

FRONT DOOR OPEN

a play by Tom Baum

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Characters

ELEANOR, a woman in her 60s, an agoraphobic housewife

DOUGLAS, her husband, a man in his 60s, a urological surgeon

GRETCHEN, their only child, a woman in her 40s, a professor of
psychology

THALIA, Gretchen's teenage daughter

The setting is Eleanor and Douglas's living room. The time is the present.

The action takes place in one day.

Scene 1

(The living room of ELEANOR and DOUGLAS's house.

Three doors, one to a foyer and the front door, one to a stairway and an unseen kitchen, one to another portion of the house, including an unseen bathroom. Three windows look out on a front porch. All are curtained. The front door has four locks, including a chain lock.

The living room is furnished in mid-century modern, and includes a sideboard, storage cabinets, well-stocked bookshelves, a leather armchair, a remotely-controlled radio, wall-to-wall carpeting, a footstool, a wastebasket, a land line, and several faded throw pillows on the other chairs and on the sofa.

It's early morning. The room is dark except for the glow of the lights on the burglar-alarm panel by the front door.

Sound of breaking glass.

ELEANOR, a woman in her 60s, enters, in nightgown, robe, and slippers.)

ELEANOR: Who's there? Whoever you are, I'm warning you, I'm not alone. There are other people here. We have a gun.

(ELEANOR edges toward the window nearest the door, starts to open the curtain.

Sound of footsteps on the porch, the sound of broken glass crunched underfoot.

ELEANOR backs away in direction of the kitchen. Sounds of barking.)

ELEANOR: You heard that, too, didn't you? This is it. It's really happening.

(ELEANOR disappears in the direction of the kitchen. More barking.)

ELEANOR: *(off)* Shh, darling, I'm taking care of this.

(ELEANOR re-enters, clutching a meat pounder. She goes to the front window again, starts to open the curtain.

From the other side of the curtain, women's voices, chattering indistinctly.

A light goes on in the living room. DOUGLAS, a man in his 60s, has entered the living room, fully dressed.)

DOUGLAS: Darling, what are you doing up?

ELEANOR: (*oblivious*) It's all right. Don't worry. I'm dealing with the situation.

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, hello, are you awake?

(ELEANOR turns. Registers DOUGLAS.)

ELEANOR: What? Yes. Of course I am. Of course I'm awake.

(The sounds cut out.)

DOUGLAS: Still hearing those noises?

ELEANOR: Why?

(DOUGLAS indicates the meat pounder in her hand.)

DOUGLAS: Another "home invasion?"

ELEANOR: Douglas, do you mind taking a look? Just to make sure.

(DOUGLAS goes over to the window nearest the door, opens the curtains. The front porch is visible beyond.)

DOUGLAS: You see? Nobody there.

ELEANOR: Good. Thank you for checking.

(ELEANOR sets the meat pounder aside.)

DOUGLAS: So tell me...who's coming to the house today?

ELEANOR: What do you mean, who's coming to the house? No one.

DOUGLAS: Are you sure? Didn't we make an appointment with the tree man?

ELEANOR: Oh yes, you're right. Mr. Nardone's coming today.

DOUGLAS: That's the "home invasion." Mr. Nardone.

ELEANOR: I don't know why we ever made that appointment. Did you give the birches the vitamin treatment?

DOUGLAS: Darling, that's completely futile.

ELEANOR: It's not futile! He'll say dig them up and charge us an arm and a leg. Those trees can be saved!

(ELEANOR starts in the direction of the kitchen, sees DOUGLAS turning down the thermostat.)

ELEANOR: And please don't turn the heat down. The bedroom was freezing last night.

DOUGLAS: Heat dries the mucous membranes. You're more likely to get a pneumonia. A cold bedroom increases your life expectancy.

ELEANOR: Not if you have nightmares.,.

(ELEANOR exits briefly. DOUGLAS stares at his left hand—the one he didn't use to turn down the thermostat. It's shaking.)

ELEANOR: *(off)* ...Nightmares shorten your life.

DOUGLAS: I'd like to see your evidence for that.

(ELEANOR re-enters with a watering can. DOUGLAS makes a fist of his shaking hand.)

DOUGLAS: What's this for?

ELEANOR: It's the vitamin solution. Please water the birches before you leave. I'll leave the can right here. (*sets watering can by the door to the kitchen*) You promise me you'll do that?

DOUGLAS: I promise. Whose turn is it to make breakfast? Is it Allbran day?

ELEANOR: I'd really rather have oatmeal.

DOUGLAS: I don't have time to make you oatmeal. And you never wash out the saucepan.

ELEANOR: How can you say that? I always wash out the saucepan!

DOUGLAS: Last Tuesday you didn't. And you fell asleep on me again last night.

ELEANOR: I most certainly did not fall asleep!

DOUGLAS: OK, whom did Joan Crawford end up with?

ELEANOR: Henry Fonda. Not the other one who was after her...Starts with a D. Four syllables...

DOUGLAS: Where were they at the end of the movie?

ELEANOR: In Joan Crawford's apartment.

DOUGLAS: They were in Henry Fonda's cottage on the Cape. You missed the last twenty minutes of the movie. I hate watching your movie when you've fallen asleep.

ELEANOR: Den-nis Mor-gan...

DOUGLAS: Da-vid Ni-ven....

ELEANOR: Dur-wood Kir-by...

DOUGLAS: What do you need at the store today?

ELEANOR: That depends what you'd like for dinner.

DOUGLAS: That's entirely up to you, darling.

ELEANOR: Lemon chicken. I'll need a pound of boneless.

DOUGLAS: It's too lemony, that chicken dish. Why don't I pick up some ground turkey. You'll make us a meat loaf.

ELEANOR: Den-holm Ell-i-ot...

DOUGLAS: That's five syllables. Go Google it, I'm late for a prostatectomy.

ELEANOR: Oh and while you're at Kroger's, I need underwear. Panties and bras. Same size as before. Day-ton...Da-mon...I'm getting warmer...

DOUGLAS: Will you remember to take your Xanax?

ELEANOR: Douglas, all I've been feeling lately is the side effects.

DOUGLAS: That's what you get for studying the leaflet.

ELEANOR: The leaflet says some people get more anxious.

DOUGLAS: One in ten thousand.

ELEANOR: Maybe I'm the one.

DOUGLAS: No, darling. You're one in a million.

(DOUGLAS has disarmed the burglar alarm system, unchained the chain-lock, and unlocked the other three locks. He jams a hat on his head.)

DOUGLAS: I have rounds after surgery, but I should be back after lunch. Set up the Scrabble, we'll have another marathon this afternoon.

(DOUGLAS kisses ELEANOR.)

ELEANOR: Da-na!

DOUGLAS: Dana Andrews!

ELEANOR: Dana Andrews.

DOUGLAS: That's a relief. Bye, darling.

(DOUGLAS opens the front door. From the burglar alarm panel comes a voice:)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(DOUGLAS exits, closing the door after him. ELEANOR starts to re-chain the door.)

ELEANOR: *(calls through door)* Douglas, the birches!

(No answer. ELEANOR reaches for the door, but can't bring herself to open it. Sound of a car door slamming. ELEANOR re-chains the door, punches in the code that re-arms the system, and locks the other three locks. Hesitates. Goes to the land line. Dials.)

ELEANOR: *(into phone)* Yes, hello, this is Mrs. Leverette...My husband will be coming in later to shop for dinner....Will you please tell him what I really want is boneless chicken, not ground turkey, and he mustn't take no for an answer. I'll need lemons too, so please alert the produce department...Thank you.

(ELEANOR hangs up. This effort has cost her. Sound of wind. Tree branches scraping at the window. Vague voices.)

ELEANOR unearths a bottle from the couch. She takes a quick nip, stashes the bottle back in its hiding place.

The sounds grow louder. ELEANOR picks up the radio remote.

Classical music comes on. She opens a drawer, takes out a paper rose, fixes the rose to her hair, changes the station. The lights fade as she dances to Hot Chocolate's "Sexy Thing":)

HOT CHOCOLATE: *(on radio)* “—I believe in miracles
Where're you from, you sexy thang, you sexy thang you
I believe in miracles since you came along, you sexy thang
Where did you come from, baby
How did you know, I needed you
How did you know I needed you so badly
How did you know I'd give my heart gladly
Yesterday I was one of the lonely people
Now you're lying close to me, making love to me
I believe in miracles...”

