blowing magician that everyone thought was the human embodiment of God, a great big great man and he could even make things fly -- *he* could fly.

I don’t remember much. The spectacles.

People want to know if my son’s Jewish, and I can’t say.

I don’t know.

I’m not Jewish. I went to Catholic school. My Dad’s Catholic. His mom was born in a two-room shack on the edge of a peat bog. Irish. Catholic. I don’t know a damn thing about being Jewish.

But some kids at Liam’s school all of a sudden think he’s Jewish -- they’re not beating him up about it or shoving him in a toilet, that sort of thing. They’re nice kids, ten, nine, eight, I don’t know how old. I don’t think there’s any judgement involved in it at all, really. I think they’re just curious.

They’re debating whether or not Liam’s Jewish because his great-grandmother, my other grandma, not the one from the peat bog -- God, that makes her sound like a monster -- but the other grandma of mine, great-grandma of his, was Jewish.

My mother was born Jewish. In New York City. And her family owned a candy shop that was a front for the Jewish mob, and all that’s interesting stuff and I don’t blame them or Liam for wanting to know more about all of it -- *I want to know too* -- but we’re never gonna know more about it, and just because they were Jewish doesn’t mean they were any more religious than me, who’s a Catholic, but I don’t think I’m really a Christian even, I’m just a Catholic. And my Mom converted from Judaism to Catholicism anyway to marry my very Irish very Catholic dad, but somehow these kids at Liam’s school want to know because mothers and mothers and mothers... And blood.
I don’t think I’d mind being Jewish.

All the best magic was in the old books, the Old Testament.

Any birthday party magician can change a clear liquid to a dark one. Water to wine.

I want cruise ship magic. I want Las Vegas magic.

Torah magic.

A light layer of smoke creeps on the stage.

BRENDA

And the smoke rolls in and I ask myself and you ask yourself and we all have to ask ourselves: is this a memory, or is this an illusion, or is this whole place about to burn down to the fucking ground?
Lights up on a Cocoa Beach, FL condo.

There’s an upper level with a large dining table. The dining table is separated from the kitchen by a long L-shaped counter.

Stairs lead down to the lower level family room. Couches. Coffee table. Record player. Television. Imagine at the fourth wall: large sliding glass doors that lead directly to the beach, less than 100 yards away. The ocean is clearly a presence for them.

A psychedelic guitar riff plays quietly.

Brenda watches television, not too intently, as Rosie hustles around the kitchen preparing a big meal.

A little winded, Rosie stops at the dining table and pours herself a tall glass of water from a clear pitcher. She drinks.

BRENDA

How are the rolls looking?

ROOSIE

Hot up there.

The guitar riff continues - it’s from the television.

VOICE (TELEVISION)

“Hello, humans. I said, ‘Hello, humans!’”

ROOSIE

What is this garbage?

BRENDA

Macy’s parade.
ROSIE
Macy’s parade. Why are they dressed like that?

BRENDA
It’s “Planet of the Apes.”

ROSIE
Ridiculous. They only do this to sell toys.

BRENDA
I’m too old for toys and I think it’s outstanding.

ROSIE
I hate that music. Turn it off.

BRENDA
I’m watching.

ROSIE
When you’re in college you can watch whatever you want.

BRENDA
If I get in. Are they charred?

ROSIE
The rolls are fine.

BRENDA
Of course they are.

ROSIE
You want me to check the oven? I’ll check the oven.

Rosie disappears to a back corner of the kitchen.

ROSIE (O.S.)
I checked the oven. Rolls. Fine.

BRENDA
There’s enough smoke for a laser-light show. I’ll bet it’s Lou.

ROSIE
She’s not smoking in my house.
BRENDA
She’s smoking *dope* in your house.

ROSIE
No one does drugs in my house.

BRENDA
*Everyone* does drugs in your house.

ROSIE
Really? What drugs are you doing?

BRENDA
I don’t do drugs, Mom.

ROSIE
C’mon. C’mon, “Planet of the Apes.” You said *everyone* is doing drugs, so please tell me the drugs that you’re doing. I want to know. Maybe I’m doing drugs too. *Everyone, everyone’s* doing drugs. Jimmy’s doing drugs?

BRENDA
That one’s obvious. You don’t go brain dead like that of natural causes. I mean, c’mon. He’s related to me and he’s a total dummy. One answer: drugs.

ROSIE
Don’t be mean.

BRENDA
Drugs.

ROSIE
He’s twelve-years old.

BRENDA
Look out on the beach. He’s not the only one. Where is Lil’ Jimmy?

ROSIE
He’s playing out on the street.

BRENDA
Just a kid “out on the streets.” See what I mean?

ROSIE
*What do* you mean?
BRENDA
I mean drugs.

ROSIE
If the whole house is on drugs, which ones am I supposed to be on?

BRENDA
Haven’t you ever heard of Mother’s Little Helper?

ROSIE
Is it like Hamburger Helper?

BRENDA
Exactly the same.

ROSIE
Disgusting stuff. My mother would tar and feather me if she caught me cooking that garbage for her grandchildren.

BRENDA
Grandma’s dead.

ROSIE
She’d find a way. Set the table.

BRENDA
My foot, Mom.

ROSIE
Your foot, nothing. And why are you walking around without the boot?

BRENDA
The boot hurts more than it helps.

ROSIE
How do you know?

BRENDA
Because it’s my foot.

ROSIE
When did you get your doctor’s degree? When?
BRENDA
Over the weekend. You know when I was supposed to be in St. Pete with Sarah Higgenbootham and her family? Well we really went down to Mexico and got quickie medical licenses. I’m an orthopedist, Sarah’s a dentist, and her parents just drank margaritas the whole time and had three-ways with sweaty Mexican boys.

ROSIE
Where a girl gets these kind of ideas I will never know.

BRENDA
“Cosmo,” Mom. “Cosmo.”

ROSIE
Was that the dog on the Jetsons?

BRENDA
It’s a women’s magazine. I’ll loan one to you sometime.

ROSIE
I know everything I need to know about being a woman. Put on the boot. Set the table.

BRENDA
Which one? Boot or table?

ROSIE
Both. Figure it out. If that foot grows back wrong you’ll never let me live it down.

BRENDA
I’m not a lizard. It’s not gonna grow back. I still have a foot.

ROSIE
Good. Then use it and set the table.

Brenda straps a walking boot onto her foot. A phone rings offstage and Rosie goes to answer it.

The phone stops ringing.

Brenda grabs a glass and pours from the water pitcher. The liquid filling her glass is somehow a dark red.
She takes her glass to the couch and throws her foot up on the coffee table again.

After a moment...

ROSIE (O.S.)

Set the table, Brenda.

Lou, enters, plops down next to Brenda.

LOU

When’s dinner?

BRENDA

Whenever you finish setting the table.

LOU

Try and make me.

Brenda easily grabs Lou’s arm and twists it. Pain.

LOU

Uncle, uncle, uncle, uncle, uncle, uncle---

Brenda finally lets go.

LOU

Jeez, I said uncle about a million times.

I was waiting until you meant it.

BRENDA

LOU

Who’s Mom on the phone with?

BRENDA

Do I look like I can hear her?

LOU

No, jeez. Who do you think it is?

BRENDA

I don’t know!
LOU

Is dinner soon?

BRENDA

Why are you asking me? I’m not cooking.

LOU

I’m asking because you think you know the answer to everything. Do you think she’ll be on the phone a while?

BRENDA

Are you asking all of these stupid questions and just generally not getting your life together because you’re high? Again?

LOU

Of course not.

BRENDA

You say “of course not” but I know you have a lid of marijuana in the back left corner of your closet.

LOU

That’s not true.

BRENDA

It smells so strong that I don’t know who’s more of an idiot, you for keeping it there or Mom and Dad for not finding it.

LOU

They don’t go through my stuff.

BRENDA

They go through mine.

LOU

Because you’re bad.

BRENDA

You’re the one bringing giant quantities of dope into the house, but I’m the bad one?

LOU

Yeah.
Really?

Yeah. Really.

(shift)

Listen, I have to tell you something pretty important, but you have to promise to keep it a secret.

Fine. What is it?

Promise to keep a secret.

I promise.

No, really, really, promise.

I promise; I said I promise. What do you want from me?

I want you to mean it.

(beat)

Promise you’ll keep a secret.

I promise. I’ll keep your secret.

I think I’m pregnant.

Oh shit. Why do you think that?

Because I went to the doctor and he said I’m pregnant.

Oh shit.
It's a miracle.

BRENDA

What does that mean?

LOU

It's a miracle.

(beat)

Miracles. You went to Our Savior’s too.

BRENDA

Yeah, but I hated it. So did you.

LOU

There isn’t a father.

BRENDA

He already split? That didn’t take long. I told you Lucky was bad news.

LOU

This isn’t Lucky’s baby.

BRENDA

Oh shit.

LOU

It’s no man’s. It’s a gift from God.

BRENDA

Oh shit.

LOU

You keep saying that, but this is a good thing. It’s the best thing. You don’t see a miracle and say “Oh shit.”

Brenda looks quizzically at Lou. A take. A double take. And then uproarious laughter.

BRENDA

Oh man... So, you totally got me this time. That was good.

LOU

You’ll keep it a secret?
BRENDA
Obviously. You think I’m gonna let anyone know my little sister pulled one over on me like that? And if you try and tell anyone I’ll say you’re a liar and I’ll beat the shit out of you.

