

CHECK OFF IN THE SUN

A FAMILY DRAMA IN TWO ACTS

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Check Off In The Sun

Synopsis

Victoria is terminally ill. She arranges for a villa in the southwest and has her closest friends and family join her for what is assumed to be a final meeting among them. Two generations attend. It is a farewell but none can figure out how to say farewell. Each comes with a personal history, each with a personal need to assert what Victoria means to him or her, the part she played in his or her life, and even expectations for what Victoria should feel about them. Least of all can they figure out how to handle the impending death.

Traditional arguments among them resume, but now highly tense in the context of a life viewed as an entirety. Each questions his or her own and each other's accomplishments to the extent their personalities permit. Each questions even more the roles others played in Victoria's life. And Victoria concludes they came for no reason but to check her off. She herself is not sure why she called them.

There is a frightening police marijuana raid and a steak missing at the dinner table; but they learn how to give comfort and some about life and death, their own as well as Victoria's.

History

The play has been work shopped in drama groups but not produced.

Running Time

120 minutes.

Lighting and Set Requirements

Minimum. No lighting changes. A table, a chair or two, some suitcases, paper documents.

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Cast Of Characters

THEO- VICTORIA's son, late twenties, into health food, fraternal twin; they look different, ELIZA.

JEREMY - VICTORIA's son, late twenties, the other fraternal twin, snarky.

HARVEY - VICTORIA's husband, mid-fifties, computer nerd

VICTORIA - terminally ill, mid-fifties

PATRICIA – WILLIAM's former girlfriend, mid forties, wants him back, protects him

JUDY – VICTORIA's childhood friend, same age.

ELIZA – JUDY's adopted daughter, a teen.

BARBARA – VICTORIA's former lover of many years past, sixties, Judge

WILLIAM - VICTORIA's younger brother, late forties.

Act I Scene 1

Setting: Theo and Jeremy are standing beside a long dining room table. There a window to the front of the house. Harvey is seated at a PC in the back of the kitchen. Theo is handling some oranges.

THEO

That's what it is.

JEREMY

What's what it is?

THEO

It's the sugar, the refined sugar.

JEREMY

Refined sugar could be bad for you but it's not everything.

THEO

Close enough.

JEREMY

It doesn't cause cancer.

THEO

Like how do you know?

JEREMY

Look. You're upset. I'm upset. Everyone's upset. But sugar doesn't cause cancer.

THEO

Like what about Warburg's work? He's a scientist, like you.

JEREMY

I'm no scientist. I clean test tubes and crunch numbers.

THEO

You do not. Besides, what about everybody's work? Cancer cells have like a fundamentally different energy metabolism.

JEREMY

Great.

THEO

Malignant tumors exhibit like an increase in anaerobic glycolysis; the cancer cells like use glucose as a fuel with lactic acid as an anaerobic by-product.

JEREMY

You can't even pronounce those words. I'm not a doctor and neither are you. But what good does it do now to try to convince mom that she's guilty, that she brought this on herself, that she gave herself cancer, **like** she would do something **like** this against us, **like** with malice aforethought.

THEO

Like that's not the point.

JEREMY

Then what's the point? That we have to have this argument every time we see mom. We never argued otherwise. Cutting back on sugar's not going to cure mom now. The cancer's all over her.

THEO

Cranston said it worked on like four of his patients; Bolivar reports similar results. I'm like researching things and this is what I'm finding. What are you doing for Mom?

JEREMY

I'm telling you it's nonsense. That's what I'm doing, no matter what Doctors Quack and Gimmick report in the JSPM.

THEO

What's the JSPM?

JEREMY

The Journal of Stuff People Made Up.

THEO

Dad, help us out here. (No answer.) Dad. Dad!! Help us out here.

HARVEY

(Without turning away from his computer) What? I'm a computer geek, not a doctor.

JEREMY

Tell us what the web says. The web knows everything. Every computer guy believes in the web, right?

HARVEY

This is hard enough as it is. I'm not jumping on a band wagon that's playing a song I can't sing.

VICTORIA

(VICTORIA enters unseen by the boys or HARVEY.)

JEREMY

Really? Since when is there a song you can't sing.

THEO

Mom has got to give up sugar, all refined sugar. She's got to give up meat.

JEREMY

Meat? Meat doesn't have sugar.

THEO

The WHO says meat consumption can be like be a significant risk...

JEREMY

The WHO's a rock band. Who's the WHO?

THEO

Who's the WHO? Everyone knows who the WHO is. The W.H.O.! The World Health Organization.

JEREMY

Who gives a damn what the World Health Association says?

THEO

Organization.

JEREMY

Dad. Help us out here. If Mom's gonna die, she doesn't have to die being denied what she's always loved about life, does she?

THEO

She's not gonna die!

HARVEY

You guys! (Turning around, he sees his wife.) Vic.

VICTORIA

I came into the kitchen, it seems, to die.

HARVEY

No. Nope. I'm sorry about the kids but there's no dying allowed in the kitchen.

VICTORIA:

Why not in the kitchen? I'd like to know. Where's a respectable lady supposed to die?

HARVEY

This is really more of a dining room than a kitchen anyway so even if.

THEO

That's right. And you certainly can't die in the dining room.

VICTORIA

A lady can die anywhere she likes.

JEREMY

Not in the dining room.

THEO

No, no. Absolutely not.

VICTORIA

Why not?

THEO

Dying in the dining room would cause everyone...

HARVEY, THEO, and JEREMY (all together)

...to lose their appetites. With corpses sitting around at the dinner table, who can eat?

JEREMY

That's it exactly, especially if the corpses make noise. They sometimes do.

THEO

What do you mean they make noise?

HARVEY

Because their bodies are rotting, producing gases, which...

THEO

Stop it, Dad. That's disgusting.

HARVEY

Jeremy started it but it's true, I mean scientifically.

JEREMY

But let's let it go.

THEO

We're sorry, Mom.

VICTORIA

The corpse of a lady does not make offensive noises. But if not the kitchen or dining room, then where's a lady allowed to die?