(Music fades as the lights go down.)

Scene 2

(Lights up on ELEANOR, an hour or two later. She's dressed now, the paper rose still in her hair. She starts setting up the Scrabble.

Sound of stairs creaking. Then a sound of distant voices—the party noise.)

ELEANOR: What are those now? Are you hearing that?

(Now the sounds seem to be coming from the direction of the kitchen. ELEANOR backs away from the advancing sounds, in the direction of the front door. Steels herself.

The doorbell rings.

ELEANOR stifles a yelp, reaches for the meat pounder.)

ELEANOR: Who's that?

GRETCHEN: *(off)* It's me! Open the door!

ELEANOR: Are you from Nardone Tree Service?

GRETCHEN: *(off)* Mom, it's Gretchen!

ELEANOR: Gretchen?! No. Go away. *(calls)* Darling, are you hearing this?

GRETCHEN: *(off)* Mom, just open the door, will you please?

(ELEANOR tries to steady herself.)

ELEANOR: Gretchen?

GRETCHEN: Yes! Are you going to open the door or not?

ELEANOR: Hold your horses. I'm coming.

(But for a moment ELEANOR doesn't budge at all. Then, deep breath, she punches in the code that disarms the burglar alarm, unchains and unlocks the front door, opens it warily.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(GRETCHEN enters.)

GRETCHEN: Hello, Mom. What took you so long?

ELEANOR: What on earth are you doing in the East?

GRETCHEN: Mom...I think what you meant to say is...hello.

ELEANOR: You haven't answered my question. What are you doing here?

GRETCHEN: Why didn't I warn you, is that what you mean?

ELEANOR: It's been weeks since I heard a single word from you. Your father isn't here, he's at the hospital. Did you tell him you were coming?

GRETCHEN: After last time? I was afraid he'd tell me not to bother. What are you doing with a meat pounder?

ELEANOR: Oh, the meat pounder. I'm... I'm preparing some lemon chicken. *(sets meat pounder aside, starts to chain the door)*

GRETCHEN: Mom, don't lock up, Thalia's here too.

ELEANOR: Thalia's here? Where?

GRETCHEN: In my car.

ELEANOR: *(at the window)* Is that a rental car? It looks ancient.

GRETCHEN: It's my car. What's left of it.

ELEANOR: You drove all the way from California? Why didn't you fly?

GRETCHEN: The short answer, Mom, is we're not going back. So how are you doing?

ELEANOR: How am I doing? I'm doing fine. What do you mean, not going back? I don't like the sound of that...

(Distant sound of party voices.)

GRETCHEN: Mom, what's the matter?

(ELEANOR glances out the window, starts to punch in the code to re-arm the alarm system.)

GRETCHEN: I just told you, Thalia's here too. What is it, what startled you just now?

ELEANOR: Don't start with your questions. I'm expecting the tree man, I thought I heard his truck.

GRETCHEN: *(lightly)* Is that who the paper rose is for?

ELEANOR: Oh. No. The tree man? Of course not. Why would you ask such a thing?

(ELEANOR takes off the rose, stashes it in a drawer—along with the meat pounder.)

GRETCHEN: Mom...the meat pounder.

(ELEANOR stops putting the meat pounder in the drawer, sets it aside.)

ELEANOR: It's not Alzheimer's, if that's what you're thinking.

GRETCHEN: You wouldn't still be playing Scrabble.

ELEANOR: Every day. I still win three games out of four.

GRETCHEN: House hasn't changed. Still freezing as ever.

(GRETCHEN *goes to turn up the thermostat.*)

ELEANOR: I wouldn't touch that thermostat if I were you.

GRETCHEN: We might as well be comfy till he gets here.

(GRETCHEN *turns up the thermostat, takes out her cell.*)

GRETCHEN: (*into phone*) Come on in and bring the big suitcase....Because my back hurts from five days of driving, OK?....Not when the video's over, this very second. (*to ELEANOR*) She's such a dawdler.

ELEANOR: Well, so were you. You dawdled at the breast, you dawdled coming out of my vagina. Have you had breakfast? Help yourself to whatever's in the fridge.

GRETCHEN: Thanks, we've eaten. Have I ever heard you say "vagina"?

ELEANOR: Gretchen, I taught you "vagina." You were starting to call it your "twat."

(*Doorbell. ELEANOR stiffens, peers anxiously out the window.*)

GRETCHEN: Mom...focus...it's Thalia.

ELEANOR: Of course it is. I'm just eager to see her, that's all.

(GRETCHEN *unchains the lock, opens the door.*)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(*THALIA, mid-teens, enters, dragging a big suitcase with a conspicuous fuzzy-monkey I.D. ornament. She has a neck tattoo.*)

THALIA: There. Now my back is fucked up.

GRETCHEN: Language. Say hi to Grandma.

THALIA: Hi, Grandma. (*tosses keys to GRETCHEN*)

ELEANOR: Hello, Thalia. Nice to see you in the flesh, after how many years? Must be ten at least. Do I get a hug?

GRETCHEN: Don't get your hopes up. Thalia's not hugging this year.

(*Defiantly, THALIA hugs ELEANOR.*)

ELEANOR: That's very sweet, to make an exception of your grandma. (*darkly*) That's quite a large suitcase. Why did you bring it in here?

THALIA: Yeah, she said you'd freak out.

ELEANOR: I hope that doesn't mean what I think it means.

THALIA: Yeah, it does. We're gonna need to stay here.

ELEANOR: Here? This house? No. I'm afraid not, dear. (*to GRETCHEN*) Not after what happened last time.

GRETCHEN: Mom, it's just for a while.

ELEANOR: How long is "a while"?

GRETCHEN: That depends on how soon I find a job here.

ELEANOR: Here? Locally? You're moving back?

GRETCHEN: That's the plan.

ELEANOR: Why so suddenly? Gretchen, what happened?

THALIA: We're homeless.

ELEANOR: No! What happened to your house?

THALIA: The house is fine. We just can't go there anymore. Union Bank changed the locks.

ELEANOR: (to GRETCHEN) What happened to your money?

THALIA: Long story, Grandma.

GRETCHEN: And let's not burden her with the details.

THALIA: Dad's gonna flip out when he finds we're gone.

ELEANOR: You just up and left? Without telling Larry?

GRETCHEN: We're separated, Mom. We've been living apart.

ELEANOR: Well, your father certainly saw that coming. Wishful thinking, I always thought, but how distressing. (to THALIA) Especially for you.

THALIA: Hey. We hope we never seen that dickwad again.

ELEANOR: I was never that eager to see him myself. What will happen to all your patients?

GRETCHEN: "Clients," Mom.

THALIA: She's not an M.D.

ELEANOR: Well, won't your "clients" miss you?

THALIA: She was the school psychologist, Grandma.

GRETCHEN: Thalia, I can speak for myself, thank you—

THALIA: If the students were threatening to jump off a bridge, she'd pat them on the head and send them to a real shrink.

ELEANOR: Well, how could she have managed a full practice? (to GRETCHEN) You had all those classes to teach.

THALIA: Yeah, that didn't work out so great either.

GRETCHEN: Thalia—

ELEANOR: What do you mean, it didn't work out? Your mother had tenure.

THALIA: And then she didn't.

GRETCHEN: *(to THALIA)* Not one more word. *(to ELEANOR)* The prospects are better in the East. *(to THALIA)* Where are you going?

THALIA: To get a barf bag. That McDonalds breakfast was totally disgusting.

(THALIA exits in the direction of the kitchen. Instantly, a menacing growl from ZENDA, the dog. THALIA scurries back into the living room, terrified. Sounds of angry barking.)

THALIA: What the fuck?—He tried to bite me!

ELEANOR: You startled him, Thalia. He's not used to visitors.

THALIA: What kind of weird dog is that? He's gigantic!

ELEANOR: He's supposed to be a pure black Lab, but I think a Great Dane might have gotten in there first. *(calls)* Darling, quiet down!

(The barking tails off.)

GRETCHEN: Since when do you have a dog?

ELEANOR: Well, I'm alone so much...with your father at the hospital...I finally talked him into it.

GRETCHEN: I can't picture Dad walking a dog.