LOU
I thought you’d take me seriously.

BRENDA
I did. And then we had a good laugh. Now set the table.

LOU
Okay.

Lou slowly moves away, dispirited. She sets the table.

LOU
Just... keep it secret, okay? Don’t tell Dad. I had to fake his signature at the doctor’s.

BRENDA
You really saw a doctor?

LOU
Yeah. Jenny knows one down in Satellite Beach.

Jenny’s... A doctor who does--?

LOU
Yeah.

BRENDA
Are you going to--?

LOU
No. Of course not. It’s my miracle baby.

BRENDA
Has Jenny had a--?

LOU
You can’t tell anyone.

BRENDA
About you or Jenny?
Either.

BRENDA

If this is real...

(beat)

I don’t know how to help you.

LOU

I don’t need your help. That’s the beauty of it. This is God’s baby. And when he’s born he
won’t hold it against you for not believing. God’s cool like that. Our baby will be too.

(pause)

Plus, I know you broke your foot riding on the beach on David’s motorcycle and not
slipping on the pool deck at Dina Martino’s after-prom-party and if you tell Mom or Dad
anything about me then I spill the beans about you too.

BRENDA

Right. There it is. Listen, something to take seriously, Lou: if you are pregnant, which I
don’t think you are, then you really shouldn’t be smoking dope. It’s not good for the
“baby.”

LOU

I’m not smoking anything.

BRENDA

Then what the hell is all this?

They take a moment to assess the situation.

LOU AND BRENDA

Mom’s rolls.

BRENDA

Mom!

LOU

Mom!

MOM!

LOU AND BRENDA

I’m coming, I’m coming.

ROSIE (O.S.)
Rosie runs in, in a huff.

ROSIE
I’m here, I’m here. Well, I guess your father won’t be joining us for dinner.

LOU
It’s Thanksgiving.

BRENDA
What’s he doing?

ROSIE
He said it was classified.

BRENDA
Just because someone wants to keep something a secret doesn’t mean it’s classified.

ROSIE
I don’t even know what that’s supposed to mean. Were those words?

LOU
BJ thinks she’s about the smartest thing on the planet.

ROSIE
That’s what keeps getting you into fights at school, Brenda Jo. You can practice cutting that attitude out at home too, and I’ll bet those bullies will be leaving you alone in no time. You bring it on yourself.

BRENDA
Yeah. I get black eyes and bruises because I want them. From the bullies. At school.

ROSIE
And what the heck are you drinking, young lady?

Brenda looks down at the glass of wine in her hand.

BRENDA
Uh...

ROSIE
Yes?
It’s Thanksgiving.

BRENDA

You’re seventeen.

ROSIE

Mom, the rolls.

LOU

Oh jeez.

ROSIE

She runs into the back corner of the kitchen, out of sight.

ROSIE

Ah, ah, ah, damn... someone go and get Jimmy to come in. It’s almost time for dinner.

BRENDA

Lou?

Brenda points at her boot.

LOU

I hate you.

BRENDA

How kind, your holiness.

LOU

(walking off)

I’m going to find Jimmy.

BRENDA

You do that.

Brenda skulks off in the opposite direction.

Rosie emerges with a piping hot pan, talking to herself.

16
ROSIE

They’re not too bad. (beat)
They’re going to be fine. (sniffing)
I think these are going to be delicious. (beat)
Perfect.
I loved taking things apart when I was young, of course. But I always put them back together.

That’s an engineer. You don’t take it apart just to... mess, messy... thing. I want it to be better. To make it better. Engineers make.

You just wanna look at the pieces? That’s not engineering. That’s math.

I hate mathematicians.

No imagination. Earthbound. They’re penguins, great, cute... Engineers are eagles. We can fucking fly.

A mathematician? Math guys, they... There’s more computational power in a middle schooler’s graphing calculator than there was in the entire Apollo command module. You can pick one up in aisle eleven at your local Wal-Mart.

Wal-Mart: where genius lives.

Math. Mathematicians... MATH!
SCENE TWO - 1983

Rosie sits, a much more serene energy than Brenda who is wired, frantic almost.

ROSIE
It's not as if David was supporting you.

BRENDA
I don’t need money.

ROSIE
Everyone needs money.

BRENDA
Sure.

ROSIE
Alimony. Child support. You should get it all. Take it all. I’ve read about it.

BRENDA
Where?

ROSIE
The usual places.

BRENDA
You are not helping.

ROSIE
You can’t afford to not think about your future. Liam’s future.

BRENDA
I don’t need to be told how wrong I’m doing it, Mom.

ROSIE
Doing what?

BRENDA
I don’t know... life. I’m fucking tired.

ROSIE
Language, Brenda Jo.
BRENDA
I’m getting divorced. If there’s a time I should get a pass, it’s now.

ROSIE
It’s always the right time to be a lady.

BRENDA
Or Jimmy. Never heard you give him a hard time about--

ROSIE
Boys are different.

BRENDA
They shouldn’t be.

ROSIE
They are.

BRENDA
We’re all your kids. You shouldn’t treat us differently.

ROSIE
Why not? You’re different kids.

BRENDA
I’m gonna lose my shit!

ROSIE
No. Now’s the time to be strong. For yourself. For your son. This is your chance to be better.

BRENDA
Better than what?

ROSIE
Better than before.

BRENDA
Am I doing that bad?

ROSIE
You’re getting divorced. So maybe. Yes.
Brenda gives her mother a look so sharp it’s shocking that it doesn’t kill her.

BRENDA

Damn it, I’m tired.

ROSIE

So lay down.

BRENDA

He ruined my body.

ROSIE

David hit you?

BRENDA

God no. I would’ve kicked his scrawny little ass. Only a man who can’t fight would grow a mustache like that, ugh he’s disgusting. Ugh! Did he hit me... I bet Lou could punch harder than him. I know it. I’ve never seen him throw a punch, but I know it.

ROSIE

You girls were always so rough.

BRENDA

God knows where we learned it. Maybe it was coded right into our DNA.

ROSIE

I hate all that confusing science talk.

BRENDA

You shouldn’t have married an engineer.

ROSIE

Well, that is what it is.

BRENDA

Shouldn’t have raised one either.

ROSIE

Like I had a choice?

BRENDA

You saying I would’ve been me no matter what?
ROSIE
It’s true.

BRENDA
When did you decide that though? When did you give up?

ROSIE
Pshaw.

BRENDA
Stuff like that makes you sound old. Like Grandma. You sound more like her all the time.

ROSIE
And one day you’ll sound like me. Or like your father.

BRENDA
Kill me now.

ROSIE
Are you mad at David or at me?

BRENDA
I’m mad at the world.

ROSIE
What did he do to you?

BRENDA
He fucking decided to divorce me.

ROSIE
Weren’t you unhappy too?

BRENDA
What does it matter? It still fucking hurts.

ROSIE
And you said... He hurt you?

BRENDA
Huh?
Your body. You said he ruined--

I gave him a child.

(beat)

My tits... my... all of it. I was hot, Mom. I was really, really hot. And he ruined it. And I’m 27 and I’m screwed.

(mutter)

I wish I could get screwed. Is the Boardwalk still a place? A safe bet?

You love Liam.

Of course I love Liam. I also loved my body. I had it for a lot longer than I’ve had him. I’m not saying I would trade one for the other, but I’m not saying I wouldn’t.

(beat)

I’d have to think about it.

(beat)

(a mischievous grin)

I meant it about the Boardwalk.

Like I would know what happens down that way.

You should check it out. I’m sure there’s some crusty old fisherman out there who’d like to... taste your cooking.

Why does he have to be crusty?

He doesn’t have to be. But I’ve got a good feeling about what we’re working with.

You’ll have better luck.

But I always hated surfers. Cocoa Beach was wasted on me.

Let me make you something to eat.
BRENDA
I’m not hungry.

ROSIE
When’s the last time you ate?

BRENDA
I don’t know.

ROSIE
When’s the last time Liam ate?

BRENDA
He’s fine. Really.

ROSIE
I’ll cook something up all the same.

The sound of a door opening off.

LOU (O.S.)
She didn’t leave yet, did she?

ROSIE
(yelling)
Your sister’s down here.

LOU (O.S.)
I’ll be there in sec.
(beat)
Little Lee-Lee, give your Auntie and cousin a couple big old hugs!

BRENDA
(quiet)
How is she?

ROSIE
What do you mean?

BRENDA
Don’t play dumb. How is she? Is it bad?

ROSIE
You’re the one I’m worried about, dear.

24
BRENDA
Mom, I swear, no matter how bad it gets I can’t be... is she getting help? Professional help?

ROSIE
Your sister’s doing just fine. I’ll cook you up something.

Rosie exits back into the kitchen.

Brenda waits, staring out at the beach.

Lou bursts in attacking Brenda with affection.

BRENDA
Hi.

LOU
Hi? No. How are you? Oh my, how are you my dear beautiful sister?

I’m fine. Are you okay?

BRENDA
Fantastic. Better than I’ve felt in years.

Clearly. Are you on something?

LOU
I don’t do drugs anymore, Brenda.

I mean, like... prescription stuff?

LOU
I’m not on anything. But lets talk about... How are you?

BRENDA
I’m shitty. I just drove twenty hours straight from New York and I think I probably cried from Exit 250 all the way to “Why don’t I just end it.” Only had to pee three times. Probably because I heard “Every Breath You Take “ over and over again. Feeling like you’re being followed is a great motivator.