JEREMY

Theo says you go to the butcher shop to die, or the candy store. Those are good places if you're not too embarrassed about dying in front of a bunch of strangers.

THEO

Like you go to hell. Mom's not going to die because we're gonna find a way for her.

JEREMY

A way for her to do what, lose weight on some screwy diet?

VICTORIA

First I died and now you say I need a diet. Maybe a person can be too fat to die. Maybe I'll be too overweight and they won't take me wherever dead people go, so I'll still be alive. That's a strategy.

JEREMY

That's not what I meant and you know it. Mom, how do you feel today?

VICTORIA

Tired and my muscles ache.

THEO

Because there's lactic acid all over your body.

JEREMY

How do you know? What are you, some new age superhero, Captain Lactic?

THEO

Captain Anti-lactic, if anything.

HARVEY

Anti-Galactic? I found it on the web! He's already a superhero, Captain Anti-Galactic, but he doesn't look like you. He kind of has an orange thing sticking out here and a doodad on his back.

VICTORIA

(Laughing) Enough. We're here to relax, have fun in the sun with family and old friends that I called to meet us here. So, for me, no arguments.

PATRICIA

(Entering.) This is gonna be great. Great! Have you looked around at this place? I keep checking it out and finding more neat stuff.

VICTORIA

It's beautiful. It must have eight bedrooms, and in the warm southwest. So fine. And the view; the sun is so bright. Thank you so much, Patricia.

PATRICIA

I knew you'd love it.

VICTORIA

I still can't figure out how you found it.

PATRICIA

I'm a realtor. That's my business.

VICTORIA

Realtors buy and sell houses, not borrow them for their former boyfriend's sister.

PATRICIA

William should be here soon, right?

VICTORIA

How long since you've seen my brother?

PATRICIA

A few months, but he told me on the phone that he wasn't going with anyone.

VICTORIA

That's true. This place is wonderful. You got it for us and came early to set it all up; it's too much. I know you're looking forward to seeing him, but, personally, I think he's not worthy of you.

PATRICIA

He's your brother, even if he can be difficult, I found this place for us all to get together.

THEO

Great, it really is great. Would anyone like some coffee?

JEREMY

Yeah, we're deeply grateful, except for the weird smell near the laundry room. But we'll still make coffee.

PATRICIA

Oh, the smell's just...

THEO

Like that is a very weird smell.

PATRICIA

That's just my non-toxic laundry stuff.

JEREMY

Non-toxic?

THEO

All laundry products are toxic, so they can clean. But you're not supposed to drink them.

PATRICIA

Non-anti-hypo-allergenic detergent. I came early to wash and kill all the free radicals in the linen and stuff.

HARVEY

Stuff? Your personal things? I didn't see any personal things hanging up to dry.

THEO

Free radicals are bad.

JEREMY

Please. I suppose they cause cancer.

THEO

Matter of fact, they run around the body causing damage to tissue, that can lead to...

VICTORIA

Cancer. There's cancer everywhere.

JEREMY

I heard free radicals caused cancer in the labor movement.

THEO

You don't know anything about the labor movement.

HARVEY

Forget the labor movement. Your uncle William is coming. He hates labor.

VICTORIA

Yes, please don't get my brother started on labor or radicals or ... anything. Don't get him started.

PATRICIA

I'll keep him happy. I can feel it now.

JEREMY

I looked them up on line. Free Radicals is a jazz, funk, hip-hop, avant-garde, ska, reggae, African fusion, Indian raga, punk, klezmer, polka and Latin jazz group.

THEO

Is that a joke? Do they like know what they're playing?

JEREMY

Maybe. Anyway, we're glad you washed the linens, Patricia, and whatever personals Dad thought might be hanging up in spite of the smell.

HARVEY

Nonsense, I didn't see any personals.

VICTORIA

Stop that. Patricia found us a great place.

JUDY

(Knock at the door.)

VICTORIA

I'll get it.

THEO

No, I'll get it. You need to get better.

JEREMY

How does answering the door or not answering the door make her better?

(Jeremy and Theo stand with their backs to the door, holding the handle together but neither opening it. Victoria is in front of them but they don't let her get to the door.)

VICTORIA

I don't know about my getting better but a person could die in the hot sun out there before you open the door.

THEO

It's like we can't figure out who's supposed to open it.

VICTORIA

Whoever's closest.

JEREMY

We're tied.

JUDY

(Knock at the door again.)

VICTORIA

Come in.

THEO, JEREMY

(They let go of the handle and turn away from the door.)

JUDY and ELIZA

(Judy opens the door, enters and knocks into them. She leaves the door open as she drags in her suitcases, followed by her adopted daughter Eliza. Judy leaves the suitcases in the middle of the floor and goes to Victoria, ignoring Theo and Jeremy. Eliza leaves her suitcase beside her mother's and stands there gaping, smiling at the two handsome men.)

JUDY

Viks Victoria. (Hugs her.) Oh my god. You look great. I expected... I don't know what I expected. Everybody, hello. This place looks great. Victoria, you look great. This whole city looks great. The warm, soft sun. The whole southwest is exactly what they say it is. Can I look around?

JEREMY

What do they say the southwest is?

JUDY

Say? Who knows what they say? People say whatever they want to say. I was reading this fantastic book on the airplane.

HARVEY

What people?

JEREMY

What book?

VICTORIA

Stop it. (To Judy) Pat got the place for us.

JUDY

It's fabulous. (Judy looks around, walks past Pat on her way out to the other rooms.) Fabulous, Pat; but Victoria really looks terrible, doesn't she? How are we going to manage looking at her for the whole week? Eliza, come on. Let's look around. (Eliza follows her out.)

THEO

Well, your friend Judy's here.

JEREMY

Mom, are you glad Judy's here?

VICTORIA

You know I am.

HARVEY

She left her bags in the middle of the floor.

VICTORIA

She's my oldest friend so let her be. Accept her the way she is.

THEO

We love Aunt Judy. You know we do. You're always happier when she's around.

JEREMY

We'll move her bags for her. (To Dad) You're the one who has problems with Aunt Judy.