ELEANOR: Well, he bought a leash, but they really didn't take to each other.

GRETCHEN: So you have a dog-walker?

ELEANOR: Oh hardly. (*more barking; calls*) Quiet, darling! (*to*
GRETCHEN; *lightly*) He knows we're talking about him.

GRETCHEN: So wait: who takes the dog out?

ELEANOR: Nobody takes him out. Don't worry, he's paper-
trained....but only for the kitchen, poor thing.

GRETCHEN: Are you saying this dog won't leave the house either?

ELEANOR: Well, he does get his exercise...racing around the center
island. But no, he's definitely a kitchen dog.

GRETCHEN: And that's who you were talking to...when I rang the bell?

ELEANOR: That's what you do with a dog, you talk to him. Don't look
at me in that tone of voice, I haven't lost my mind. (*calls*) Zenda, quiet,
darling!

GRETCHEN: Zenda?

ELEANOR: Yes, his name is Zenda.

GRETCHEN: As in *The Prisoner of Zenda*?

ELEANOR: I suppose so. Never questioned it.

GRETCHEN: The name just popped into your head.

ELEANOR: I didn't consult a list of dog names, if that's what you're
asking. Are you planning to play the shrink with me again? I know you
can't help it, but don't. You're on bad enough terms with your father as
it is.

(*Sound of a car door slamming. ELEANOR gives a start.*)

GRETCHEN: Mom, what's the matter?

ELEANOR: Why, you didn't hear that sound?

GRETCHEN: You mean that car door slamming?

ELEANOR: Well, see? We both heard it.

(Doorbell. ELEANOR stiffens.)

THALIA: Grandma, somebody's at the door.

ELEANOR: Yes, I heard the bell. *(to GRETCHEN)* Do you mind seeing who that is?

(GRETCHEN peers out the window.)

GRETCHEN: It's a man in a green jumpsuit.

ELEANOR: That's who I thought it was. That's the tree man. Mr. Nardone.

GRETCHEN: Why is the tree man here?

ELEANOR: The birches out back aren't leafing.

GRETCHEN: Doesn't that mean they're dead?

ELEANOR: Not necessarily. I've asked your father to water them with a vitamin solution.

GRETCHEN: Which of course he never does.

ELEANOR: He forgets to. Wait till you're our age.

GRETCHEN: No. It's textbook passive-aggressive.

ELEANOR: Didn't you hear what I just said? Stop psychoanalyzing. I'm warning you. Just stop.

(The doorbell rings again. ELEANOR winces.)

GRETCHEN: Mom, it's OK, relax. I'll deal with Mr. Nardone.

(GRETCHEN goes to the front door, opens it.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

GRETCHEN: That must drive Dad nuts.

ELEANOR: Yes, I'm afraid it does. But I insisted on state of the art.

GRETCHEN: *(to unseen man)* Mr. Nardone? I'm Gretchen, Eleanor's daughter. It's the birch trees in back. We need a diagnosis.

ELEANOR: *(calls after her)* Tell him I don't want those trees cut down!

(GRETCHEN has exited onto the porch. ELEANOR re-chains the door. THALIA settles into the principal armchair.)

THALIA: Grandma, why are you locking her out?

ELEANOR: I wasn't locking her out. Force of habit. *(unchains door)*

THALIA: Mom says you don't really go out that much.

ELEANOR: Is that what she told you?

THALIA: No, actually, she says you don't go out at all.

ELEANOR: You've discussed me, I see. Um, that's your Grandpa's chair.

THALIA: Yeah, nice leather. Like when did you stop going out?

ELEANOR: I don't keep a diary, so I really can't tell you.

THALIA: When you were my age?

ELEANOR: Well, no, I wasn't home-schooled, was I.

THALIA: What about after you left school?

ELEANOR: No. I mean I went out all the time. With your grandfather. We took several trips together.

THALIA: So what happened?

ELEANOR: Nothing “happened.” We...we decided to have a child. So then I had your mother to take care of.

THALIA: Didn’t you hang out with other moms?

ELEANOR: What do you mean, “hang out”?

THALIA: In play groups.

ELEANOR: No—“play groups”?—we didn’t have “play groups” in those days.

THALIA: And if you don’t go out, you don’t meet guys.

ELEANOR: Well, I certainly wasn’t interested in meeting “guys.”

THALIA: That’s why she’s always grounding me.

ELEANOR: No one grounded me, good Lord. (*at window*) What’s taking your mother so long?

THALIA: You’re kinda grounding yourself, aren’t you? That’s Mom’s theory.

ELEANOR: Oh she’s always been full of theories, that’s what they pay her for. I take it you’ve been dating a lot of boys?

THALIA: That’s not how it works today.

ELEANOR: Well... if it involves oral sex in parking lots, I’d just as soon not hear about it.

THALIA: Wow, no, that’s over. We go on Tinder.

ELEANOR: That sounds even worse.

THALIA: No, it’s cool. Wherever you are, you can always hook up with some dude in the area. Unless it’s a really dorky area.

ELEANOR: And your mother approves of this.

THALIA: Hey, Mom's a lot of things, but she's not a hypocrite. Isn't that why Grandpa kicked her out, 'cause she was always sneaking guys into her bedroom?

ELEANOR: That's not why your Grandpa...He didn't "kick her out," God no. He relied on your mother for so many things. They were very close.

THALIA: Then how come we never came to see you? Except when I was five years old.

ELEANOR: That's between your mother and your grandfather.

THALIA: But other people come to visit, right?

ELEANOR: No...not regularly. We've never really felt the need.

THALIA: Wait. Are you saying Grandpa doesn't have friends either?

ELEANOR: Well of course he's friendly with his colleagues. We have the nursing staff in for cocktails every Christmas.

THALIA: And that's the whole deal.

ELEANOR: Sweetheart...your grandpa and I have always had each other. Which is more than most people can say.

THALIA: Wow. That's so messed up.

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(ELEANOR *goes to the front door.*)

ELEANOR: (*calls*) What did Mr. Nardone say?

(GRETCHEN *enters.*)

GRETCHEN: It's oak root fungus, both birches are doomed. He'll take them out for a thousand dollars.

ELEANOR: No. I absolutely refuse to let him do that.

GRETCHEN: Mom. They were beautiful trees, they're not beautiful anymore. He says the infection will spread.

ELEANOR: Let it spread. I love looking at those trees. Even without the leaves. Especially without the leaves.

(Sound of truck door slamming. ELEANOR goes on alert.)

GRETCHEN: Mom. Hey. You really need to calm down. What medications is Dad giving you?

ELEANOR: That's none of your concern.

GRETCHEN: Xanax?

ELEANOR: Some of the names escape me. Xanax, yes.

GRETCHEN: Doesn't appear to be helping. You seem so rattled.

ELEANOR: Well of course I'm rattled. After all these years you show up, out of nowhere, you're homeless, you're not living with your husband, now you're pestering me with personal questions, and I'm expected to take it in stride? What are you doing?

(GRETCHEN has started inhaling deeply through her nose, then exhaling loudly with her tongue against her upper teeth.)

THALIA: She does that whenever she's upset.

ELEANOR: Why should she be upset? I'm the one who's upset.

(THALIA suddenly darts at GRETCHEN, waving her hands in front of GRETCHEN's face.)

THALIA: Yahhhhh!

GRETCHEN: *(to THALIA)* Get away, you horrible child.

ELEANOR: Thalia, don't torture your mother.

THALIA: I'm teaching her to focus. *(to GRETCHEN)* There's a college student outside, he's got a bunch of flowers, he's asking for you. He's really cute.

GRETCHEN: Go check out your room. Now. It's on the third floor—that way—the back stairs. I'll be up shortly.

(GRETCHEN *resumes yoga-breathing.*)

THALIA: (*going; to ELEANOR*) See how crazy she is? (*louder*) She says she gets it all from you.

GRETCHEN: I can hear everything you're saying!

(THALIA *exits.*)

ELEANOR: What did she mean, a college student with flowers?

GRETCHEN: Ommmmmm.

ELEANOR: Did you hear me?

GRETCHEN: Forget it, Mom. She's just being provocative.

ELEANOR: Comes by it honestly, I'd say.

GRETCHEN: Meaning what exactly?

ELEANOR: You were such a brash little girl. From the moment you could talk. Wore me to a frazzle with all your demands.