(beat)

Liam... I don’t know how he’s not more freaked out. He was a champ. I’m a mess.
Our kids are stronger than us.

Maybe.

That’s a good thing.

Food’s ready in five!

What’s going on with you? Really?

Nothing. I just came from church. If I have a glow or something. It’s always... it’s just amazing to see the way that Anthony takes to it. His training. It’s just like in “Luke."

Right.

Do you remember the story?

No.

Jesus is a boy--

Still? Have they checked?

And he gets lost from his parents and they find him in the temple. And he’s wise. And Anthony’s just like that too. It’s that kind of... it just... it’s beautiful. He gets it. He is it.

It’s Thursday, Lou. You go to church most Thursdays?
LOU
We only go on days that end in “y.”
   (smiling)
Not too much.

BRENDA
   (beat)
Ummm... I don’t... did you...? Are you picking Anthony up there later? From Our Saviours?

LOU
No. I left him up in the guest room. With Liam.

BRENDA
Great. That’s great.

LOU
You know, after that long car ride, Liam really shouldn’t be pent up like that. They could go down to the beach and we could keep talking, just us girls.

BRENDA
Liam’s four. He shouldn’t be on the beach alone.

LOU
Anthony can go with him.

BRENDA
I... I don’t think so.

Lou touches Brenda in the most gentle way possible.

LOU
You look so tired.

BRENDA
I am.

LOU
Why don’t you lay down?

BRENDA
I don’t think I could sleep.
LOU
That’s okay. But if you close your eyes long enough, Mom won’t know the difference and you can avoid getting force-fed lunch.

BRENDA
But “I need to eat.”

LOU
Lay down.

Brenda lays down on the couch. Lou hums -- a cross between a hymn and a lullaby -- as she covers her sister with a blanket.

Lou caresses Brenda, trying to hum her to sleep.

Slowly, Brenda’s body begins to rise into the air, levitating.

Brenda rises, rising, rises as Lou continues to quietly sing.

ROSIE (O.S.)
Food’s ready!

Lou reaches up, pulls down at the blanket covering Brenda and: poof. Vanished.

The lights go to black, but for a spotlight in a corner. Brenda is there, waiting.
SCENE THREE - 1967

BRENDA
(incredibly hushed)
Hurry....... Hurry!

Brenda waits more.

Lou rushes into the narrow shaft of light. They cram close together, out of necessity, not affection.

Brenda and Lou stand in silence, both catching their breath. Lou is loaded down with pearls that are too long for her, a dress that’s too big, maybe some weird makeup -- a child who has been playing dress up.

The breathing slows, but their anticipation rises. They bolt straight, a reaction to a sound we cannot hear.

BRENDA
Shit!

LOU
That’s a bad word!

BRENDA
Quiet!

LOU
You be quiet!

BRENDA
Seriously, keep your mouth shut unless you wanna get beat to hell.

LOU
Stop cursing!

BRENDA
“Hell” isn’t a curse. They say it in church all the time.
LOU
They don’t say it like you just said it.

BRENDA
Well... when you’re twelve you can curse all you want too.

LOU
There’s no big difference, being ten from twelve.

BRENDA
Yeah, there is. It’s pretty much the biggest difference ever. There aren’t even any girls in your class who wear a bra.

You don’t wear a bra.

BRENDA
So. Deedee does and she’s in my class and I saw her bra in gym and she’s twelve and so am I, so I’m a lot more grown up than you are so you better listen to me when I tell you to shut the hell up.

LOU
You shut up.

Brenda punches Lou in the arm.

Lou punches Brenda back.

Brenda punches again, damn hard.

LOU
Ow!

Brenda puts an adamant shushing finger to her mouth.

Lou shakes her head in dismay.

LOU
(mouthing, silent)

(Ow!)

They listen to whatever is happening outside the closet, somewhere between curious and worried.

30
Lou fiddles with the string of pearls, clacking them like prayer beads.

Brenda places a calmer silencing hand over Lou’s noisy nervous clacking.

LOU

Sorry.

They listen again.

They hear something strange.

LOU

What’s that?

BRENDA

Bet you’re glad I’m twelve now. Looks like ten year-olds don’t have all the answers.

LOU

I know what it is.

BRENDA

Prove it.

LOU

You’re not the only smart one.

BRENDA

Ha!

LOU

Ssssh!

Brenda nods, resigned to the fact that Lou’s right: quiet.

LOU

Do you think those are good sounds or bad sounds?

BRENDA

I can’t tell.
Me either. I’m sorry I lied.

BRENDA

It’s okay.

LOU

I heard Father Luke make sounds like that once, behind his office door, and then Mrs. McCutchen came out and her face was all red.

BRENDA

Was she crying?

LOU

No. Just all red. I don’t know. It was different a little.

They listen.

BRENDA

If it sounded like that in his office they were definitely bad sounds. Father Luke’s an asshole.

LOU

Don’t you dare say that!

BRENDA

Father Luke’s an asshole; Father John’s an asshole, and all the nuns are assholes too. Anyone who likes church that much is an asshole.

Lou drops to her knees and prays.

BRENDA

Get off me. What the shit are you doing?

LOU

I guess I’m being an asshole.

Brenda’s jaw drops with shock, hearing the word from her little sister.

Lou realizes what she’s said, and she decides to be proud, grown-up, about it.
Brenda punches Lou in the shoulder. Lou
punches Brenda in the leg. Both pull back their
fists at the same time, a standoff.

Lou points a warning finger at Brenda before she
warily resumes praying.

Eyes closed, silent prayer.

Lou gets off her knees.

LOU
God forgives you.

BRENDA
How do you know?

LOU
It’s his job!

BRENDA
You’re such a dummy. Jesus forgives people. God punishes people and turns them into
stuff.

LOU

BRENDA
And he talked to you?

LOU
All the time.

BRENDA
You’re so stupid.

LOU
I’ll bet you’re just jealous because he doesn’t talk to you.

BRENDA
The day I’m jealous of you is the day I take a long walk off a short pier.
That doesn’t make sense.

Think about it.

Pause.

If you took a long walk then you’d just end up in the ocean.

Okay. I get it.

Brenda and Lou both bolt to attention -- high alert, fear.

That’s definitely a bad sound.

Sssh, I’m listening.

They both listen quietly to the unheard “bad” sounds.

Lock the door.

It doesn’t lock, dummy. It’s a closet.

If we could lock it then we’d be safe.

No we wouldn’t.

Tell me it’ll be okay, Brenda. Please tell me it’ll be okay.

I’d be lying.

I don’t care. Tell me.
BRENDA
You wouldn’t believe me.

LOU
I would. I would.

BRENDA
(beat)
I can’t do it.

Pause.

LOU
Was that the door?

I don’t know.

BRENDA
Hold onto me, Brenda.

LOU
Ssssh.

BRENDA
Please.

LOU
Brenda takes hold of Lou. They wait. They listen.

ROSIE (O.S.)
You can come out now, girls.

LOU
She knows. They know. She knows we’re in here.

BRENDA
Shit.

Lou gives Brenda an admonishing hit.

ROSIE (O.S.)
It’s safe to come out now.
As Lou exits the closet, escaping into the complete darkness, Brenda snaggs an earring off of Lou.

LOU (O.S.)

Mom, what’s wrong with you?

ROSIE (O.S.)

I’ll be okay.

LOU (O.S.)

What happened to you?

ROSIE (O.S.)

I’ll be okay. Let me make you a snack.

(beat)

Brenda? Brenda Jo?
THE MIND

Brenda holds out the earring for the audience to see. During the following she executes graceful hand theatrics.

BRENDA
(soliloquy)
A brief history of the transistor radio.

Most engineers couldn’t give a shit about history. How was it made? How do you make it better? How do you move one step closer to making the present feel like we’re living in the future?

The transistor changed the world.

With a flourish the stolen earring has transformed to a transistor.

BRENDA
(soliloquy)
No vacuum tubes, no giant batteries (the nine-volt was invented for the portable transistor radio) -- and now you could take music, news, a connection to the world, take it anywhere, in your pocket -- and radio still meant something.

And the world keeps moving faster and faster, more circuitry, less space, more science, less understanding, more information, more, more, more, smaller, smaller, smaller, and smaller.

All the power in the smallest things. The largest amount of money shoved into the smallest number of hands. Hydrogen. The smallest atom. Split it. Make it smaller and it can murder a million people. Look at the details. Pay close attention.

With another flourish the transistor has disappeared completely.

BRENDA
(soliloquy)
I’m starting to think that science is the human brain tricking itself into thinking it knows more than it really does.

Magic is just tricking the brain into thinking it knows less.

And somewhere in between are all of us. Regular people. Idiots.
SCENE FOUR - 1986

Lights up on the condo, partially emptied, pictures off the walls, etc. Rosie picks through boxes.

Brenda takes a framed picture off a table.

BRENDA
I haven’t seen this one in a long, long time.

ROSIE
Think I put that away twenty years ago.

BRENDA
That’s not possible. It was still up in the hall when I graduated high school.

ROSIE
Close enough.

BRENDA
Our ten year reunion was last year.

ROSIE
It’s close. You’ll see. Where’d you find the picture?

BRENDA
Attic. Dad was a good looking guy. God, I hate even hearing that come out of my fucking mouth.