HARVEY

I don't have problems with anyone.

JEREMY

She didn't even say hello to you.

VICTORIA

Razz someone else. She just forgot.

THEO

She hates you because you took Mom away from her.

VICTORIA

Theo! Not true. If anybody, that would be Barbara.

HARVEY

(To the kids.) She's not really your aunt and the past is none of your business.

JEREMY

She didn't really say hello to any of us, but we love her anyway. .

THEO

She sort of did.

JEREMY

Another car just pulled up. It's Aunt Booby. (Singing.) Here comes the judge. Here comes the judge.

THEO

(Joins in.) Here comes the judge.

BARBARA

(Barbara enters with a small carry case, trips into Judy's and Eliza's luggage and moves around them.) The door was left open. Who left their suitcases in the middle of the floor? That is so so!

JEREMY

Aunt Barbara, good to see you. Can we get you some coffee?

THEO

With cream, right?

BARBARA

I heard the chanting through the door. You kids are so bad. But you don't have to tell me about the bags here. Judy must be here. Oh Vicsy. So much to tell you. So good to see you, and all of you, Jeremy and Theo and Patricia and... (she gestures to Harvey but does not name him.). On the phone I was, I was just beside myself but now that I see you and well I see you; I'm so much more relaxed. We have so much to talk about, so much to plan. Did you read about the Collect-Bugwig protocol for, you know, cancer? It's good for other things too. We have to look into it. And there's that Shaman in Peru.

HARVEY

The Bigwig Program, great.

JEREMY

Everybody wearing hair out to here.

THEO

You're thinking of ear wig, a little bug that crawls in your ears.

HARVEY

Whatever it is, I never heard of it; the doctors never heard of it. Nobody ever heard of it. And a witchdoctor in Peru, great.

VICTORIA

I'm still alive, Barbara, how about that? Hi. (They hug.) I heard about those treatments; they're great. There're plenty of things to try, Barbara. Meanwhile, you have the bedroom at the top of the stairs. It's such a cute room. Tell me if you like it.

BARBARA

I'm sure the room's fine, but yes, there're treatments out there, good results with some and we can do them. And, by the way, I told everyone not to make a big deal about the judge business. (Turns to the boys.)

JEREMY

But it is a big deal to us.

THEO

It is. Let us get you some coffee.

BARBARA

No thanks. And I'm Barbara, Aunt Barbara to you. Not Booby.

THEO

Sorry, but I called you Booby since before I could pronounce Barbara. So, by law, it may be that I have to call you Aunt Booby now.

BARBARA

No law like that that I ever heard of.

THEO

You are the law, Aunt Barbara, the judge. Make it the law.

JEREMY

Every one listens to you, by law.

BARBARA

No one obeys the law, not **the** law or my law.

VICTORIA

We're all so impressed they made you a judge. No one can get over it.

BARBARA

(Frowning.) Get over it. I'll go check out my room. You never are what you want to be even when that's what you are.

HARVEY

(Scowling at Barbara.) Victoria gave you the best room, better than ours.

VICTORIA

I just want everyone to be comfortable. Pat and I worked out the rooms.

HARVEY

(Grumbling to himself.) She doesn't even say hello to people.

BARBARA

(Not looking at him.) I said hello to everyone. I didn't want to disturb any geeks who are concentrating. With their heads buried so deep in their computers, how would they know whether I said hello anyway? Let sleeping geeks lie I always say.

JEREMY

Beware of geeks bearing gifts. Can we get you some coffee, Aunt Barbara?

THEO

We'll make a fresh pot for you.

BARBARA

No thanks, not yet. I'll go check out my room. And there's the cesium chloride protocol, Vicsy; we have to talk about it. A little later without every doubter in the world around.
(Exits)

JEREMY

What did she say? You are what you are when you are?

HARVEY

Sometimes, you have to bury your head, one place or another.

THEO

Aunt Booby never got along with Dad, ever.

JEREMY

Because Aunt Booby took mom away from Aunt Judy. But, then Dad took mom away from Aunt Booby so Aunt Judy and Aunt Booby ended up commiserating, sort of.

THEO

I got it.

JUDY

(Comes in carrying a book, followed by Eliza.) You should see this place. Everything is so... so southwest. Except there's a weird smell near the laundry room.

ELIZA

(Stops to stand and smile at Jeremy and Theo) I didn't smell it.

It's a very strong smell. JUDY

It's mostly linens being washed. THEO

And personal stuff. JEREMY

I didn't say that. HARVEY

Harvey! VICTORIA

(To Jeremy and Theo) Hi. ELIZA

Whose personal stuff? JUDY

Stuff Dad saw. (To Eliza) Hi. THEO

Pat did the laundry. (To Eliza) Hi. JEREMY

It's my ultra biodegradable, all natural laundry detergent. I mean "what's next to your skin is next to your skin." That's their tag line. It's unscented, you know. PATRICIA

They need to scent it. JEREMY

Viks, who's here so far? JUDY

Oh, Pat found the place and... VICTORIA

I'm going to go check this place out again. The garden is so great. Maybe I'll go out there to read. (Judy starts to exit.) JUDY

JEREMY

What's that you're reading, Aunt Judy.

JUDY

And the view of the mountains, gold and grey and rugged.

ELIZA

(To Jeremy and Theo.) Hi.

THEO

Good to see you.

JEREMY

Hi.

ELIZA

Hi.

JUDY

(To Eliza) Eliza, you coming?

ELIZA

I'll stay here. We already saw the place once.

JUDY

(Exits.)

JEREMY

(To his mother Victoria.) Aunt Booby is always so stubborn, so down? How come she doesn't like it that we get excited about her being a judge?

VICTORIA

Barbara's not stubborn. She doesn't feel she has as much an influence on the world as a judge should. But don't make fun of my best friends from forever.

JEREMY

You're allowed to have a past, mom, no matter who's part of it.

THEO

And we love them all.

HARVEY

Your mother's past is none of your business. And who gets to allow a past anyway?