GRETCHEN: What demands? Mom, I was a total dork.

ELEANOR: A dork? Never. You always had friends.

GRETCHEN: What do you mean, always? Until I was four years old, we spent every single minute in the house. I had one friend. You. How does this alarm system work? In case I have to get in by myself.

ELEANOR: There's a code you punch in on the keypad: It's 2-5-8-0-4-5-6. The sign of the cross. (*demonstrates*) I managed to sneak that past your father.

GRETCHEN: Good. Without a secret life, you're dead. (*starts out*)

ELEANOR: Where are you going?

GRETCHEN: To cool off, do you mind? And don't let Thalia leave the house.

ELEANOR: Why would she want to do that? She just got here.

GRETCHEN: Mom...do you know what G,Y,P,O means?

ELEANOR: (*thinking*) "Get your penis out"?

GRETCHEN: Close. "Get your pants off." That's what she texts them.

ELEANOR: Well...apart from technology...she's following right in your footsteps.

GRETCHEN: She's smarter than I was, she doesn't bring them home. She goes on Tinder, who knows what's waiting out there? She could be hooking up with a predator. Can I count on you to watch her? I mean it. Like a hawk.

ELEANOR: Yes. Just go if you're going.

(GRETCHEN *opens the front door.*)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(GRETCHEN *exits. Sound of her car starting up. ELEANOR chains the lock, arms the system. Tries to lift the suitcase...can't. Shoves it as far out of sight as she can. Sinks onto the couch, shivering at the sound of chirping birds, which dissolve into female chatter. Covers her ears. Lights down.*

When the lights come up again, ELEANOR is dozing on the couch. Sound of a car door slamming. ELEANOR wakes. The female chatter returns.

Sound of a key in the lock, followed by the rasp of the obstructing door-chain.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

ELEANOR: Who is it?

DOUGLAS: (*other side of door*) Eleanor, for God's sake, unchain the door.

(*The sounds cut out.*)

DOUGLAS: (*other side of door*) Eleanor!

ELEANOR: Douglas, be patient, I'm coming.

(*ELEANOR unchains the door, backs away, distraught. DOUGLAS opens it.*)

DOUGLAS *enters. He looks worn-out. His hand is secretly shaking.*)

DOUGLAS: What's the matter, Eleanor? Did something frighten you?

ELEANOR: The doorbell. I didn't expect you back so soon. Didn't you have rounds?

DOUGLAS: It's my privilege to skip them. You haven't set up the Scrabble board.

ELEANOR: I got...distracted. How did the surgery go?

DOUGLAS: It went the way it went. (*at the thermostat*) Why did you mess with the thermostat?

ELEANOR: I didn't.

DOUGLAS: What do you mean, you didn't? It's up to 74. Did the tree man come?

ELEANOR: Yes, Mr. Nardone was here. You forgot to water the birches.

DOUGLAS: He said they have to come out, didn't he? (*under his breath*) Fucking bitch.

ELEANOR: What did you say?

DOUGLAS: Sorry. That wasn't directed at you.

ELEANOR: You said it to my face.

DOUGLAS: I wasn't thinking of you at all. It's just that thing I do lately.

ELEANOR: Did something go wrong with the surgery?

DOUGLAS: I'd rather not talk about it. He's having abdominal pain.
We had to give him morphine.

ELEANOR: But you got the cancer.

DOUGLAS: Yes, I got the cancer, but where did I screw up?

ELEANOR: Oh please, you didn't screw up.

DOUGLAS: How can you possibly know that?

ELEANOR: Because I know when you're being a worrywart.

DOUGLAS: It's more than a worry.

ELEANOR: Why?

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, you don't want to hear this.

ELEANOR: Of course I want to hear it. I'm your wife.

DOUGLAS: To put it bluntly, I'm losing my touch.

ELEANOR: Oh you've been saying that for years.

DOUGLAS: And now it's true. I felt it today. Where do I cut now?
What do I tie here? I urinate...did I flush? Did I just take my Flomax?
Which Beethoven symphony am I listening to? I had the highest score in
the country on my anatomy boards, now I can barely tell the tibia from
the fibula.

ELEANOR: Well, you're not an orthopedist, so stop obsessing.

DOUGLAS: Do you know what they're saying about me lately? "Be sure to get him first case. Later in the day he's not so sharp."

ELEANOR: Please, you're just working yourself into a state. Sit down, I'll get you your pomegranate juice. And then yes, all right, we'll play Scrabble.

(ELEANOR starts to exit, spots the meat pounder, picks it up, exits. DOUGLAS picks up the remote, turns on the radio, unfolds the Scrabble board, sets up the racks. Oldie rock is blasting out:)

ROLLING STONES: *(on radio)* "—down to me, yes it is
The way she does just what she's told
Down to me, the change has come
She's under my thumb—"

DOUGLAS: *(calls)* Eleanor?! Why am I listening to this song? *(turns off radio)*

ELEANOR: *(off)* Oh. I was going around the dial, I must have left it on that station by mistake.

DOUGLAS: Since when do you go around the dial?

(ELEANOR enters with DOUGLAS's pomegranate juice.)

ELEANOR: You know, Douglas, there are different kinds of music in the world, you'd be amazed.

DOUGLAS: *(sees suitcase)* Oh good Lord—

ELEANOR: I can probably get through life without hearing another Brandenburg Concerto—

DOUGLAS: —What is that suitcase doing there?

ELEANOR: Yes, the suitcase.

DOUGLAS: Where do you think you're going?

ELEANOR: What a question. I'm not going anywhere.

DOUGLAS: (*examines it*) This isn't even one of mine. What the hell is going on here?

(*In the kitchen, ZENDA starts barking.*)

THALIA: (*off*) Quiet, Zenda! Off! Off!

(*THALIA enters.*)

THALIA: That dog needs anger management. (*sits in DOUGLAS's chair; to DOUGLAS*) Hey there, how's it going?

DOUGLAS: Who the devil are you?

ELEANOR: Douglas, it's your granddaughter.

DOUGLAS: Thalia?

THALIA: He remembers my name.

DOUGLAS: Of course I remember. I just didn't expect...What are you doing here? Where's your mother?

THALIA: She'll be here soon, don't worry.

DOUGLAS: What about Larry? Is Larry here?

ELEANOR: You don't have to worry about Larry. Apparently they've been having problems.

DOUGLAS: I can't say I'm surprised. Did you know about this?

ELEANOR: Not a word.

THALIA: Better tell him, Grandma.

ELEANOR: Um...they're planning to live here.

DOUGLAS: Here in town?

THALIA: Here in this house.

ELEANOR: Until they find a place of their own.

DOUGLAS: They have a place. In California.

ELEANOR: Not anymore. It was foreclosed.

DOUGLAS: How could that happen? Where did Gretchen's money go?

ELEANOR: Douglas, if I knew, I'd tell you.

DOUGLAS: So...she'll be in our lives again.

ELEANOR: It certainly seems that way.

DOUGLAS: (*to THALIA*) What about your education?

THALIA: She'll drag me to a bunch of schools. I'm so not looking forward.

DOUGLAS: Those tattoos might limit her options. What does that one say? The one on your neck. The Japanese character.

THALIA: Yeah, no idea.

DOUGLAS: You have something burned into your skin and you don't bother to ask what it says? It could be profanity for all you know.

ELEANOR: Douglas, we're not in Japan, please drop it.

DOUGLAS: Why don't you tattoo a logo on your forehead while you're at it? You can earn some extra money as a billboard.

THALIA: Oh wow. (*re tattoo*) I hope this is a curse word, 'cause I know the one I'd choose.

ELEANOR: Thalia, please stop provoking him.

DOUGLAS: Yes, and do you mind getting out of my chair?

ELEANOR: Oh Douglas, stop being so testy.

DOUGLAS: What about a hotel?

ELEANOR: I'm not sure Gretchen can afford a hotel. Not till she finds a new job.

DOUGLAS: Dare I ask what happened to her old one?

THALIA: They fired her ass.

DOUGLAS: That's impossible, she had tenure.

THALIA: It was Larry's fault.

DOUGLAS: Larry's fault she got fired?

THALIA: He was always at home—leeching off Mom, working on his stupid novel. Screaming at us night and day. That's kind of what drove her out.

DOUGLAS: Out where?

