

Spring 5-19-2017

Night Launch

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Recommended Citation

Hallman, Cavan, "Night Launch" (2017). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 2326.
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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

<http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/1969/12/moon-landing/img/03-launch-714.jpg>

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?

SCENE ONE - 1974

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.

How are the rolls looking?

BRENDA

Hot up there.

ROSIE

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

"Hello, humans. I said, 'Hello, humans!'"

VOICE (TELEVISION)

What is this garbage?

ROSIE

Macy's parade.

BRENDA

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*, *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 Higgenbotham 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.

BRENDA

I was waiting until you meant it.

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? BRENDA

Yeah. Really. LOU

(shift)

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

Fine. What is it? BRENDA

Promise to keep a secret. LOU

I promise. BRENDA

No, really, really, promise. LOU

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

I want you to mean it. LOU

Promise you'll keep a secret. (beat)

I promise. I'll keep your secret. BRENDA

I think I'm pregnant. LOU

Oh shit. Why do you think that? BRENDA

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

Oh shit. BRENDA

It's a miracle.

LOU

What does that mean?

BRENDA

It's a miracle.

LOU

Miracles. You went to Our Savior's too.

(beat)

Yeah, but I hated it. So did you.

BRENDA

There isn't a father.

LOU

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

BRENDA

This isn't Lucky's baby.

LOU

Oh shit.

BRENDA

It's no man's. It's a gift from God.

LOU

Oh shit.

BRENDA

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."

LOU

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

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

BRENDA

You'll keep it a secret?

LOU

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.

BRENDA

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?

LOU

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!

LOU AND BRENDA

MOM!

ROSIE (O.S.)

I'm coming, I'm coming.

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.

ROSIE

They're not too bad.

(beat)

They're going to be fine.

(sniffing)

I think these are going to be delicious.

(beat)

Perfect.

THE MIND

BRENDA

(soliloquy)

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?

ROSIE

Your body. You said he ruined--

BRENDA

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?

ROSIE

You love Liam.

BRENDA

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.

ROSIE

Like I would know what happens down that way.

BRENDA

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

ROSIE

Why does he have to be crusty?

BRENDA

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

ROSIE

You'll have better luck.

BRENDA

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

ROSIE

Let me make you something to eat.

I'm not hungry. BRENDA

When's the last time you ate? ROSIE

I don't know. BRENDA

When's the last time Liam ate? ROSIE

He's fine. Really. BRENDA

I'll cook something up all the same. ROSIE

The sound of a door opening off.

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

Your sister's down here. ROSIE
(yelling)

I'll be there in sec. LOU (O.S.)
(beat)

Little Lee-Lee, give your Auntie and cousin a couple big old hugs!

How is she? BRENDA
(quiet)

What do you mean? ROSIE

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

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

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?

BRENDA

I'm fine. Are you okay?

LOU

Fantastic. Better than I've felt in years.

BRENDA

Clearly. Are you on something?

LOU

I don't do drugs anymore, Brenda.

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.

LOU

Maybe.

BRENDA

That's a good thing.

LOU

Food's ready in five!

ROSIE (O.S.)

What's going on with you? Really?

BRENDA

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."

LOU

Right.

BRENDA

Do you remember the story?

LOU

No.

BRENDA

Jesus is a boy--

LOU

Still? Have they checked?

BRENDA

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.

LOU

It's Thursday, Lou. You go to church most Thursdays?

BRENDA

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.

LOU

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.

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

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

Sorry.

LOU

They listen again.

They hear something strange.

What's that?

LOU

BRENDA

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

I know what it is.

LOU

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.

Do you think those are good sounds or bad sounds?

LOU

BRENDA

I can't tell.

LOU

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

Nuh-uh. God forgives you. I asked him.

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.

LOU

Think about it.

BRENDA

Pause.

If you took a long walk then you'd just end up in the ocean.
(pause)

LOU

Okay. I get it.

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

That's definitely a bad sound.

LOU

Sssh, I'm listening.

BRENDA

They both listen quietly to the unheard "bad" sounds.

Lock the door.

LOU

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

BRENDA

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

LOU

No we wouldn't.

BRENDA

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

LOU

I'd be lying.

BRENDA

I don't care. Tell me.

LOU

You wouldn't believe me.

BRENDA

I would. I would.

LOU

I can't do it.

(beat)

Pause.

Was that the door?

LOU

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 snags an earring off of Lou.

Mom, what's wrong with you? LOU (O.S.)

I'll be okay. ROSIE (O.S.)

What happened to you? LOU (O.S.)

I'll be okay. Let me make you a snack. ROSIE (O.S.)
(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.

BRENDA

What?

ROSIE

I never would have left your father if it wasn't for you.

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.

BRENDA

Or Dad.

ROSIE

And I didn't see him much.

BRENDA

"Classified."