VICTORIA

She's not just part of the past if she's here in the other room. And if you can't agree with her ideas on what to try, my ideas, at least respect them.

JEREMY

But a witch doctor? (Reacting to Victoria's look.) That's what Dad called it. And once the witch doctor gets you in the jungle, what can you do? Why would he let you out?

THEO

Another car is pulling up.

HARVEY

If the main thing you did with her was twenty years ago, she's part of the past.

JEREMY

It's a cab. It's amazing this place has as much parking as it does.

WILLIAM

(William comes in, dragging a lot of luggage and boxes.) Hi, sis.

VICTORIA

Glad you're here, William.

WILLIAM

What are all these bags doing in the middle of the room?

THEO

The backstroke.

JEREMY

That was a dumb joke when it was a joke.

WILLIAM

No, really. Whose are these?

ELIZA

My mom's? Look at all the stuff you brought.

WILLIAM

It's not all for me. It's groceries and stuff for our stay here. But what are these bags doing in the middle of the dining room floor?

PATRICIA

(Has been angling around to get close to him. Kind of whispers.) William, it's so good to see you. (They're a little clumsy together.) Isn't this place great? Can I show you?

WILLIAM

Yeah. It's on the market? Looks big. Except for all these bags.

PATRICIA

Don't get mad about the luggage. I'll move them.

WILLIAM

You don't have to pick up after everybody. It's so infantile. You bring your luggage into a place. You get your room. You take your luggage with you. Where's my room?

VICTORIA

Maybe you're the one being childish. Your room's at the top of the stairs, second room on your right.

WILLIAM

Right. I bet it's Judy.

PATRICIA

Let me show you the room we picked it out for you.

WILLIAM

I'll... find it. (He heads off toward the stairs. Stops and looks at PATRICIA) Sorry, Pat. But I'm seeing someone.

JEREMY

Uncle Bill, you left your luggage here. You want help with it.

WILLIAM

I didn't leave it there. I just wanted to see where the stairway was before I took them up. Or maybe there's an elevator.

THEO

No elevator.

WILLIAM

They're pretty heavy.

PATRICIA

I'll help you with them. You really seeing someone?

WILLIAM

No. I just don't want expectations. We'll take the bags together. (William and Pat exit.) No matter what you pack, you never have what you need.

VICTORIA

(Whispers to Pat as she leaves.) I knew he wasn't really seeing anybody. He's just upset. (She goes to the window and looks out.) William reminds me, everyone reminds me of all the things I wanted to be.

HARVEY

Don't look out the window.

ELIZA (To JEREMY)

Do you have a girlfriend?

JEREMY

What?

THEO

Eliza asked whether you have like a girlfriend.

JEREMY

I heard her.

ELIZA

Do **you** have a girlfriend?

THEO

What?

JEREMY

Eliza asked whether you have **like** a girlfriend.

THEO

I heard her. Yes, sort of, not really. I had a girlfriend. We broke up.

HARVEY

Please don't look out the window, Vic.

VICTORIA

Why not, Harv?

HARVEY

Because when you look out the window, you see the past.

VICTORIA

What else is there to see? One can't look forward to the future if there's just death.

ELIZA

I don't get death. You know I just don't get it. You know what I mean?

HARVEY

If you look out the window here, you see the desert. Everyone says it's pretty, inspiring. But the desert is lifeless.

ELIZA

Maybe death is like the desert. But I still don't get it

THEO

The desert doesn't get much water.

JEREMY

She knows what a desert is. That's why your last girlfriend dumped you. You didn't get what she didn't get.

THEO

She didn't dump me.

HARVEY

Stop it. You kids never argued before. Don't argue now.

JEREMY

We're trying to help, get people coffee. No one is interested.

HARVEY

Just keep offering. (To Victoria.)

VICTORIA

When I look out the window, sometimes I think I can see Peru.

HARVEY

What?

VICTORIA

The mountains. They're like the mountains in Peru, except in Peru they have snow on them, I think. I could go there for the treatment, whatever they do to you; it might help.

HARVEY

We don't know what's in Peru, Vic. Look at what we have here, the present.

VICTORIA

The present doesn't help right now. I need the past to face the future.

HARVEY

Your friends are here. When you face into the house, you feel the warm sun on your back.

VICTORIA

The **hot** sun. Maybe we're all headed for hell. Out there, somewhere, at least I'd be going there, I'd be seeking a future.

HARVEY

Look indoors, where you can see the present.

PATRICIA and WILLIAM

(Enter)

VICTORIA

Indoors is the past, my oldest and dearest friends and family. But is it my past, is it really me? I wanted to be a singer.

HARVEY

You were a singer. You are a singer. You sang for everyone.

VICTORIA

For eight year olds in the schools; a chorus teacher. I wanted to sing for the world.

THEO

Mom, maybe an artist doesn't sing for her audience.

JEREMY

She sings for god. So it doesn't matter that they were eight years old. God was listening.

VICTORIA

And this, my cancer, is god applauding, finally, after all these years of hearing me sing.

JUDY and BARBARA

(Enter from separate doors.)

BARBARA

What a good idea! Let's sing. (Starts singing My Bonnie Lies Over The Ocean.)

(Everyone except Judy joins in singing.)

JUDY

What a dumb idea! I don't feel like singing. I mean Viks and I always sang together, since we were kids. Remember those safety songs, "The wheels on the bus." (Starts singing the competing song and Victoria joins) "The wheels on the bus go round and round, round and round, round and round."

(There's a knock at the door. Singing stops)

PATRICIA

(Answers the door with Jeremy listening, looking over her shoulder. She chatters and gestures and then says.) Thanks. (Closes the door.)

JUDY

I like to sing and I like to read. (Sings.) The wheels on the bus go...

VICTORIA

Who was that?

PATRICIA

Just a man.

BARBARA

What did he want?

PATRICIA

Nothing. It was kind of a mistake.

JEREMY

He wanted to know why there were people and cars here and how many and why the place wasn't empty because he thought it was for sale.

VICTORIA

I knew it. We're going to get in trouble for being here.