THALIA: You know what? I'll let Mom deal.

(The front door opens.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(GRETCHEN enters, dragging a duffel bag.)

GRETCHEN: Well. That's all of it.

DOUGLAS: I should think so. Look at all this. Out of a clear blue sky.

GRETCHEN: Hello, Dad.

DOUGLAS: Why didn't you warn us? Let us know the worst.

GRETCHEN: The worst about what?

DOUGLAS: Losing your house. Losing your job.

GRETCHEN: (*looks daggers at THALIA*) Here's a heads-up about my lovely daughter. She has a vivid imagination. Mom, I forgot to bring a hairdryer.

ELEANOR: Oh, we have dozens. One of them might even work.

GRETCHEN: Would you please hunt one up? I'm dying for a shower.

ELEANOR: Gretchen, if you want to be alone with your father, just say so. You don't have to invent excuses. (*to THALIA*) Come, sweetheart. I'll introduce you to my best friend.

(*ELEANOR exits with THALIA.*)

ELEANOR: (*off*) Zenda, this is Thalia. Thalia wishes you were a cat.

(*GRETCHEN waits till they're gone. Hushed:*)

GRETCHEN: What's going on with Mom? She seems worse than ever.

DOUGLAS: Is that your professional opinion?

GRETCHEN: From what I've seen so far.

DOUGLAS: At the moment I'm more interested in you. How could you lose your house? What happened to your savings? I'm betting it had something to do with Larry.

GRETCHEN: Larry had something to do with it, yes.

DOUGLAS: He never got movie work, did he?

GRETCHEN: He never even got a meeting. Do you mind very much if we don't discuss my soon-to-be ex-husband? You can gloat all you want to Mom, just leave me out of it.

DOUGLAS: Does he know you've come East?

GRETCHEN: I don't know what Larry knows, and I don't care.

DOUGLAS: That sounds utterly reckless to me. This whole business...showing up here unannounced, jobless, daughter in tow, disrupting your mother's peace of mind—

GRETCHEN: Peace of mind! She's jumping at every little sound. It's almost as if she's hallucinating.

DOUGLAS: Stay out of it. Unless you want a repeat of three years ago. Forcing her to walk all the way to Grove Park. What was that wonderful piece of jargon?

GRETCHEN: It's called "flooding."

DOUGLAS: Yes, well, you flooded her right into the E.R.

GRETCHEN: I didn't realize it went that far.

DOUGLAS: A lot of things you never realized. Why the hell did you ever marry that man?

GRETCHEN: Didn't you hear what I just said? Why did you marry Mom?

DOUGLAS: I was deeply in love with your mother.

GRETCHEN: Well, maybe I was in love with Larry. At least he didn't frighten me to death.

DOUGLAS: When did I ever frighten you?

GRETCHEN: Ohmigod, in my teens? I looked forward to those nights you had rounds. I didn't have to face you over dinner, and listen to your insults.

DOUGLAS: What insults?

GRETCHEN: Let's see. "Hopeless slut"?

DOUGLAS: I never said any such thing.

GRETCHEN: Like it was yesterday.

DOUGLAS: Not in your presence, I'm sure of that. Every month a new face.

GRETCHEN: Every month? Don't be ridiculous.

DOUGLAS: The one on the chess team, with the smelly feet.

GRETCHEN: You mean Corby Howard? I adored his smell. Sweet of you to remember.

DOUGLAS: Of course I remember. His name wasn't Howard, it was Howell.

GRETCHEN: Wow, did you keep a ledger? I didn't know you were that jealous.

DOUGLAS: And the one with the Amish beard...oh, and that basketball player...

GRETCHEN: Jimarcus Johnson. Are you saying I slept with all those boys?

DOUGLAS: You never denied it.

GRETCHEN: I don't remember you asking.

DOUGLAS: I didn't have to ask. I had ears.

GRETCHEN: Nobody asked you to listen. Or tear the lock off my bedroom door. What are we going to do about Mom?

DOUGLAS: I'll tell you what you can do, now that you're here. I've had it up to here with the shopping. She won't order her underwear on-line, and the salesgirls give me fishy looks.

GRETCHEN: You haven't tried taking her along.

DOUGLAS: No.

GRETCHEN: Why not?

DOUGLAS: Because I'm sick of trying to persuade her. She was always nervous in stores, from long before we met. Always hated shopping.

GRETCHEN: What if you took her to church?

DOUGLAS: You're not serious.

GRETCHEN: It's a safe environment. She might enjoy talking to the pastor.

DOUGLAS: I'd have to chloroform her. Church! What a ridiculous idea. Your mother has no interest in religion.

GRETCHEN: Then why is the alarm code in the shape of a cross?
(*miming the code on her chest*) 2-5-8-0, 4-5-6.

DOUGLAS: (*miming the code on the keypad*) Good Lord...isn't that peculiar...

GRETCHEN: As if she's warding off vampires.

DOUGLAS: A woman of her intelligence. Did you know she made Phi Beta Kappa her junior year?

GRETCHEN: Of course I knew. And you don't make Phi Beta hiding in your dorm room.

DOUGLAS: She wasn't hiding back then. She was fighting it. God knows what's lurking in her DNA.

GRETCHEN: And DNA is destiny.

DOUGLAS: I don't appreciate the sarcasm. I've done everything medically possible. You think I wouldn't like to take her places? I haven't been to a movie in years. Other than what we see on TV, and half the time she falls asleep on me. And I hate going to the movies alone.

GRETCHEN: Sorry, can't help you there.

DOUGLAS: We saw our share of movies together.

GRETCHEN: More than our share. Tell me, Dad, did you ever feel you had to keep her to herself?

DOUGLAS: What can you possibly mean by that?

GRETCHEN: Always wondered.

DOUGLAS: Well, stop wondering. I was thrilled to be seen with your mother. She was a brilliant, beautiful woman, she had her pick of a dozen men, and when she agreed to marry me I couldn't believe my luck. What about your own behavior? All those boys, in and out of the house, how was your mother supposed to cope with that invasion, when she can barely deal with the tree man?

GRETCHEN: It was you who couldn't cope.

DOUGLAS: And then to top it off, you ignore all my warnings and marry an obvious deadbeat. *(pause)* I'll write down your mother's sizes, you can buy some bras and panties at Kroger's, while you're picking up the grocery order. Or that other place we used to go, if it's still there, what was it?

GRETCHEN: Fashion Gallery.

DOUGLAS: Fashion Gallery. It's all coming back.

GRETCHEN: *(wryly)* Yes, isn't it.

DOUGLAS: Well, if you're going to be around, it's only fair you pitch in again. Ground turkey, some salad fixings, I'll leave it up to you.

(Sound of barking. ELEANOR and THALIA enter. THALIA is wearing bunny ears.)

ELEANOR: *(to Zenda)* Zenda, it's OK. She's not a real rabbit! *(to THALIA)* Don't worry, sweetheart. He won't chase you in here.

DOUGLAS: What now? Where did that headgear come from?

THALIA: Some closet in the attic with a lot of Mom stuff in it.

ELEANOR: I was trying to remember...did I make that for Halloween?

GRETCHEN: You really don't remember?

(GRETCHEN *grabs the ears from THALIA, puts them on.*)

GRETCHEN: "Mr. Chicken, I'm sorry we're hunting your eggs! I can't help it if I'm a symbol of fertility!"—My third-grade play?

ELEANOR: Oh right...I made your costume...but I don't remember the play...

GRETCHEN: Of course you don't. Dad pleaded with you to come with him, and you couldn't bring yourself to leave the house.

THALIA: Scarred her for life.

ELEANOR: Is that what she told you?

GRETCHEN: I was being sarcastic.

ELEANOR: Sounds more like an accusation.

THALIA: You never tried out for another play again. (*to ELEANOR*) I'm in all the plays. She doesn't come to see me either.

GRETCHEN: That is so not true! What about when you were Rizzo in Grease?

THALIA: When I was the Evil Queen in Snow White? You were in Rancho Mirage with your teaching assistant.

GRETCHEN: Button it, Thalia.

THALIA: And that's why they fired her.

DOUGLAS: Young lady, did you hear your mother? You're not part of the conversation.

THALIA: She was known as the Claremont Cougar.

GRETCHEN: What did I just tell you?

ELEANOR: Will you please stop yelling at each other? My head is about to burst.