ROSIE
Language, Brenda Jo.

BRENDA
He looks like Frank Sinatra.

ROSIE
Everyone looked like Frank Sinatra then. Put on a suit. Comb your hair. There it is. You’re ready for the radio.

BRENDA
He looks like movie Frank Sinatra.
ROSIE

Why does it matter?

BRENDA

Because I don’t see him... like that. I don’t ever think of Dad as being attractive... to other people.

ROSIE

Well he was to me.

BRENDA

The whole time?

ROSIE

(pause)

No. Not the whole time.

(beat)

But, I guess he’s still attractive to someone.

BRENDA

Too many someones.

(beat)

Whores. Him and her and all of them. And I’m not sorry about my language.

ROSIE

You don’t have to be. And I left him.

BRENDA

Because he deserved it and he’s a whore and that new bitch from wherever is a whore too.

ROSIE

Alright, that’s enough.

BRENDA

It isn’t. It’s not your fault. It’s his! He spent twenty years fucking around on you.

ROSIE

At least.
BRENDA
It's his fault and everyone needs to know it. You don’t have to be bigger than him and hide the truth from Aunt Dotty or the cousins or anyone. I fucking hate the shit out of him and it’s his fault, Mom, not yours.

ROSIE
And you have some of the responsibility too, I suppose.

What?

BRENDA
I never told you to leave him. I should’ve. But I didn’t.

ROSIE
Not in so many words, dear, but when you gave me that “Cosmopolitan” magazine, that was the first time I ever thought, you know, it occurred to me that maybe I was allowed to leave your father. I never would have done that without you.

BRENDA
I don’t even remember--

ROSIE
Twelve years ago. You were a senior in high school.

BRENDA
That’s crazy.

ROSIE
I was thinking about getting a job.

BRENDA
The shoe store.

ROSIE
I loved that shoe store. Before that the only people I ever saw were my children--

BRENDA
And we were awful.
ROSIE
(with a smile)

-- or people from church.

Or Dad.

And I didn’t see him much.

“Classified.”

What bullshit.

Mom!

What?

BRENDA
I’ve never... I’ve never heard you swear before.

ROSIE
I’m 53 years old, Brenda. You’re thirty. We can all grow up a little.

BRENDA
I’m not upset, I’m just surprised.

ROSIE
I’m 53. I’m moving into my own apartment. I’m getting a divorce. I can swear every now and then if I want to.

(beat)

I’m getting a divorce.

She gets a little teary for a moment. Restraint.

Brenda reaches out and grabs her mother’s hand.

BRENDA

Happy tears or sad?
ROSIE

Yes.

They sit in quiet for a moment.

ROSIE

I loved that shoe department. It was a nice, clean mall.

BRENDA

It had a Piccadilly.

ROSIE

Oh, we have to go back to Piccadilly one more time before it closes.

BRENDA

And a movie.

ROSIE

I’ve seen everything I want to see.

BRENDA

Does that matter?

ROSIE

My new job doesn’t start until next week.

BRENDA

My treat.

ROSIE

If you insist.

(beat)

I’ll miss that mall. I still don’t understand why they’re tearing it down.

BRENDA

Because it’s not good enough. Piccadilly: great. Movies: great. A lot of the other stuff: not so great.

ROSIE

Dillard’s was a fine store.
BRENDA
When you started it was. And you were really good at selling shoes and you felt comfortable there, but being comfortable doesn’t mean something’s right. The new mall in Melbourne is so much better.

ROSIE
Who wants to drive to Melbourne?

BRENDA
The people who don’t want to get stabbed outside of Piccadilly.

ROSIE
No one got stabbed.

BRENDA
They absolutely did. It made the news in New York.

ROSIE
That’s ridiculous. People get stabbed in New York all the time. What do they care about if someone gets stabbed in Florida?

BRENDA
It’s the news. They care about all the stabbings. And all the dead babies.

Pause.

ROSIE
If you’re trying to be funny, then please stop.

What?

ROSIE
(beat)
It’s not a joking matter.

BRENDA
Shit.

ROSIE
And just because we decided that we’re both adults, it doesn’t mean you can’t be polite to your mother. Language.
BRENDA
Me be polite? You’re the one who just accused me of destroying our family.

ROSIE
I never said that!

BRENDA
If I’m responsible for--

ROSIE
I said that you have some of the responsibility. That’s true. It’s true. I’m telling you when you gave me that “Cosmopolitan”--

BRENDA
It’s just called “Cosmo,” mom.

ROSIE
Okay. But when you gave me the magazine I read about it and I read about women moving into the workforce, and a lot of them, a lot of them were divorced. And they were okay. They said they were okay, and happy, and that their families still loved them, and that was when I realized that one day I might… it might be okay for me to get a divorce too. It was very… it was a very new thing for me to consider. I had never… that just wasn’t a possibility. I was married. I was a wife. What else did I know?

BRENDA
You knew that you had a terrible husband.

ROSIE
I knew I had a husband who made enough money to take care of his family. We were never hungry.

BRENDA
Our dog was never hungry either.

ROSIE
I don’t know why you have to exaggerate. Your father treated us better than Huffy.

BRENDA
I don’t know. He never beat the shit out of the dog.

ROSIE
Your father never laid a hand on you.
He did.

I never saw it.

I envy some of the things you didn’t see. I really do.

Tell me. Tell me all about it. Convince me.

See, there it is. “Convince you.” I mean, what a shitty thing to say. Have I ever lied to you?

Absolutely. When you were a teenager you lied to me all the time. You lied to your sister. You lied to me. Your father. You lied to the teachers at school.

Because I was a teenager. Now-- I’m not a teenager. I’m telling you that the motherfucker fucking beat the shit out of your daughters and you’re telling me that you need to be convinced. That’s... that’s monstrous.

Fine, Brenda. I’m a monster. Have you eaten? I have leftovers from Bamboo Panda.

I’m not hungry.

Did you eat?

No. I’m not hungry.

You still have to eat. Even if you don’t think you’re hungry you still need to eat. I’ll microwave something.

Rosie gets up and goes to the kitchen. She disappears into a back corner of the kitchen.

45
One minute.

Brenda walks downstage and looks out the sliding glass doors.

In the long silence we can hear the wind and the ocean rise and melt into a dull white noise. The noise stays just quiet enough, ends just soon enough that it sounds more soothing than the onset of a panic attack.

ROSIE (O.S.)

Thirty seconds.

ROSIE (O.S.)

I’m gonna miss this view.

(beat)

You?

ROSIE (O.S.)

Fifteen.

The microwave dings.

ROSIE (O.S.)

I’ve got rice done. You want some orange chicken too? I’ll make you some orange chicken.

More stillness. More ocean.

BRENDA

Liam has better memories of his grandpa than I do. I try to remember something nice and my mind just goes blank. Like a hum. Like what meditation is, I think.

Liam says him and Dad used to go for runs together on the beach. Just walk right out these doors and run and run... He wishes we lived down here again, so him and Grandpa could do it all the time just like they used to. All the time.

I’m pretty sure it only happened once.

Another ding of the microwave.
Moments later, Rosie emerges with a plate, sets it down on the dinner table.

ROSIE

Your food’s ready, dear.

BRENDA

I told you I’m not hungry.

ROSIE

(beat)

Your food’s ready.

BRENDA

Can you just put it on the coffee table?

ROSIE

Let’s sit at the real table. One last time.

Brenda reluctantly comes up one level to the table.

BRENDA

I’m not hungry, Mom.

ROSIE

Here’s a napkin.

Brenda takes the napkin and slowly, deliberately, picks at the plate in front of her.

BRENDA

(mouth full)

 Fucking “Cosmo.”

ROSIE

Chew with your mouth closed, dear.

Brenda finishes her bite.

BRENDA

If you started thinking about this twelve years ago... Twelve years is a really long time.

ROSIE

Don’t I know it?

47
BRENDA
What could you have possibly been waiting for?

ROSIE
Courage.

(beat)
I didn’t have it.

BRENDA
C’mon now, Mom.

ROSIE
I didn’t need it. Not before. So I didn’t have it. Life was always easy and so I didn’t have to... courage wasn’t something I ever needed until I did and it was new and I didn’t have it. I had to save it up. Build it up.

BRENDA
Your life wasn’t all easy. Don’t try to make everything okay. Your mom was--

ROSIE
An angel.

BRENDA
An alcoholic.

ROSIE
Life was easy, Brenda Jo.

BRENDA
Just talk. For real. Say something that’s completely real for a minute.

ROSIE
How’s the Chinese?

BRENDA
It's good.

ROSIE
You’re picking.

BRENDA
Because I’m not hungry.

ROSIE
Eat.

48
Brenda eats more.

ROSIE
My great-aunt Eva was one of the first in our family to leave Russia. She was married to my uncle Menashe. They had two boys. Moved to New York in, 1890-something. And she hated America. Just hated everything about it. Didn’t like the food. Didn’t like the people. She blamed Menashe for all of it. Every single thing that was wrong with her life, with life in America, Eva thought was Menashe’s fault. Somehow she saved up some money, stole it from her husband, squirreled it away, and when her two boys were old enough, about twenty years old if I remember correctly, then she took them back to Russia. She moved to Siberia. I think she was a little bit famous for being a woman Siberian fur trapper, her and her boys. You have to think, she hated her life so much that she left America for Russia. This is when there were pogroms. Eva would have rather been killed for being a Jew in Russia than to live with her husband in America.