PATRICIA

We're not. He was just wondering because he lives in the neighborhood. I took all the For Sale signs down.

THEO

And he wanted to know why the For Sale signs were down.

PATRICIA

Maybe taking them down was not such a good idea.

VICTORIA

You mean **you're** going to get in trouble? That would be the worst, especially now that we're all here.

WILLIAM

I think some of us are not all here but I won't say who. Just kidding. Sort of.

BARBARA

A realtor has a right to work on preparing a property for sale. That's what we, members of the prep crew are doing. I for one have spent almost all my time here, thinking about ways to enhance this property.

JUDY

Looks fine to me. I can't think of anything to do.

BARBARA

That's you. Needs organizing, rearranging, and cleaning. We have to get at it.

ELIZA

I'll help.

VICTORIA

Sometimes I forget you're a judge, Barbara. You think Pat's okay?

BARBARA

No problem as long as we can remember why we're here. Let's clean the kitchen for the property's sake but let's not forget Vicsy, right? We have to help you decide what you're going to do, Collect-Budwig, Cesium protocol, Peru.

VICTORIA

So glad you heard about Peru too. But it's so far, such a long trip, so many mosquitoes away.

THEO

Whatever you want to do, Mom. We'll help.

JEREMY

You don't have to do anything that doesn't help or doesn't make sense to you, Mom.

BARBARA

She does have to do something though, doesn't she? I can take her to Peru.

HARVEY

How's that helping?

VICTORIA

The shaman's treatments might work. Wouldn't that be exciting though. I could have war paint on my cheeks.

ELIZA

I thought each of us was figuring out why we're here, what we're doing to fix up the house. I could sweep a little.

HARVEY

Sounds like a dreary party game. We all have to find out why we're here.

BARBARA

Most of us know what we're doing here. What are you doing here?

HARVEY

That's not what I meant. We can't be childish pretending to do things.

JUDY

Sometimes, it's okay to be childish.

JEREMY

I came to steal the appliances and make the neighbors nervous.

VICTORIA

Stop it. We certainly can't be childish and object to every suggestion made. Pat, you are a brave woman.

WILLIAM

Is she? Yeah, I guess maybe.

BARBARA

I remember Victoria and I were lost in the woods. That's when we had to be brave and stay close, very close together.

JUDY

(Looking up from her phone.) Who? No. I don't remember that.

BARBARA

Because you weren't there. We had to be brave and keep slogging. Who could know what would happen if we stopped?

VICTORIA

Except we weren't in the woods. We walked for hours on this trail in this city park.

BARBARA

Well, we almost never found our way out.

VICTORIA

Until we asked a woman walking her dog. You were too proud to admit you were lost.

BARBARA

We weren't exactly lost but I would've gladly admitted we were if you would admit we were walking in circles on the same path.

VICTORIA

You kept saying we were passing the same tree. I can't help it if I couldn't tell one tree from another back then. Now I can tell them apart.

BARBARA

There were no men chasing us in that story. Just trees.

VICTORIA

The men were always chasing us, especially you, but not when we needed them.

BARBARA

Right, we're lost in a park and then where are the men to chase us back to civilization? Maybe that's not where men chase you.

WILLIAM

A city park is civilization.

PATRICIA

(Squeezes his hand.) It's their story.

WILLIAM

It's a silly story.

VICTORIA

It's silly to call a story silly. Maybe you don't understand it.

JUDY

I don't see anything brave about getting lost.

BARBARA

I remember Victoria and I sneaked into the theater once. That was brave.

JUDY

Why didn't you just buy tickets? (She withdraws from the conversation and opens her book.)

ELIZA

You probably could have.

BARBARA

Because we wanted to be part of the theater; we wanted to be artists.

JUDY

People buy tickets.

BARBARA

We wanted to be artists not just paying customers. But the usher saw us and chased us. We got away and ran up to the first balcony and he spotted us there. The second balcony. And he spotted us again, coming on the run.

HARVEY

Then the third balcony?

JEREMY

She's telling the story.

THEO

We all got excited.

BARBARA

Yes, the third. He saw us; we raced across to the stairway at the other end of the balcony; we went down. We hid in one of the boxes, the fanciest box. Panting and scared. The theater was dark by then but it seemed to me our body functions were making tremendous noise, deep breaths, pumping hearts and we were glowing in the dark.

WILLIAM

The stories people tell.

BARBARA

The usher ran right up to the box we were in. He looked in and I thought for sure he saw us; there was nowhere else to run from our balcony box. We could leap to our deaths in the audience below. But then he ran by.

JEREMY

And you got to be in the theater together without paying.

THEO

Or being paid.

BARBARA

We were in the theater together, Victoria and I. But it ruined the whole show. We kept looking around, afraid the usher was going to come back and find us; every movement we heard in the dark was the usher coming for us. So dumb!

JEREMY

Did they know you had done something illegal when they thought of you for a judge?

BARBARA

There was no arrest, no charges brought. But I thought about that, if the past came to visit. We weren't really strictly illegal because there was no sign on the door we entered. And besides we were minors. I could talk my way out of it.

THEO

I bet you could.

JUDY

I don't know whether that was brave or not. Remember when we hitchhiked through Europe? That was brave.

VICTORIA

A long time ago.

JUDY

And we got in that truck with that burly type with the big mustache, and that sweaty shirt, and then he wouldn't stop to let us out. No matter what we said, in no matter what language we couldn't speak, he wouldn't stop.

BARBARA

Are we going to hear this story again?

THEO

(Reacting to Victoria's look.) Okay, we'll listen.

JUDY

It won't hurt you to.

JEREMY

Yes, Aunt Judy

ELIZA

I don't remember it.

WILLIAM

It's doesn't matter. It's different every time.

VICTORIA

So don't focus so hard on the details; it's essentially the same.

JUDY

We thought we were kidnapped, about to be sold to decadents in the white slave trade for who knew what purpose.

PATRICIA

Everybody knows for what purpose those people want young women.

WILLIAM

Back then maybe. Nowadays, they could want your organs. Some people's organs sell for more money than they would make in their entire lives. There's a business in organs.