THALIA: Grandma's right. It's not that big of a deal.

DOUGLAS: "That big a deal." Not "big of a deal." The extra word is a waste of breath.

THALIA: Seriously?

ELEANOR: Douglas, please, this is no time to be a grammar Nazi.

THALIA: (*to GRETCHEN*) Is this what you grew up with? No wonder.

ELEANOR: Feel free to ignore it.

DOUGLAS: Why should she ignore me? Doesn't she want to speak correctly? She'd rather insult me to my face? And I'm supposed to put up with this? No. You can't stay here.

ELEANOR: Douglas, weren't you listening? They can't afford to stay anywhere else.

THALIA: (*to GRETCHEN*) Dude, let's go, he doesn't want us here.

DOUGLAS: Is that how you talk to your mother? You call your mother "dude"? (*to THALIA, who's been texting*) What are you doing, are you texting? You're with your family, Thalia, not some virtual other person. Give me that.

(DOUGLAS *snatches the phone away from THALIA.*)

THALIA: Whoa! What are you doing?

DOUGLAS: (*reads*) "Grammar lecture from pissy old guy. PIR." What's PIR?

ELEANOR: (*who's been mouthing the letters*) Parent in...room?

THALIA: Wow, great guess.

GRETCHEN: Dad, give her the phone back.

DOUGLAS: I think I'll hold onto it.

THALIA: Oh fuck me.

DOUGLAS: What? What did you say?

THALIA: You're being a real douche.

GRETCHEN: All right, Thalia, you're way past your limit—

DOUGLAS: Did you hear what she said to me?

GRETCHEN: Yes, I heard, I'll deal with it—

THALIA: Ohmigod, what are you doing—

GRETCHEN: Dad!

(DOUGLAS places the phone under a chair leg and sits down hard on the chair, crushing the phone.)

ELEANOR: Oh, Douglas.

THALIA: Are you kidding me? What a dick!

DOUGLAS: That's enough of your insolence! Go to your room and you stay there until I tell you to come out. Now! This instant!

THALIA: No!

DOUGLAS: GO TO YOUR ROOM!

ELEANOR: Thalia...that's your grandpa's way of saying you can stay.

THALIA: Mom, you gonna let him get away with that?

GRETCHEN: No. Do what he says, we'll negotiate later.

(THALIA *heads out.*)

THALIA: Fuck you all!

(THALIA *exits.* DOUGLAS *picks up the phone, tosses it in the wastebasket.*)

GRETCHEN: Nice move, Dad. Are you proud of yourself?

DOUGLAS: That girl is completely out of control.

GRETCHEN: Oh, and you're not?

DOUGLAS: Says anything, does anything, no consequences. Is this is what your "attachment parenting" has come to?

GRETCHEN: You really want to do this? You're a great one to talk about "attachment."

DOUGLAS: That's quite enough. I'm not interested in hearing any criticism—

GRETCHEN: No, just let things deteriorate—

DOUGLAS: —from a woman who managed to get herself fired....over what sounds like a morals clause in her tenure contract. Par for the course, I'd say.

(DOUGLAS *exits.*)

DOUGLAS: (*off*) Fucking bitch!

GRETCHEN: What?!

ELEANOR: Ignore it. It's not personal.

GRETCHEN: Are you kidding? Of course it's personal.

ELEANOR: He doesn't actually mean you're a bitch. The surgery didn't go perfectly this morning. He replays things in his head. It's all part of what I have to live with.

GRETCHEN: It's scary, Mom.

ELEANOR: Then for both our sakes, stop trying to get his goat. And don't waste your time trying to change us. We're fine. Happier than some people I could name.

GRETCHEN: Are you sure Dad's happy? Just the two of you?

ELEANOR: He sees people all day. That's enough for him.

GRETCHEN: You used to see people. Back in college.

ELEANOR: Well yes, I was quite popular.

GRETCHEN: And you had ambitions.

ELEANOR: Please, I was never ambitious.

GRETCHEN: Mom. You once told me you wanted to be a travel writer.

ELEANOR: I put that on my college application. You had to write something.

GRETCHEN: Did Dad ever encourage you?

ELEANOR: To do what?

GRETCHEN: To write. To travel.

ELEANOR: He took me on a cruise.

GRETCHEN: What cruise? You never told me about a cruise.

ELEANOR: The summer I was pregnant. I had an assignment to write it up for Travel & Leisure.

GRETCHEN: Why have I never seen that article?

ELEANOR: Because it never got written.

GRETCHEN: Why not? Did something happen on that cruise?

ELEANOR: I'd rather not relive it, if it's all the same to you.

GRETCHEN: Mom, come on, it's good to talk.

ELEANOR: There's nothing to talk about.

GRETCHEN: Mom.

ELEANOR: We got to a port...I think it was Barcelona... I didn't want to go ashore.

*(Party sounds are tricking in...distant chatter... women's voices...laughter...dance music.
ELEANOR tenses.)*

ELEANOR: ...Your father was very sweet about it, actually. I mean he was furious at first, but he brought me all my meals, we played Scrabble in the cabin...Naturally, I didn't want to spoil his fun...He was having such a good time...You know how women make a fuss over doctors....*(pause)* Don't start accusing him of things, he's been a devoted husband...in every way.

GRETCHEN: No dry spells. No rough patches.

ELEANOR: Nothing we couldn't handle.

GRETCHEN: Never been tempted. Either of you.

ELEANOR: What? No. I don't know what you mean by "tempted."

GRETCHEN: OK. Do you know the meaning of "agoraphobia"? The literal meaning?

ELEANOR: Yes, it's Greek. It means "fear of the marketplace."

GRETCHEN: That's right. And in ancient Greece, the only women seen in the agora were prostitutes.

ELEANOR: Oh please. Gretchen, believe me, if that's all I was afraid of, my sexual impulses, I'd have left the house long ago. Just because you cheated on your husband, doesn't mean I've been unfaithful.

GRETCHEN: Well, of course you haven't—

(The women's voices...the party noise...return. GRETCHEN sees ELEANOR trying to wave them away.)

ELEANOR: You have no basis for suspecting infidelity. On anyone's part.

GRETCHEN: *(pointedly)* I don't think I mentioned infidelity.

ELEANOR: Yes, you did. You asked if either of us had been tempted. You shouldn't be asking such questions. There's no basis whatsoever.

(GRETCHEN sees ELEANOR trying to wave the sounds away.)

GRETCHEN: What is it? Mom? Are you hearing something? What's going on? Tell me.

ELEANOR: No! Stop! I'm perfectly fine!

GRETCHEN: Mom. You're not fine. You're imploding. What does Dad have to say about this?

ELEANOR: He says it's under control.

GRETCHEN: That's what he tells you. God, that makes me angry.

ELEANOR: Well, keep that to yourself.

GRETCHEN: Why, because you never get angry at him?

ELEANOR: I stand up for myself, don't worry about that. Maybe you should be more afraid of your anger. You'd still be enjoying your father's company.

GRETCHEN: Really. Just be a sweet little girl and kiss his ass. Why didn't I ever think of that?

ELEANOR: I didn't say you had to kiss his ass. I'm talking about your high-school affairs. Drove your father mad, the way you flaunted them in his face.

GRETCHEN: Doesn't mean I wasn't afraid.

ELEANOR: You weren't afraid to bring them home.

GRETCHEN: Mom, I was afraid of everything. I'm still afraid. I have all your anxieties. I'm nervous before every lecture. I can't open my email in the morning without feeling I'm being invaded.

ELEANOR: Well there, you see? This is why I never wanted children.

(Pause.)

ELEANOR: Oh Lord. I shouldn't have told you that.

GRETCHEN: So why did you?

ELEANOR: It just popped out.

GRETCHEN: No, I'm asking, why did you have a child?

ELEANOR: Well...to be perfectly honest...your father insisted, and I didn't want to deprive him. But we both knew what was coming. I had a nervous pregnancy, and you, you weren't the easiest baby. Exhausting, really. Took every ounce of energy I had, with nothing left for anything else. I wasn't much of a companion in those days.

(Party sounds are trickling in. ELEANOR breaks off.)

GRETCHEN: Mom?

ELEANOR: But then later you took up the slack. All those things I couldn't do for him. You went everywhere together, don't you remember?

GRETCHEN: All too well.