Growing up, I mean, Grandma, my aunts and uncles, they talked about it constantly. And my poor uncle Menashe. And she was, Eva was... a villain. It was unreal that a woman would leave her husband. That’s the world I grew up in.

BRENDA
I hear that story, and what I hear is that you grew up in a world where when a woman has a dream she’s willing to take a big risk to make it happen.

ROSIE
What was her dream? To make her family hate her?

BRENDA
That wouldn’t be much of a dream. A dream has to be hard. Our family hates me, and it almost feels like I didn’t have to work for it at all.

ROSIE
That’s ridiculous. Why would your family hate you?

BRENDA
Well whatever the reason, this whole, “I’m responsible for your divorce” thing isn’t going to help.

ROSIE
When’s the last time you spoke to your sister?

BRENDA
You were there.
ROSIE
You can’t be serious. That’s almost four years.

BRENDA
Great. We can both count.
(pointing to her head)
Up here.

ROSIE
Talk to your sister. I’m sure she’s forgiven you.

BRENDA
Bullshit. And if she has, I don’t accept it. Not for even one second. Because I don’t forgive her.

ROSIE
You’re going to turn your back on your family for the rest of your life over one little... skirmish?

BRENDA
I don’t care about that. I almost don’t even blame her. I do blame her for making me lie for ten years. For making me an accomplice. For fucking infecting me with the sickness that was her lie. She did it to all of us. I don’t forgive her, and you shouldn’t either. We should all care.

ROSIE
Maybe we’re too busy living our lives to care, dear. Did you ever think about that?
(pause)
Eat more.

BRENDA
You never told me about your Aunt Eva before. Sounds like a pretty tough lady. Pretty cool.

ROSIE
You didn’t understand what I was saying at all.

BRENDA
Sure I did.
(beat)
Now that you’re... you and Dad. Do you think you’ll go back to being Jewish? You only became Catholic to marry him, right?
ROSIE
I’m not going back to anything, Brenda Jo. I’m going forward. Jewish, Catholic... I don’t think I believe in a single bit of it.

BRENDA
Unless it’s in “Cosmo.”

ROSIE
Well, of course dear. Back to the boxes? Shall we?

BRENDA
Back to the boxes.

Rosie clears away the plate as Brenda descends down into the living room and the boxes.

BRENDA
Junk... junk... junk... Oh... wow.

ROSIE
What is it?

BRENDA
It’s the old radio. I used to love this thing.

She examines a portable radio with awe.

BRENDA
Can... can I have it?

ROSIE
That’s yours. You don’t have to ask for permission.

BRENDA
I wanted this damn thing for so long.

ROSIE
What are you talking about? It’s always been yours. You got it as a Christmas present.

BRENDA
This was Dad’s.
ROSIE
What would he want with a transistor radio?

BRENDA
I don’t know.

ROSIE
What do you want it for now?

BRENDA
......... Nostalgia? I don’t know.

ROSIE
It might still work.

BRENDA
It stopped working forever ago.

ROSIE
Then why are we making a big deal about this?

BRENDA
Because you’re... This was not a Christmas present.

ROSIE
Third grade. Fifth grade maybe.

BRENDA
This was Dad’s radio.

ROSIE
Your memory is... not good. Drugs?

BRENDA
What!?!?

ROSIE
Everyone’s on them.  
(beat)
I’m kidding.

BRENDA
So we can agree that this was Dad’s?
ROSIE

Of course not.

BRENDA

I had to beg, beg, in order to listen in on Dad’s radio. This thing was guarded like... like... something that is guarded really securely.

ROSIE

Oh, I had higher hopes for that one. There was such a buildup, and you had a great vocabulary when you were a child. I was always so impressed by you.

BRENDA

Excellent, just... wonderful. Thanks for the radio.

ROSIE

You’re welcome.

There is a long silence as Rosie comes down to the living room and goes into another box.

Ocean sounds again, faintly.

Brenda shakes her head in disbelief, fondling the transistor radio.

There is a sudden rumble, massive and deep, that reverberates through the condo.

Both women instinctively look up.

The rumbling passes.

ROSIE

Is that Columbia?

BRENDA

No. Columbia came back last week. It’s the one with the teacher.  
(beat)  
What time is it?

ROSIE

11:40.
I should call Liam.

ROSIE

Why? Won’t he be in school?

There is a sound offstage as the front door opens, just the sound of keys.

BRENDA

Lil’ Jimmy. That you?

ROSIE

Lou Ann?

Paul (55) enters in classy beach wear. It is very possible that 35 years ago he looked like Frank Sinatra.

PAUL

Rosie. (pause)

Brenda. (beat)

Good to see you, kiddo.

BLACKOUT.
END OF ACT ONE.
ACT TWO

THE MIND

Brenda addresses the audience from a spotlight among the dark void.

BRENDA
(soliloquy)
The Indian River has a smell. Some people love it. Some hate it. I don’t remember if I used to love it or if I hated it, but I can’t imagine that it’s changed. I rolled down the windows and I was there, in a different time.

Breathe deep.

Fucking smell...

When I was a kid they used to say that however many years ago pirates and Spanish settlers, conquistadors -- maybe all three of those things are one same thing just from three different points of view, just inefficient categorization, blurry -- they used to say the smell was from when those blurry people first found Florida, “found” Florida, and they dumped their European garbage and bilge and crap in the river and poisoned and destroyed so terribly this place they thought was so beautiful they named it for flowers and that’s how the Indian River got its smell that some people love and some people hate.

It’s a lie, of course. Hydrogen sulphide. That’s where the smell comes from. Simple chemical reaction that is much less interesting than a myth, but that’s how it always goes. Would you rather believe that a giant man-baby drives a flaming chariot across the sky every day or that the gravitational pulls of giant balls of roiling gas swing our planet and everything on it through space at approximately 66,000 miles an hour? Most people want the man-baby.

A lot of people describe hydrogen sulphide as being like rotten eggs, but I’m not sure; I don’t want, to say “rotten.” I just kind of think that maybe that’s, “rotten” definitely has some negative implications to it, and some people like the smell of the Indian River and I wouldn’t want to judge them either, just for loving a river, a river maybe they grew up on -- stingrays, dolphins, manatees, rotten eggs, eggs.

The problem with the people who want to tell the story about something rotten is that they’re fundamentally wrong.
The “rotting” people, the pirate people, the Euro-garbage people, they’re all telling a story about a river that’s been corrupted, a dying organism, and the smell is symptom number one, the key witness in a show trial about the demise of our grand river. Death and dying and stinking all the way down to the grave.

But they. Are. Wrong.

Hydrogen sulphide is how you know the river is still alive. The old sea grass makes room for the new and dissolves into nutrients, life. The smell of decay is the smell of life.

But I’m not a biologist.

And conquistadors are sexy. They have pith helmets. Beards.
SCENE ONE - 1972 (APOLLO XVII)

The bank of the Indian River, a little overgrown with brush, undeveloped. This site is directly across-river from the launchpad.

10:18 p.m.

RADIO (V.O.)
“This is Apollo Saturn Launch Control. We're holding at the 30 second mark. This was an automatic cutoff. Cutoff by the terminal sequencer as mentioned this sequencer initiates various actions.”

Rosie stands on the bank of the river. She holds the transistor radio. Brenda sits on the ground close by.

RADIO (V.O.)
“Each action must take place and must be completed before the next one can be initiated. If anything does not get completed in time there will be an automatic cutoff. This cutoff was automatic, done by the sequencer. We're standing by now to check just what the problem was. Apollo Seventeen is now at T-minus 30 seconds and holding. This is Kennedy Launch Control.”

Rosie switches off the radio.

ROSIE
I really don’t understand the fuss.

BRENDA
(such a teenager)

Mom...

ROSIE
Twenty, thirty cars... It’s what, Walt Disney World here?

BRENDA
It's the first launch ever at night.

ROSIE
They’ve launched rockets at night. I hear it. The fuss. I hear it, I feel it for heaven’s--

BRENDA
First night launch with astronauts. With people.
I see people all the time too.

It’s the last trip to the moon.

I just don’t get it.

The fuss.

You don’t get it. I get it. I get it that you don’t get it. But it’s a big deal, Mom.

Okay, alright.

Can you turn the radio back on?

They wait in the quiet. Nature sounds. Maybe a few murmurs from nearby would-be launch watchers.

Rosie tries to turn the radio back on.

Fail.

She bangs it around.

Be careful with that.

This old thing?

It’s expensive.

It is not.
BRENDA
It cost twenty five dollars.

ROSIE
I can get one new at Radio Shack for six ninety-five. I saw. In Melbourne.

BRENDA
You never go to Melbourne.

ROSIE
I do.

She bangs the radio.

BRENDA
Stop!

ROSIE
Fine. Fine.

(beat)

Fine.

Just nature sounds.

ROSIE
Ten more minutes. My mother would cook my goose if she knew my children were out this late.

BRENDA
Grandma’s dead.

ROSIE
God, I miss her.

Pause.

BRENDA
Shocking.

(long pause)

Shocking.

ROSIE
What’s that, dear?
BRENDA
That you’d let Lou watch Lil’ Jimmy alone at night.

ROSIE
She’s a responsible child.

BRENDA
She’s a *child*, yeah.

ROSIE
Would you like to go home now?

BRENDA
No.

ROSIE
I’m ready to go home.