ELIZA

You're dead if they sell your organs, right?

THEO

Right. They don't usually let you stay attached to them, especially if they sell different organs to different people.

ELIZA

They do that?

JEREMY

Yes.

BARBARA

Depends how you measure income. Of course they don't usually give anything like the price paid to the person whose organs they sell.

ELIZA

If they're dead, what would they do with the money anyway?

WILLIAM

Money is money. It's value.

JUDY

All the time I was trying to figure out how the truck door lock worked.

VICTORIA

You were never any good with doors or locks.

JUDY

I can't even use the automatic coffee maker.

VICTORIA

I thought we were dead, or worse.

BARBARA

The more times you tell the story, the closer to death you were.

JUDY

But then the truck stopped for a light at an intersection in this small town.

THEO

I thought it was a railroad track.

JEREMY

Last time it was just a busy crossing, a four way stop, no light.

HARVEY

One time, the truck stopped to buy tickets for a ferry.

JUDY

I got mixed up. There was no traffic light.

WILLIAM

One time the whole story was in a boat with jumping into the water to escape.

THEO

I thought it was on the outskirts of a city.

JUDY

Whatever, we were really scared. Then, finally, the door got flung open; I don't even know how or what I did; and I jumped out.

VICTORIA

And left me in the truck.

BARBARA

Pretty normal for Judy.

JUDY

Why didn't you jump out too? I could never figure that out.

VICTORIA

Because he grabbed my arm; I've told you that a thousand times and you always pretend you don't remember. And when he grabbed my arm, did you look back, call the police, call for help, scream?

JUDY

What was I supposed to do? I didn't think of those things.

WILLIAM

That's childish. I would have thought of something.

BARBARA

But would it have worked.

VICTORIA

It's childish to always think you can solve someone else's problem.

PATRICIA

William always solves problems.

BARBARA

Judy thought of Judy, as always

VICTORIA

Yeah well, Jude, what did you think of? Really?

JUDY

Nothing.

BARBARA

But everyone thinks of what they think of. We don't plan out our thoughts for situations like that.

HARVEY

Sounds like a trial going on here.

THEO

Defense counsel has spoken.

JEREMY

The judge has spoken.

THEO

Has judged. Innocent on all charges.

BARBARA

That's what I think explains it. It's not a crime. That's how the mind works.

VICTORIA

(To Judy.) You were never good at thinking of things in situations.

JUDY

I got out of the truck, didn't I? Why didn't you scream or something?

VICTORIA

I couldn't. I opened my mouth to scream and there was this gross fist and huge arm coming at me. So, instead of screaming, I bit him, right through his shirt. I couldn't scream while I was biting him. I can still taste his sweaty, greasy sleeve. I was afraid I wasn't hurting him enough but I closed my eyes and just kept biting as hard as I could.

HARVEY

I'm sure he felt it.

PATRICIA

(Laughing) I heard William would know, but you too Harvey?

HARVEY

Victoria doesn't bite me.

WILLIAM

She used to bite me all the time when we were kids.

JEREMY

She was in training, practicing.

VICTORIA

You were such a nuisance as a brother. You always tried to bully me.

WILLIAM

You bullied me. You were older.

VICTORIA

I still am. I may die first.

THEO

Stop that, Mom. Tell us about the man in the truck, Mom. I'm gonna pee in my pants if I don't hear how it turns out.

BARBARA

Thought you said you heard the story before.

THEO

But you said it could be different this time.

JEREMY

One time they were in cages on a boat with other women.

JUDY

That's not how it happened.

VICTORIA

I think he was so shocked to get bitten that he let go of his grip on me in order to hit me.

JEREMY

Then you jumped out of the truck because Judy had left the door open. (He points to the front door.)

WILLIAM

Did Judy leave the door open when she came in earlier? She often does.

JUDY

I don't think about closing doors.

BARBARA

Judy's an open-the-door and a leave-the-door-open kind of person.

VICTORIA

Lucky for me. He hit me. He knocked me through the open door out of the truck.

THEO

Incredible.

BARBARA

What a story! You sort of got it right this time.

THEO

You're the only one who remembers it, Aunt Barbara.

BARBARA

And I wasn't actually there.

JEREMY

Tell us what happened then, Mom. You never tell us what happened after that.

JUDY

Nothing. We went on with our trip around Europe. Sowing our wild oats I guess.

VICTORIA

So long ago. So silly. We do such silly things.

PATRICIA

It's an adventure. But it's pretty dumb too, getting in that truck.

WILLIAM

Stupid thing to do.

JUDY

The things we did weren't stupid at the time. And that truck was something Victoria and I did together; we were very close, and it made us closer, the closest.

BARBARA

Lots of kids hitchhike through Europe and come back with stories like that.

JEREMY

Did you ever look back on anything and say how clever it was, how smart it was?

BARBARA

How would **you** know about looking back? (Teasing.) What have you to look back on?

ELIZA

You'd be surprised. Young people have a lot of decisions to make.

THEO

Yeah. Have you decided a lot?

ELIZA

I don't know. There's a lot to decide.

BARBARA

She has. Young people have. Deciding to go to sneak into the theater for example.

JUDY

That story about the theater's not nearly as good a story as escaping from a truck with an evil driver.

VICTORIA

A beginning like that long ago, you'd think we'd go on to fame and success.

HARVEY

As what? Kidnap escapees?

VICTORIA

No, as artists.

THEO

You did, mom, you did.

JEREMY

Escape artists? I've never heard you talk this way, Mom.

VICTORIA

No, you know, we should have been artists, musicians, something like that.

WILLIAM

Because you were almost kidnapped?

VICTORIA

Exactly. Because we had the courage to try things.

HARVEY

Vik, you were what you were. That's what you are.

WILLIAM

Instead of becoming an artist, you had your nose fixed.

VICTORIA

What? What does that have to do with anything? You were always so mean.

BARBARA

He would bring that up. He's such a snob.

PATRICIA

I'm sure he doesn't mean it that way.