ROSIE

What bullshit.

BRENDA

Mom!

ROSIE

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.

BRENDA

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 Huff.

BRENDA

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

ROSIE

Your father never laid a hand on you.

BRENDA

He did.

ROSIE

I never saw it.

BRENDA

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

ROSIE

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

BRENDA

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

ROSIE

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.

BRENDA

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.

ROSIE

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

BRENDA

I'm not hungry.

ROSIE

Did you eat?

BRENDA

No. I'm not hungry.

ROSIE

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.

One minute.

ROSIE (O.S.)

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.

Thirty seconds.

ROSIE (O.S.)

I'm gonna miss this view.

BRENDA

(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?

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.

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!?!
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.

BRENDA

Why? Won't he be in school?

ROSIE

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

Lil' Jimmy. That you?

BRENDA

Lou Ann?

ROSIE

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

Rosie.

PAUL

(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.

ROSIE

It's the last trip to the moon.

BRENDA

I just don't get it.

ROSIE

The fuss.

BRENDA AND ROSIE

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

BRENDA

Okay, alright.

ROSIE

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

BRENDA

Can you turn the radio back on?

Rosie tries to turn the radio back on.

Fail.

She bangs it around.

BRENDA

Be careful with that.

ROSIE

This old thing?

BRENDA

It's expensive.

ROSIE

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.

ROSIE

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 infinitesimal 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.

I think I'm gonna die.
ROSIE
(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.

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

What do you want me to do? It's July. In Florida. Will you please just shut up? Day off.

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.

Is it hot out? I didn't notice.

PAUL

It's so hot.

BRENDA

Hot.

LOU
(muttered)

Be a dear, Paul. Please.

ROSIE

I'm going. Fine. I'm going.

PAUL

Chocolate.

ROSIE

I know my own wife.

PAUL

You think.

ROSIE

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

PAUL

I'll give you something.

ROSIE

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

He exits.

I hope the baby isn't a boy.

LOU

Why's that?

ROSIE

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.

LOU

Rosie laughs hard. The girls don't.

ROSIE

You can't eat the baby.

LOU

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

BRENDA

And lunch.

LOU

And dinner.

BRENDA

And laundry.

LOU

And picking you up from school.

ROSIE

Well--

LOU

What do boys ever do?

ROSIE

You need them to make babies.

Brenda laughs, trying and failing to hide it.

LOU

What's so funny?

BRENDA

Mom's talking about sex.

LOU

I know what she's talking about.

(beat)

Boys make babies?

They help. ROSIE

But the baby's inside the mom. LOU

That's right. ROSIE

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

I guess she did. ROSIE

I want to be like Mother Mary. LOU

Brenda hits her sister.

Don't say that! BRENDA

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

You can't say that! It's blasphemy. BRENDA

No it's not. LOU

It totally is. Right, Mom? BRENDA

I don't know, Brenda Jo. ROSIE

It's totally blasphemy. BRENDA

I didn't do anything wrong! LOU

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.

ROSIE

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.

Rosie. That slurping... Could you?

PAUL

Could I what?

ROSIE

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

PAUL

You're ridiculous.

ROSIE

It's a matter of decency.

PAUL

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.

ROSIE

No different from the beach we live on.

PAUL

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

ROSIE

We live on a beach.

PAUL

You can see everything.

ROSIE

Everything God gave her. PAUL

I think the devil gets a little credit too. ROSIE

Sure. PAUL

It's disgusting. ROSIE

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

And do what? ROSIE

Give her a piece of our mind. PAUL

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

I'm going. PAUL

No. ROSIE

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

I did not. ROSIE

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

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)

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.

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?

LOU

I hate it!

ROSIE

Hate's not a nice word, Louann.

LOU

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.

LOU

I'm trying.

ROSIE

Maybe you can try harder.

LOU

I'm not as smart as Brenda.

ROSIE

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. LOU

Because my parents were. ROSIE

Why? LOU

Their parents too. ROSIE

Pause.

What's Jewish? LOU

It's a different religion. ROSIE

We weren't Catholics. (beat)

Whoooooa... LOU

Does that mean Grandpa didn't go to heaven when he died? (beat)

No. He just went to a different heaven. ROSIE

Okay. LOU

There's more than one heaven? (pause)

I don't know, Lou. ROSIE

Pause.

When did you become a Catholic? LOU

ROSIE

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

LOU

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.

ROSIE

I... He found me.

BRENDA

Good. He was quite upset.

ROSIE

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

BRENDA

What's wrong with you?

ROSIE

I um... I got in a fight.

BRENDA

With who?

ROSIE

With Holden?

BRENDA

Your friend?

ROSIE

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

BRENDA

Sounds like you have poor taste in friends.

ROSIE

Yeah.

BRENDA

Where's your father?

ROSIE

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.