ELEANOR: I used to sit by that window...waiting for the two of you to come home...wondering where you'd gotten to...

GRETCHEN: You must have been happy when Dad turned on me.

ELEANOR: What are you saying? He didn't "turn on you."

GRETCHEN: Mom...he pried the lock off my bedroom door.

ELEANOR: Because you insisted on locking yourself in. With God knows who, I never asked. And then letting Larry drag you off to California.

GRETCHEN: He didn't have to drag me. By that time I was thrilled to leave this house.

ELEANOR: Yes, and next thing we know, we get a postcard from a Vegas wedding chapel. I'm sorry your marriage was such a failure, but you needn't take it out on us.

GRETCHEN: Fine, I won't inflict myself on you any longer. What time does Kroger's close?

ELEANOR: I imagine it's still open. Why?

GRETCHEN: He asked me to pick up the groceries. And buy you some underwear.

ELEANOR: Oh, he did, did he?

GRETCHEN: But he didn't give me your sizes.

ELEANOR: You'll have to guess then, won't you.

GRETCHEN: Right. You will keep an eye on Thalia while I'm gone?

ELEANOR: I said I would.

GRETCHEN: Don't let her talk you into anything. Tie her down if you have to. Where did I leave my bag? I just had it. Fuck!

(GRETCHEN starts yoga-breathing as she looks for her bag.)

ELEANOR: Oh there you go with that.

(GRETCHEN finds her bag. She opens the front door.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

ELEANOR: Try to get back on time. We still eat at six.

GRETCHEN: Mom, stop, all right? You've pushed enough of my buttons for one day.

(GRETCHEN exits. ELEANOR tries to follow, freezes in the open doorway.)

ELEANOR: You're too old to have buttons!

(ZENDA has started growling. Sound of Gretchen's car door slamming. It echoes, merging with the returning sound of party noise...laughing female voices. ELEANOR closes the front door, backing away, waving away the sounds.

DOUGLAS enters.)

DOUGLAS: Where's Gretchen?

ELEANOR: She went out for a while. She was getting upset.

(DOUGLAS picks up Thalia's discarded cell phone.)

DOUGLAS: Can't say I blame her. Are we ready for Scrabble?

ELEANOR: I'm not sure I want to play Scrabble today.

DOUGLAS: You need a break from all these intrusions. Pick a letter.

(The party sounds are still echoing in ELEANOR's ears. DOUGLAS picks a tile.)

DOUGLAS: (picking tile) Q.

ELEANOR: (shows tile) E.

(They each pick seven tiles.)

DOUGLAS: What a day. First a surgery goes south, now suddenly I'm surrounded by neurotic females. *(off ELEANOR's look)* Not you, darling. *(re his tiles)* Look at these letters. I swear I'm cursed.

(DOUGLAS's hand is shaking. ELEANOR puts down a word.)

ELEANOR: *(puts down word)* 17-18-19...38 points.

DOUGLAS: "Cozen"?

ELEANOR: Oh, come on, you know "cozen." It means to cheat or deceive. Put it down.

(DOUGLAS writes down the score. Examines his non-writing hand.)

ELEANOR: Why are you staring at your hand?

DOUGLAS: You can't tell it's shaking?

ELEANOR: Douglas, you're making yourself do that. Anyway, it's your left hand.

DOUGLAS: Today the left, tomorrow the right.

ELEANOR: Stop trying to scare me. Make your move.

DOUGLAS: Do we allow Z,A for pizza?

ELEANOR: Of course we do.

DOUGLAS: Don't tell me "of course," I forgot. *(putting down tiles)* Rat. 18.

ELEANOR: It's 21. Double letter on the "R" and "T." *(puts down tiles)* Gretchen was telling me something interesting.

DOUGLAS: There's no stopping her, is there. About what?

ELEANOR: In ancient Greece, women were prisoners in their own homes.

DOUGLAS: According to whom?

ELEANOR: They never left the house. Except with their husbands.

DOUGLAS: Oh really. I'd like to see her evidence for that.

ELEANOR: Only prostitutes went out by themselves. It's where the term "agoraphobia" comes from.

DOUGLAS: What's prostitution got to do with it? You're afraid of looking like a whore, that's why you won't leave the house? I'll make you a deal: I'll stop listening to her theories if you will.

ELEANOR: Oh, so you two talked about me?

DOUGLAS: Nothing of consequence.

ELEANOR: But you asked her to shop for me. And pick up the groceries.

DOUGLAS: If she's going to live here, she might as well make herself useful.

ELEANOR: Unlike your wife.

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, don't start with that. I mean it.

ELEANOR: Maybe you two could go roller-skating. You both used to love that. Were you complaining about me to each other?

DOUGLAS: God, it's like talking to a wall.

ELEANOR: I don't like people gossiping behind my back!

DOUGLAS: Finally: a good reason for not having friends.

ELEANOR: What? Why would you say that to me? Why are you being so nasty all of a sudden? And for God's sake don't show me your hand again! You don't have Parkinson's. You have doctor's hypochondria.

DOUGLAS: What medical school did you go to? Christ, I'm at my wits' end. I can't take it any longer!

ELEANOR: Don't shout at me please. It never helps when you shout.

DOUGLAS: You're right. I'm sorry. Everything's fine. Everything's under control.

(DOUGLAS *suddenly upends the Scrabble board.*)

ELEANOR: (*stunned*) What in heaven's name is wrong with you?

(DOUGLAS *bolts for the door, grabs his hat.*)

ELEANOR: Where are you going? Douglas, come back here! Douglas!

(DOUGLAS *slams out of the house.*)

ELEANOR *stands stock still for a moment. The door slam is echoing loudly, followed by a burst of female laughter. THALIA has entered from the direction of the kitchen, munching on a cookie, hanging back, unseen. She watches ELEANOR go to the door, chain it, lock the other three locks, and punch in the code that arms the system.*)

THALIA: You know, Grandma...you really don't have to lock all the locks. One's enough.

(ELEANOR *whirls, startled.*)

ELEANOR: What are you doing down here? You were told to go to your room.

THALIA: Do you do everything he tells you?

(ELEANOR *has started picking up the scattered tiles. THALIA helps.*)

ELEANOR: I'm not a pushover, Thalia. No matter what your mother's told you. Now please go back upstairs.

THALIA: I didn't say you were a pushover. I think you were probably a very cool kid.

ELEANOR: Well, thank you, I was.

THALIA: Do you and Grandpa usually fight?

ELEANOR: No. Hardly ever.

THALIA: Then what are all these letters doing on the floor?

ELEANOR: He lost his temper.

THALIA: Why, 'cause Mom was trying to analyze you?

ELEANOR: You were listening? Those were private conversations.

THALIA: You don't need to be analyzed, Grandma.

ELEANOR: Well, thank you again.

THALIA: You need to leave the fucking house! (*starts for door*) Come on, let's go. Don't worry, I won't let guys hit on you. Unless you want them to.

ELEANOR: Stop this, Thalia. I know you're joking, but stop.

THALIA: OK, just to the corner and back. I'll hold your hand the whole way. Grandma, seriously, you can't keep living like this. It's fucked up. Look at you, you're trembling. You're like a basket case. Come on...take my hand.

ELEANOR: I said no!

THALIA: Grandma, you're doing this.

(*THALIA grabs ELEANOR's arm, starts hauling her toward the front door.*)

ELEANOR: Let go of me! Go to your room!

THALIA: Nope. We're going out.

ELEANOR: I said let go of my arm!

(*ELEANOR flails out with her free hand, striking THALIA.*)

THALIA: Really?

ELEANOR: Thalia, I'm sorry.

THALIA: Yeah, you're sorry. I'm sorry I tried to help. Forget it. Be a pussy. Don't ever leave the house again. Rot here forever.

(THALIA heads for the front door.)

ELEANOR: Where are you going?

THALIA: None of your business.

ELEANOR: Please don't go. I promised your mother.

THALIA: Bye, Grandma!

(THALIA has unchained the door, unlocked the other locks.)

ELEANOR: Thalia, no!

(THALIA opens the door...setting off the ear-splitting burglar alarm.)

ELEANOR: Thalia?!

(THALIA glances back...hesitates...and leaves the door ajar as she exits.

ELEANOR flies to the alarm panel, punches in the code to silence the alarm.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

ELEANOR: Thalia!!