WILLIAM

It has to do, because of why you had your nose fixed.

VICTORIA

Because it was such a big nose. And you never had the courage to change anything about you or admit anything about you needed changing.

BARBARA

For someone as regal as Victoria. It was entirely too much a working class nose.

ELIZA

Victoria was a queen or something, right?

WILLIAM

Exactly. It's infantile stewing about what you could have been. Being middle class, you could get your nose fixed but you never had a chance at real success, in art or science or anything. The middle class can't produce artists or thinkers or that kind of person; the middle class can save its money and fix its nose.

BARBARA

That's ridiculous and rude!

WILLIAM

It's true. You just don't understand. You don't know the facts.

PATRICIA

Don't let them get you in an argument, William, Bill.

WILLIAM

Don't William Bill me. I'll get in an argument if I want. Think of all the greats, soldiers, inventors, scientists, thinkers, musicians, Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Francis Drake, Sir Edward Elgar.

BARBARA

What are you talking about? The middle class, the workers, did everything.

WILLIAM

You're so hung up on worker's pride, you can't see reality. Real success is a prerogative of the aristocracy.

BARBARA

A prerogative?

WILLIAM

We never had a chance, Victoria. That's what draws us together. Your music and my brains and we never made much of ourselves because we never had a chance.

VICTORIA

What about my brains?

PATRICIA

William, Bill, what are you talking about not making much of yourself? You made a few million just on the real estate we did together. You've made plenty of yourself.

WILLIAM

If Victoria should have made more of herself, so should I. I should have made ten times as much. Anybody who's anybody in this economy should have many millions by my age.

PATRICIA

You made millions.

WILLIAM

And what does that do? It let me buy all the food we brought over for our stay here.

PATRICIA

That's something.

WILLIAM

Not much. You don't hear anyone talking about that.

ELIZA

We all appreciate it, especially when we get hungry.

VICTORIA

What if I'd really done, I mean successfully, the things I wanted to do?

BARBARA

Where's all this coming from? The first thing you guys agree on in your lives is that you're not successes. And in front of your boys.

THEO

Really! It's like we're not signs of success.

BARBARA

Of course, you're signs of success.

JEREMY

Do you tell everyone they're successes, even if they come before you in court on their last nickel, sick as dogs, completely rejected by their parents and guilty? Then sentence them.

THEO

He's sorry, Aunt Booby, I mean Aunt Barbara.

BARBARA

I kind of like it when you call me your aunt, even though I'm not. And I understand

VICTORIA

Family's not what I'm talking about and you know it. I mean in terms of individual, intellectual, personal accomplishment.

WILLIAM

I was always the more intellectual of us two but...

VICTORIA

Who says that?

WILLIAM

Middle class children have no chance of true accomplishment or of contributing something of genius.

BARBARA

The whole renaissance was a middle class innovation! People got better at what they did and then tried to figure out how it worked. That's where progress came from.

THEO

No need to argue this again, really, There's got to be a middle ground.

JEREMY

For the middle class. If we define our terms, maybe we'll find we really don't disagree.

WILLIAM

Look in the history books! Sir this and Sir that. Sir everybody. Not laborers.

BARBARA

The British fake the whole thing by knighting people after they're successful and famous so you think the aristocracy did something.

WILLIAM

I know all about this; it doesn't change the main point.

BARBARA

Look it up, Harvey. Here's something you can do. Let the internet save us. Sir Francis Drake got knighted after he sank so many Spanish ships, the English crown was afraid he'd run out of foreign targets and go after British ships.

THEO

Dad, get us a database of knights.

BARBARA

Newton wasn't aristocratic. He was knighted after he proved all that stuff nobody else understood.

JEREMY

Dad, data please.

HARVEY

I'm working on it.

BARBARA

It was craftsmen becoming middle class and figuring out how to do different things or do things better. That's how it happened. Composers were viola makers, or something.

HARVEY

Got it. Newton was the son of a farmer who died before he was born. His mother sent him away to his grandmother's so she could be more attractive for a second marriage. After her second husband died, she brought Newton back home.

JEREMY

The dates, dad, the dates.

HARVEY

Okay. This is interesting.

BARBARA

You find everything interesting. But this time we really want to know.

JUDY

I can never find the information I want on computers.

HARVEY

Newton was born in 1642 and was knighted in 1705, when he was 63

WILLIAM

We can all add.

JEREMY

You mean subtract. We can do that too.

THEO

More data. Like we love data. But we're bored with Newton now.

HARVEY

Sir Edward Elgar was the son of a piano tuner. Elgar's wife Alice's family didn't want her to marry a craftsman; but she helped make him famous.

BARBARA

That's romantic.

WILLIAM

But that's not the renaissance and everyone knows this stuff.

THEO

Dates, dad. We're like date people.

JEREMY

It's the dating game.

HARVEY

Born in 1857 and knighted in 1904.

THEO

When he was 47.

JEREMY

We're subtraction people.

PATRICIA

None of that's the renaissance. Is it? The renaissance was before that, right?

WILLIAM

Absolutely! The point is, if you attain something notable, you're not middle class. Everyone knows that so they give you a title, so the middle class does not have a chance.

HARVEY

Michelangelo was something. He spent three years in an apprenticeship at the craft shop of Ghirlandaio, however you pronounce it. Wow.

JEREMY

We had that kind of chocolate once, in San Francisco, on a family trip. Wasn't that good.

VICTORIA

Oh, hush. (To William.) That's not logical. Being middle class or not is what you were born into. You're making nobility into something people are given when they're knighted, so it's different.

WILLIAM

You never know about the stuff on the internet. Anybody can put anything on the web. We have a few exceptions but they just prove the rule.

JUDY

All that stuff is in that computer, huh?

BARBARA

Some computers can say it aloud. (To Harvey) So?

HARVEY

The web says Michelangelo tried to hide his apprenticeship because he was trying to make a case that fine arts...

VICTORIA

The truly fine arts.

HARVEY

... were fundamentally different from and had no relation to the crafts he learned

JEREMY

He said genius is different from labor, from crafts. Genius is aristocratic.