BRENDA
She’s thirteen.

ROSIE
Your sister is fine. She’s a good girl. She’s in Catholic school. Back when I was that age, all the Catholic school girls were... very well behaved. I didn’t like them, but I respected them. You had to.

BRENDA
You won’t leave me in charge.

ROSIE
There it is. Your sister isn’t “in charge.” Lil’ Jimmy is sound asleep and Lou Ann is just watching to make sure nothing strange is happening.

BRENDA
Lou Ann is something strange happening.

ROSIE
She’s a good girl.

BRENDA
I’m fifteen.
In two weeks.

BRENDA

I should be in charge.

ROSIE

That you even call it “being in charge” is proof you can’t. If this rocket doesn’t get moving soon, I swear. You’re just going to be out of luck. And a school night.

BRENDA

It’s special.

ROSIE

Ugh.

BRENDA

It’s my birthday.

ROSIE

In two weeks. Ten minutes. Less than ten minutes. We’re leaving and your father’ll get you some other present.

BRENDA

I don’t want some other present. I wanna stay. I wanna see this.

ROSIE

Nine minutes.

BRENDA

You haven’t even been counting.

ROSIE

Up here.

BRENDA

It hasn’t been two minutes yet.

ROSIE

Up here.

Beat.

Sounds of people nearby.
ROSIE
Hide now.

BRENDA
What?

ROSIE
That anyone should know I let my daughter stay out this late.

BRENDA
You’re ridiculous. I go to school with the people down there. You know that. You said “Hi” to Jenny.

ROSIE
And their parents are here too?

BRENDA
Thank god, yeah. Can you imagine if I was the only one?

ROSIE
You’re embarrassed to be with your mother?

BRENDA
I’m in high school, Mom. Of course! Shit!

Brenda covers her mouth, shocked.

ROSIE
Public school. I went to public school. I know who you are.

(pause)

I think I left the oven on.

(pause)

The oven after dinner.

(long pause)

(nearby people sounds)

I’m sure the oven is on. That was a good casserole though wasn’t it? And the oven.

BRENDA
You think the oven’s on?

ROSIE
I’m not sure... But I do think that.
BRENDA
(pause)
We should go home and check.

ROSIE
So now you’re ready to go home?

BRENDA
Yes, I’m ready. I want a home to go... home to. If the oven’s on--

ROSIE
Stop being so dramatic. When have you not had a place to sleep at night?

BRENDA
Dad says it enough. Says he’s gonna kick me out.

ROSIE
Pshaw.

BRENDA
He said it last night at dinner.

ROSIE
If your father did even half the things he threatens... That man. If he did even half... well, how big of a moron would I have to be to stick around?

A quiet moment.

Really considering her mother’s question, Brenda has to stifle a wicked kind of laughter.

ROSIE
Stop it.

(amused herself now)

Stop.

BRENDA
Really big.

ROSIE
Enough.

(pause)
I don’t know how they can send one of these things up at night. Seems so dangerous. Just do it during the daytime like a regular person, thank you.
(beat)
And who cares about the moon anymore? We’ve been three times.

BRENDA
This’ll be six.

ROSIE
God willing, and I don’t think we need to go back.
(beat)
Do people even still care about space? Haven’t they outgrown this sort of thing?

They disappear into the black.
SCENE TWO - 1982

In the black, an a cappella hymn emerges.

LOU
I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES;
WHAT COMFORT THIS SWEET SENTENCE GIVES!

Lou emerges in a void of blackness. She wears a faded concert tee and tight, tattered jeans. She holds an urn in her hands.

LOU
HE LIVES, HE LIVES, WHO ONCE WAS DEAD;
HE LIVES, MY EVER-LIVING HEAD

HE LIVES TRIUMPHANT FROM THE GRAVE,
HE LIVES ETERNALLY TO SAVE,
HE LIVES ALL-GLORIOUS IN THE SKY,
HE LIVES EXALTED THERE ON HIGH.

Lou makes a throwing gesture with the urn. No ashes release, but a smattering of twinkling stars appear out of the blackness.

LOU
HE LIVES TO SILENCE ALL MY FEARS,
HE LIVES TO WIPE AWAY MY TEARS.
HE LIVES TO CALM MY TROUBLED HEART,
HE LIVES ALL BLESSINGS TO IMPART.

Overcome with emotion, Lou falters one line into the next verse. However, the song continues in her voice, uninterrupted, revealing that she was lip-syncing the entire time.

LOU
HE LIVES TO BLESS ME WITH HIS LOVE,
HE LIVES TO PLEAD FOR ME ABOVE.
HE LIVES MY HUNGRY SOUL TO FEED,
HE LIVES TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED.
The light widens and Brenda and Rosie can be seen at Lou’s side. Brenda is in a dark pantsuit. Rosie wears linen pants and a draping floral-printed blouse.

Lou’s voice is joined by a choir.

LOU
(plus Choir)

HE LIVES AND GRANTS ME DAILY BREATH;
HE LIVES AND I SHALL CONQUER DEATH.
HE LIVES MY MANSION TO PREPARE:
HE LIVES TO BRING ME SAFELY THERE.

HE LIVES, ALL GLORY TO HIS NAME!
HE LIVES, MY JESUS, STILL THE SAME.
OH, THE SWEET JOY THIS SENTENCE GIVES,
“I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES!”

Lou drops the urn and slowly walks away.

ROSIE
Where are you going, dear?

LOU
Into the river.

Brenda and Rosie watch her go into the river.

BRENDA
Did you see that? Did you... Did you see her?

ROSIE
Of course.

BRENDA
Did she...? She threw her voice.

ROSIE
We all keep prayer in our own manner.
BRENDA
Since when do you “keep prayer?”

ROSIE
I prayed when I was a little girl.

BRENDA
How can you not have heard that? Seen that.

ROSIE
I’m much more concerned with what I see here. You. Dressed up like you were going to one of those New York City nightclubs.

BRENDA
I have a five year old son. I don’t go to nightclubs.

ROSIE
That’s not what David says.

BRENDA
You’re talking to my ex-husband?

ROSIE
No. But I still see his mother from time to time. And let me tell you, she talks.

BRENDA
She definitely talks. She doesn’t have a goddamn thing to say. But she talks.

ROSIE
She seems to think David’s going to challenge you for custody if you don’t stop leaving Liam behind so you can disco ’til all hours of the night.

BRENDA
Disco? Mom, disco is dead as... as... what’s going on--

ROSIE
Don’t say it, Brenda Jo, because I would not be able to forgive you if you did that to her. Don’t say it. Don’t you make fun of your sister and her child because she, she would never be able to forgive you either.

BRENDA
What if you’re the only one who heard me?
ROSIE
There’s something sick inside of you.

BRENDA
It’s in my blood. It’s in the chemistry and physics of how I was made. And you made me, Mom. You and Dad and Cocoa Beach and everything in the whole wide world. We’re all sick, it's just a question of who’s symptomatic.
(beat)
I noticed Dad couldn’t make it.

ROSIE
He’s working, dear.

BRENDA
When you call me, “dear,” sometimes I really think you’re telling me to “go fuck myself.”

ROSIE
I have no idea what you mean, dear.
(pause)
You really should’ve brought Liam. It would have meant so much to your sister.

BRENDA
It means more to protect my son.

ROSIE
From what?

BRENDA
From lies.

ROSIE
What lies?

BRENDA
This whole stupid fake funeral.

ROSIE
Please keep your voice down.

BRENDA
I wish I could protect myself from it. The least I can do is keep him from being hurt.

ROSIE
We would never hurt Liam.
BRENDA
The sad part is you think that’s true. You think everything is okay and normal with this family.

ROSIE
Of course everything’s normal. It’s our family. It is how it is.

BRENDA
Just because it’s familiar doesn’t mean it’s normal.

ROSIE
You watched too much TV growing up.

BRENDA
I don’t want a TV existence.

ROSIE
Good. Because you can’t have one.

BRENDA
Believe me, I know it. But there is a huge spectrum of normal that exists between here and there. This. What’s going on right now, is not normal.

ROSIE
Fine, you’re right. You’re always right.

BRENDA
And you’re always lying. You’re lying right now.

ROSIE
Of course I am. You’re not always right. There. Are you happier? I’m thrilled to tell a white lie now and then if it makes the day go a little bit easier.

BRENDA
Is life going easier, Mom? Is it? Are you happy?

ROSIE
Not right now, I’m not.

BRENDA
Good!
ROSIE
Will you ever shut up, Brenda!?!? Lord almighty! We are at your nephew’s funeral and all you want to do is fight. Show some respect for something, for once. I don’t understand you at all. You think I made you, but I don’t see a thing I can recognize. You know, children, they come into the world sometimes fully grown.

BRENDA
Sounds like that would hurt. A lot.

ROSIE
Listen to me. They show up. And they’re either stubborn or they’re smiling or they’re... I don’t know. They’re just themselves. I’ve had three and I know. And it’s the scariest thing that can happen because everyone, everyone, thinks they’re doing right in the world. No one thinks they’re a bad person. Every parent wants to be a good parent, but sometimes an alien shows up on your doorstep--

BRENDA
Doorstep? Storks? I know how pregnancy hap--

ROSIE
Shut up! Why do you think that “Rosemary’s Baby” was so popular? It’s true. That fear. It’s every parent’s nightmare that no matter how hard they try, and I tried hard damnit, no matter how hard they try that their child will turn out to be some kind of monster because she was just born that way.

BRENDA
Rosemary’s baby was a boy.

(beat)

Suppose I’m the monster in this analogy?

(beat)

Great. Just great.

ROSIE
You’re the one who started a fight.

BRENDA
Don’t take any responsibility for anything, Mom. You’re too old and that trick’s too new. I do, if I can point out one other -- this one’s not really a discrepancy, more an irony, about this riff of yours -- it’s pretty funny that you’re so caught up about all this devil business when we’re at the funeral for a child who is allegedly the second coming of Christ.

(beat)

That’s funny, right? Even you have to be able to see that.
Lou enters, naked, soaking wet down to the bone.

ROSIE

Where are your clothes, Louann?

LOU

I took them off.

ROSIE

Would you like to put them back on?

LOU

I didn’t want them to smell like the river.

ROSIE

Why don’t you go grab your clothes, dear?

LOU

I wish Dad could have come.

ROSIE

He does too.

LOU

I wish you could’ve brought Liam.

BRENDA

I wouldn’t want him to see this.

LOU

I would’ve kept my clothes on.

BRENDA

That’s really generous of you.

LOU

Anthony loved his cousin so much.

BRENDA

Did he?

LOU

Of course.
BRENDA
I wouldn’t want Liam to see any of this.

LOU
It’s important for children to learn about death.

BRENDA
I get that.

LOU
It’s a reality of existence.

BRENDA
Reality means different things to different people.

ROSIE
Stop it, Brenda.

LOU
There is only one reality. One truth. And we all share it. It’s God. And his gift. His love.

BRENDA
Agree to disagree.

LOU
No.

BRENDA
What?

ROSIE
Don’t argue with your sister. Not today. Not when her child has... has--

BRENDA
Anthony isn’t dead, because Anthony was never alive. I’m tired of lying. It takes too much, to believe in that. It’s too much to do for you. I can’t do that for you. I wish, I wish upon wish that you could have been okay with him being dead when he was delivered that way, and I regret every day that I let myself lie to you. Years. Lies for years, and it’s too much now.

Lou walks up to Brenda and socks her hard in the face.
BRENDA
God’s love.

Lou exits.

BRENDA
This all seems about right: I get hit; Mom watches. Just like old times, huh?

ROSIE
What does it hurt? What does it hurt you to let her believe what she wants?

BRENDA
Right now it hurts an awful lot. It’s been a while since I was punched in the face.

Rosie exits.
THE MIND

The lights shift, night to day.

BRENDA
(soliloquy)
Maybe a memory is like a broken relationship -- husband, daughter, son, sister... a
relationship. The ones you choose, the ones you don’t. Just because it’s broken doesn’t
mean either one of you was bad. He wasn’t bad. She wasn’t bad. They weren’t bad. We
were all just... just wrong. A memory. A father daughter sister mother child wrong. Wrong.

Maybe a memory is like a broken relationship.

Why does a memory have to be like anything? If it’s like anything at all then it doesn’t even
exist. Middle Ages, Egypt, and all the old places... Planets, stars, protons, neutrinos and the
entire fucking periodic table of elements. Where was the one thing?

NASA keeps building a telescope bigger and bigger to see something smaller and smaller.
Next year they’re finally going to launch the Hubble and even if it can see ten billion light
years away -- that means staring, taking a picture from ten billion years in the past -- we’ll
still be looking at something massive, 3.7 billion years of expansion beyond the one thing,
the one infinitessimal thing.
SCENE THREE - 1966 (GEMINI X)

Rosie, Brenda, Lou, and Paul all sit in beach chairs, lined up. Rosie is pregnant to the point of bursting. Lou is concentrating with serious intent at an open book.

ROSIE
I think I’m gonna die.
(pause)
It's too hot.

BRENDA
It's really hot.

LOU
(mindless)
Hot.

ROSIE
(pause)
Paul... Paul, it’s too hot.

BRENDA
It's really hot.

LOU
Hot.

ROSIE
Paul.

PAUL
Grab a coke from the cooler.

ROSIE
I don’t want a coke.

PAUL
It'll cool you down.

ROSIE
The baby doesn’t want a coke.

75
PAUL
The baby’ll take what you give him.

ROSIE
The baby. He or she has opinions too.

PAUL
Funny how they always sound eerily the same to my wife’s opinions.

ROSIE
We’re close.

Quiet.

ROSIE
Dear lord, I am going to cook to death.

BRENDA
Mom, can I have something to eat?

PAUL
Everyone just be quiet so I can have some peace.

ROSIE
Help yourself to whatever’s in the bag.

Brenda roots around in a paper grocery bag.

BRENDA
It’s just rolls. And they’re burnt.

ROSIE
You can either eat them or don’t. It’s up to you.

PAUL
It’s my day off! For once! Peace. Quiet. Peace and quiet.

Silence.

Brenda returns to her chair.

ROSIE
This heat though.
PAUL

ROSIE
What I don’t understand is why you’d even want to come out here and watch a launch on
this precious day off of yours.

PAUL
Because this is one of the greatest achievements in human history, maybe. I don’t know. Is
that good enough?

ROSIE
If I had a day off I’d want to stay as far away as possible from anything at all that reminded
me of work. At all!

PAUL
When you have a job of your own you can start to judge my decisions.

ROSIE
I think maybe I’d like going to work.

PAUL
Over my dead body.

ROSIE
Why don’t we just go home?

PAUL
Because today two human beings are going farther from the Earth than any human beings
have ever gone. They’re making, two, two, rendezvous with other spacecraft. That’s twice
the amount anyone has ever done before. A man is walking in space. A man I know. Even if
I hate the guy, I know him. That’s a pretty big deal. And we’re going to be here to see it.

BRENDA
We’ll see someone walking in space? From here?

PAUL
Shut up! All of you!

Silence.

ROSIE
Paul, I saw the Good Humor man down the way. Go get me an ice cream. This heat.
PAUL
Is it hot out? I didn’t notice.

BRENDA
It’s so hot.

LOU
(muttered)
Hot.

ROSIE
Be a dear, Paul. Please.

PAUL
I’m going. Fine. I’m going.

ROSIE
Chocolate.

PAUL
I know my own wife.

ROSIE
You think.

PAUL
For all the grief I get, you better give me a boy this time.

ROSIE
I’ll give you something.

Paul points a single finger at her, with as much of a threat of violence as a single finger has ever had.

He exits.

LOU
I hope the baby isn’t a boy.

ROSIE
Why’s that?
I hate boys.

LOU

That can’t be true.

ROSIE

It is.

LOU

I hate boys too.

BRENDA

You can’t hate all boys.

ROSIE

Can too. Boys are mean.

LOU

And they fight.

BRENDA

You girls fight all the time.

ROSIE

But boys fight harder.

LOU

That’s a joke. I can beat up any boy in the fourth grade and I dare them all to try.

BRENDA

You shouldn’t be so rough.

ROSIE

I hate all the boys!

LOU

But your father’s a boy.

ROSIE

That’s different.

BRENDA
ROSIE
How?

BRENDA
(pause to contemplate)
Well... He’s not a boy. And you’re not a girl. He’s a dad and you’re a mom.

ROSIE
Dads and moms were boys and girls once too.

LOU
But they grow out of it.

BRENDA
Some of them.

LOU
Yeah.

BRENDA
Some dads are okay.

LOU
Yeah.

BRENDA
But some of them are boys.

LOU
Yeah.

BRENDA
And they stink too -- boy-dads.

LOU
That’s right.

ROSIE
It sounds like you girls have it all figured out pretty good then.

LOU
Yeah.

ROSIE
So, what’ll you do if the baby’s a boy?
We should eat him.

Rosie laughs hard. The girls don’t.

You can’t eat the baby.

What do we even need boys for anyways? Girls and moms do all the important stuff. Like breakfast.

And lunch.

And dinner.

And laundry.

And picking you up from school.

Well--

What do boys ever do?

You need them to make babies.

Brenda laughs, trying and failing to hide it.

What’s so funny?

Mom’s talking about sex.

I know what she’s talking about.

(beat)

Boys make babies?
They help.

But the baby’s inside the mom.

That’s right.

Didn’t the Virgin Mary make Jesus on her own, without a boy?

I guess she did.

I want to be like Mother Mary.

Brenda hits her sister.

Don’t say that!

Ow! Why’d you hit me? I just wanna be like Mother Mary.

You can’t say that! It’s blasphemy.

No it’s not.

It totally is. Right, Mom?

I don’t know, Brenda Jo.

It’s totally blasphemy.

I didn’t do anything wrong!
BRENDA
I bet you don’t even know what blasphemy is.

LOU
Do too know. I know all about blastomy and I never even did it once.

BRENDA
*Blasphemy* is when you talk bad about God and you just did it really bad when you talked about the Virgin Mary.

LOU
How could I talk bad about her when I said I want to be like her? Nobody wants to be like something they talk bad about.

BRENDA
You do. You just blasphemed really hard and now you can’t even go to heaven.

LOU
Mom!!!

ROSIE
Brenda.

BRENDA
What?

ROSIE
Apologize to your sister.

BRENDA
I won’t say sorry for telling the truth. Lying’s a blasphemy too.

ROSIE
Brenda Jo, now!

BRENDA
Ugh... I’m sorry. Okay?

ROSIE
You can do better than that.