PATRICIA

That's just what William was saying. See Michelangelo and William agree.

BARBARA

Seems to me William is just wrong. Philosophy is philosophy and politeness is politeness but people can still be just plain wrong. I weigh cases all day long and...

WILLIAM

The judge has ruled. How would you know who's wrong?

PATRICIA

I don't think any of this is all that interesting. We should talk about something else.

HARVEY

The web says...

VICTORIA

Harv, I think we have enough information from the web on this one. An argument that an exception proves the rule is just silly.

HARVEY

Okay, but it's interesting.

BARBARA

The Beattles were knighted. Just in case it turns out a hundred years from now that their music was significant, it'll look in history as if the titled class made that contribution too. The English are very clever, aren't they. Such liars! They're on your side, William.

WILLIAM

That doesn't matter. Those knighthoods don't get passed on to your heirs.

PATRICIA

When you die?

ELIZA

Is that right? They give you a title and take it away when you die? Dying is weird.

JEREMY

You probably don't need a title after you die.

THEO

That depends where you want to be buried.

WILLIAM

In the end, the aristocracy keeps its titles to itself.

PATRICIA

Its rank and its class for sure.

WILLIAM

The point is the real aristocracy has something to pass down to its heirs.

ELIZA

When they die?

WILLIAM

When else do you pass things down?

JUDY

(Judy, having gone out to the kitchen and returned with an apple.) You don't have to keep talking about death, about passing...out

ELIZA

I'm trying to understand. Anyway, isn't that why we came?

JUDY

To talk about death? No.

ELIZA

To understand it.

BARBARA

(To Judy) What are you doing?

JUDY

I'm cutting up this apple.

BARBARA

There's more than one person here. If you're hungry, maybe others are too. If you're going to prepare food, you should offer some to everyone.

JUDY

I'm not preparing food. I'm reading my book and having an apple.

VICTORIA

Remember after we came back from Europe, we read all those books together.

JUDY

Yeah, you got books and I got books and we read them and we talked about them and talked and read and talked. We were so close.

BARBARA

Until?

JUDY

Until what? What do you know about reading?

BARBARA

I've read some books and I heard about this reading business.

JEREMY

Must be pretty noisy readers if you heard them.

BARBARA

No, I heard that this was really an ugly story, not some testimony to how close the two of you were.

JUDY

What are you talking about now? We read books together, a lot of books together.

BARBARA

And you were always talking about the books your mother had.

JUDY

My mother taught me to read. She had great books. Books you never heard of, would never find anywhere else.

BARBARA

And then Vicsy got all excited about those books and called up your mother to borrow some. And when you heard she'd called your mother directly, you exploded.

JUDY

She was **my** mother.

BARBARA

Vicsy knew her pretty well; she'd been over to your house hundreds of times.

JUDY

Still, **my mother**. My mother was saving those books for me.

BARBARA

So you told your mother to lend Vicsy nothing and didn't talk to Vicsy for six months.

VICTORIA

That was weird. That hurt. I cried a few times.

BARBARA

Daily, you told me. That was a terrible thing to do.

JUDY

I don't know. It didn't hurt that bad. (She clutches her book and chews noisily on her apple.) This apple is good.

THEO

What's it about?

JUDY

The apple?

THEO

The book.

JUDY

Some people die and go on to live in another universe.

BARBARA

After they pass their things onto their heirs.

JEREMY

I'll probably pass nothing but wind on to my heirs.

WILLIAM

That's what the middle class passes on to its heirs.

BARBARA

What do you want to pass on?

HARVEY

The next generation doesn't want anything from us.

WILLIAM

If you have nothing to give them.

BARBARA

That's romantic.

PATRICIA

Don't be so hard on everyone, William, Bill. And don't everyone get on William

WILLIAM

I don't need protection here.

JUDY

Why are we talking about passing stuff on. In the book, they just pass on

THEO

Everyone has something to give the next generation.

JEREMY

Young people can see everyone who came before them and can mimic them.

ELIZA

You don't have any children do you, William?

BARBARA

Some people don't want children.

PAT

Some people don't have any anyway.

JUDY

Everyone in the book has children, unless they're really bad or something is wrong with them.

WILLIAM

See what I mean?

VICTORIA

You can still pass things on to your heirs, whatever heirs you want. Wealth, property, position, a cherry orchard.

HARVEY

A cherry orchard?

JEREMY

If you don't pass it on, you lose the cherry orchard.

THEO

Even the aristocracy can blow it.

ELIZA

Sounds like some kind of game, Pass-it-on.

WILLIAM

You have to **have** something to pass it on. That's the point.

JUDY

Still, when you're gone, you're gone, because you can sense but can't really see the world you came from.

WILLIAM

You're a child of a laborer.

JUDY

Eliza doesn't want anything from me. She's going to make it on her own.

WILLIAM

She's going to have to. Your parents were laborers.

JUDY

My father was a professor.

PATRICIA

It would be nice when you're gone, to think of your kids having something you gave them, some property.

JEREMY

I thought you didn't have any kids.

PATRICIA

I don't. Still, I know about property. I'm a realtor.

VICTORIA

Trees, blossoms, red fruit hanging from the branches. Wouldn't it be nice to leave a cherry orchard for the next generation?

JUDY

They'd sell it in a heart beat. Eliza couldn't run a cherry orchard.

ELIZA

How do you know? I could try.

WILLIAM

If it's property we're after, true property, we're all failures, aren't we? If it's true wealth, we all blew it.

BARBARA

Blew it? You're filthy rich.

PATRICIA

Remember we went to Paris for the weekend.

VICTORIA

You have millions, William, we all know that.

WILLIAM

A few millions. But if you're not who you wanted to be, was supposed to be, then I'm certainly not either.

JUDY

You could buy a cherry orchard if you wanted one. They sell things like that. Don't they? They must.

PATRICIA

I bet I could find one for you.

WILLIAM

Cherries don't grow in the desert here.

PATRICIA

The real estate market is on line; it covers the whole country, the whole world.

WILLIAM