BRENDA
I’m sorry, Lou Ann. I’m sorry I made you cry and even if you blasphemed maybe you can still go to heaven.
Thank you.

Brenda sulks back down into her chair.

Lou returns to her book and mutters to herself, inaudible.

Paul returns and wordlessly tosses a wrapped ice cream bar into Rosie’s lap. He gets in his chair and puts in the earpiece for his transistor radio.

Rosie eats.

PAUL

Rosie. That slurping... Could you?

Could I what?

PAUL

Could you stop? The sound alone, it’s downright pornographic.

You’re ridiculous.

ROSIE

PAUL

It’s a matter of decency.

ROSIE

If you’re so worried about decency, then why don’t you go talk to that girl prancing around in the bikini. This is a place for families.

PAUL

No different from the beach we live on.

ROSIE

But it is different. We’re not on the boardwalk. Our girls are here.

PAUL

We live on a beach.

ROSIE

You can see everything.
PAUL
Everything God gave her.

ROSIE
I think the devil gets a little credit too.

PAUL
Sure.

ROSIE
It’s disgusting.

PAUL
Agreed. I’m gonna go talk to her.

ROSIE
And do what?

PAUL
Give her a piece of our mind.

ROSIE
A lot of good that’ll do. It’s not like you have clothes to give her.

PAUL
I’m going.

ROSIE
No.

PAUL
You can’t talk me out of it now. You asked me to do something; I’m doing something.

ROSIE
I did not.

PAUL
You did. And I can’t be held responsible for what happens.

He turns to walk away.
ROSIE
(shouting)
Yes you can!

Paul makes it off stage (just barely) when Brenda shouts...

BRENDA
Dad!... Dad.

She pops up out of her chair and they meet.

PAUL
What is it?

BRENDA
Can I listen to your radio?

PAUL
I’ll be back in just a second.

BRENDA
Can I listen for just a second?

PAUL
You know how much that radio costs?

BRENDA
500 dollars?

PAUL
No.

BRENDA
Three hundred dollars?

(beat)

BRENDA
Ninety dollars?

PAUL
Twenty-five bucks. A lot of money, right?

(she nods “yes”)

You can listen, but if anything happens to my radio, it’s your hide.

BRENDA
Okay.

86
She does a happy dance and picks up the radio, inserting the earpiece, never stopping with her dancing.

PAUL

I’m not joking!

She bounces back to him, radio in hand and hugs him.

PAUL

Be careful!

Brenda bounces much more carefully.

Paul exits toward the girl in the bikini, smoothing his hair and clothes.

Lou continues muttering to herself in isolation.

Brenda fiddles with the knobs on the radio.

She dances and sings along with the radio.

[The following is a suggestion. Song selection and licensing should be handled by individual producing organizations.]

BRENDA

("Wild Thing” by The Troggs)

...YOU MAKE MY HEART SING
YOU MAKE EVERYTHING GROOVY,
WILD THING
WILD THING, I THINK YOU MOVE ME
BUT I WANNA KNOW FOR SURE
COME ON AND HOLD ME TIGHT
YOU MOVE ME

WILD THING, YOU MAKE MY HEART SING

Brenda recognizes someone in the distance, off.

BRENDA

Holden, it’s me! Holden! It’s Brenda Jo.
Brenda runs off with the radio in her hands.

Lou’s voice has risen to a slightly audible volume, her nose still buried in a book.

ROSIE
What on earth do you keep muttering?

I hate it!

Hate’s not a nice word, Louann.

I don’t care.

She slams her book shut.

ROSIE
What’s the matter, dear?

LOU
Everyone in the second grade has to do it. We have to memorize a whole chapter in the Bible, and I can’t do it. I just can’t do it.

ROSIE
You’ll never do it with an attitude like that.

I’m trying.

Maybe you can try harder.

I’m not as smart as Brenda.

That’s not fair. She’s just older.
LOU
No, she’s not. She’s really smart. And she can read something once and she remembers it right, and gets almost all the words right without even trying and I can’t remember any words at all.

ROSIE
Well... we all have different gifts.

LOU
What are mine?

ROSIE
I don’t know yet. But you’ll find out. We’ll find out.

LOU
I don’t want to memorize the Bible.

ROSIE
If that’s what you have to do for school, then you just have to do it.

LOU
How did you remember all the words when you were in second grade?

ROSIE
They didn’t make me memorize the Bible.

LOU
Did you get to wait until third grade? I wish they’d let me wait.

ROSIE
I never read the Bible in school.

LOU
Whaaaaaat?!? Whoa. Why not?

ROSIE
Because I was Jewish. And I went to a public school.

LOU
Why?

ROSIE
Why was I Jewish?
Yeah.

Because my parents were.

Why?

Their parents too.

Pause.

What’s Jewish?

It’s a different religion.

(beat)

We weren’t Catholics.

Whooooa...

(beat)

Does that mean Grandpa didn’t go to heaven when he died?

No. He just went to a different heaven.

Okay.

(pause)

There’s more than one heaven?

I don’t know, Lou.

Pause.

When did you become a Catholic?
ROSIE
When I met your Dad. I became Catholic to marry your father. Because I loved him very much. Do you love your Daddy?

I do.

ROSIE
Do you love him very much?

LOU
I love him so much.

ROSIE
Well, the way you can show him that you love him is to learn your chapter really well. Okay?

LOU
Okay.

ROSIE
Show him how good of a girl you are. Okay?

LOU
Yes, Mom.

Paul returns. He moves toward his chair. No radio.

PAUL
Where’s Brenda?

ROSIE
I don’t know. I think she saw a friend.

PAUL
Where’s my radio?

ROSIE
I don’t know.

PAUL
Did you let her take it?
ROSIE
I didn’t let her do anything. She saw a friend and went to see him.

PAUL
Did you try to stop her?

ROSIE
What’s your problem?

PAUL
My problem is that little bitch just ran away with a twenty-five dollar radio.

LOU
Dad... you just said a swear.

PAUL
Shut your mouth.

ROSIE
Paul, now lis--

PAUL
No. I’m tired of listening. To all of you. It’s your turn to listen to me. Now, which direction did she go?

ROSIE
Brenda saw a friend. She’ll be back any--

PAUL
Which way? Because it’s either her fault or yours.

ROSIE
(pause)
She went that way.

Paul exits, shaking his head in disgust.

Sounds of nature rise in the background. The gentle lapping of the river is slowly amplified to a very non-gentle volume. Wind. Water. The same sounds as when Brenda looked out from the condo, now pushed to a near-deafening unnatural level as Lou continues to silently recite, faster and faster, her eyes squeezed shut.
Rosie appears to notice none of this.

Brenda enters and the sounds instantly return to the background, faint. She holds her face, in extreme pain, but stoic.

Your father’s looking for you.

I... He found me.

Good. He was quite upset.

He... he has... the radio now.

What’s wrong with you?

I um... I got in a fight.

With who?

With Holden?

Your friend?

Yeah. That’s who did it. My friend. Holden. He’s kind of a bully.

Sounds like you have poor taste in friends.

Yeah.

Where’s your father?
BRENDA
I don’t know. I’m sorry. I don’t know.

ROSIE
You kids. You play too rough.

BRENDA
(staggering)
I have to sit down.

ROSIE
You know where your chair is.
(beat)
This heat. It’s putting me to sleep.

LOU
Are you okay?

BRENDA
No.

Brenda curls up in her chair. Lou kneels next to her.

LOU
“In you, Lord my God
I put my trust.
I trust in you;
Do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous.

Show me your ways, Lord.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
Remember your great mercy and love.
Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my evil ways.
Guard my life and rescue me:
do not let me be put to shame,
for I take refuge in you.
My truth protects me,
because my hope, Lord, is in you.

Deliver Israel, O Lord
from all their troubles!”

I remembered it all Brenda. Just for you. I remembered almost all of it.

BRENDA
That’s nice, Lou. Could we just be quiet for a minute?

LOU
Okay.

Lou gets into her chair, next to Brenda’s.

Silence.

After a short time, Lou reaches out and takes Brenda’s hand. The sisters hold hands as the lights slowly fade to black.
SCENE FOUR - 1989 (DISCOVERY STS-33)

Brenda stands alone in the near black, a transistor radio held to her ear. She looks down at an unseen figure beside her.

The radio’s speaker crackles. A countdown, slower than real-time.

RADIO (V.O.)
5...

BRENDA
Your Grandpa got to push the button once. To launch a Saturn rocket. At least that’s what he said. Made almost seven million pounds of machine and people and payload and fuel look like they could float.

Is that possible, is that real, that there’s a button? Just like for the Russians and The Bomb?

RADIO (V.O.)
4...

BRENDA
Can you believe I never got to see one of these?

RADIO (V.O.)
... 3... 2... 1...

A bright light begins to fill the stage. The light grows exponentially into a blinding supernova.

Maybe somewhere deep in the light we see the silhouette of the figure to whom Brenda has spoken.

BRENDA
It’s magic, Liam. It’s a miracle.

The rumble of the shuttle arrives. The awesome combination of sound and light overwhelms.

END OF PLAY.
VITA

Cavan Hallman is a theatre artist and educator whose plays have been performed in the United States and abroad, including two commissions for the National WWII Museum. His touring plays for young audiences, which he also directs, have been performed over 20,000 times. Hallman received a Bachelor of Arts from Columbia College Chicago and a Master of Fine Arts from the University of New Orleans.