(ELEANOR starts out the open door, can't do it, backs away in confusion. ZENDA has started to bark.)

ELEANOR: Zenda, it's all right. Don't be frightened.

(The silenced alarm is still echoing, dissolving into all the noises she's been hearing all day.)

ELEANOR: *(prayerfully)* God help me.

(ELEANOR gathers herself, starts toward the front door again... and as though walking on the edge of a cliff, makes her way toward the open front door, stumbling as she goes. In the kitchen, ZENDA continues to bark. A pause, and then, visible through the porch window, ELEANOR makes her way down the front steps...and gradually vanishes from sight. The barking grows furious. Blackout.)

Scene 3

(Lights up on the living room. The front door is still ajar. ZENDA is barking hoarsely—he's been barking for several hours.)

ELEANOR enters through the half-open door. She looks drained, shaken. She's wearing the same clothes, but with the addition of a sun-hat.)

ELEANOR: *(calling to ZENDA)* Darling, it's all right. I'm back.

(ELEANOR exits into the kitchen. ZENDA stops barking, starts whimpering.)

ELEANOR: *(off)* Shh. It's OK. I won't leave you again, I promise.

(ELEANOR enters. She starts to take off the sun-hat, then spies the watering can sitting by the door to the kitchen. Winces, sags, then takes a deep breath. Picks up the watering can. Puts it down again. Goes over to the footstool, removes the brandy bottle, takes a quick swig.)

Outside, on the porch, THALIA appears, craning for a look inside, ducking back to avoid being seen, as ELEANOR replaces the bottle in the footstool.

Adjusting the sun-hat, ELEANOR picks up the watering can again and exits in the direction of the kitchen. Sound of barking.)

ELEANOR: *(off)* Shh, I'm just going to water the birches. I'll be right outside.

(A moment later:)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Pantry door open.

(Sound of the pantry door closing. Then:)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(THALIA enters, cautiously, easing the door closed behind her.)

THALIA: Grandma?

(No answer. Sound of a car door slamming. THALIA hurries over to the footstool, takes off the cover, examines the bottle.)

Sound of footsteps on the porch, and a key in the lock. THALIA quickly replaces the bottle in the footstool and makes a beeline for the kitchen. Sound of ZENDA barking. Sound of Thalia's footsteps as she bounds up the unseen stairway.

Pause. DOUGLAS enters, looking haggard. He shoots a puzzled glance at the alarm panel, closes the door behind him.)

DOUGLAS: *(calls)* Eleanor? I'm back.

(No answer.)

DOUGLAS: *(calls)* Eleanor? It's your husband. You forgot to turn on the alarm.

(Pause. ZENDA is still barking. DOUGLAS exits in the direction of the kitchen.)

DOUGLAS: *(off)* Quiet! Shut up! Off, you detestable creature!

(DOUGLAS re-enters.)

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, where are you? I'm not in the mood for hide and seek. Your dog is having a nervous breakdown!

(GRETCHEN enters, with shopping bags, closes the door behind her. DOUGLAS doesn't see GRETCHEN, calls:)

DOUGLAS: All-ee-all-ee-incomefree!

GRETCHEN: Do you actually play hide and seek with each other?

(DOUGLAS turns, startled. GRETCHEN heads for the kitchen with the shopping bags.)

DOUGLAS: No! Sometimes. She must be taking her afternoon nap. Not like her to leave the alarm off. Probably took a Klonopin and fell right asleep.

GRETCHEN: *(off)* Great. I asked Mom to keep an eye on Thalia, and she goes and pops a pill. I just hope Thalia's still here.

DOUGLAS: Of course she's still here. I put the fear of God in her. She'd listen to you too, if you had any sense of discipline.

(GRETCHEN's cell has started to ring; she enters, tightening as she looks at the number.)

DOUGLAS: What's the matter? Who's that?

GRETCHEN: Nothing. It's all right. He's been calling all afternoon.

(GRETCHEN starts yoga-breathing, lets the phone ring.)

DOUGLAS: Either answer or get rid of it, I can't stand a ringing phone!

(GRETCHEN hesitates.)

DOUGLAS: You want me to talk to him, I'll talk to him.

GRETCHEN: *(the very idea)* Thank you, no. *(answers; into phone)*
Yes, what do you want?... No, as a matter of fact, I'm not in California, you'll have to serve papers here....Who says I can't leave the state? Do what you have to do, I can't deal with this right now.

(GRETCHEN hangs up. Resumes yoga-breathing.)

DOUGLAS: Is he asking to share custody?

GRETCHEN: Let him try and get it. He hasn't seen Thalia in months.

DOUGLAS: Did he know about that teaching assistant?

GRETCHEN: Yes, he knew.

DOUGLAS: He started that Claremont Cougar business?

GRETCHEN: “Someone” leaked a tip to Gawker. They posted it, the school dismissed me. I was out of a job, no student clients, finally I couldn’t make the mortgage payments.

DOUGLAS: Larry was younger than you.

GRETCHEN: Larry was born old. (*pointedly*) Old and pompous.

DOUGLAS: You’re implying we had something in common.

GRETCHEN: Well, girls do tend to marry their fathers. For better or worse. I’m hardly the exception. With all the wifely duties I was forced to perform.

DOUGLAS: Nobody forced you, Gretchen.

GRETCHEN: Oh, you think it’s easy to say no to you? You asked me to go with you on rounds, so I went on rounds. You invited me to go to medical conventions, so OK, I went. “Gretchen, do you mind hosting the Christmas party? Your mother’s getting cold feet.” I even kept the family finances!

DOUGLAS: You asked to do the books, as I recall.

GRETCHEN: I colluded with you, I’m not denying it. It was a co-dependency.

DOUGLAS: Here it comes, more jargon.

GRETCHEN: There was a hole in your life and I filled it. Until I couldn’t bear it any more.

DOUGLAS: Gretchen...whatever went through your mind... you were always my little girl.

GRETCHEN: I was everything but your little girl! Ohmigod. Dad! I was your comparison shopper, your movie buddy, your bill-payer, I was so many things I shouldn't have been, it's probably why I'm attracted to younger men, just to put all that weirdness behind me, as if that's ever possible. And Mom...poor Mom...she couldn't seem to help what she was, you seemed resigned to it, and me, I went along with everything, it all seemed perfectly natural, except why did I feel so guilty all the time? When I was being such a good good girl, helping you out in every way possible, your weekend companion, your sidekick, your date, everything but your daughter...Why do you think I've avoided you all these years? Why do you think I was so willing to go to California?

DOUGLAS: And that's why you brought all those boys home.

GRETCHEN: No, ohmigod, that was the only approximately normal thing about it. And I didn't sleep with all of them. *(pause)* Just Jimarcus.

(GRETCHEN's phone rings again. She answers.)

GRETCHEN: *(into phone)* What is it now?

(DOUGLAS grabs the phone.)

GRETCHEN: No...stop...what are you doing?

(DOUGLAS answers the phone.)

DOUGLAS: *(into phone)* Larry, hello old man, this is Douglas.... Tell me, are you currently employed? I mean an actual job that would require you to be in California...I'm making it my business. I have a grateful patient who literally wrote the book on divorce law, and she'll be happy to represent my daughter in any action you might foolishly try to bring. Go find another woman to sponge off. And then go fuck yourself. *(hangs up)* That was deliberate. *(pause)* Well?

GRETCHEN: Well what?

DOUGLAS: I didn't hear a thank you.

GRETCHEN: You enjoyed that more than I did.

DOUGLAS: There's just no pleasing you, is there?

GRETCHEN: No, I think the time for that is past. And just so you know? I didn't buy Mom her underwear. (*wryly*) It's time I learned to draw the line.

(DOUGLAS's *phone rings. Same ring tone as GRETCHEN's.*)

DOUGLAS: I swear I'm going to have that man killed.

GRETCHEN: Dad, it's your phone.

(DOUGLAS *looks at the incoming number, tenses.*)

GRETCHEN: Who is it?

DOUGLAS: It's the hospital.

(DOUGLAS *steels himself, answers.*)

DOUGLAS: (*on phone*) Hello?...Yes, fine, so tell me....Oh good Lord, no wonder he's in pain...What's his white count?...Right...I'm just glad I ordered an X-ray. We'll unzip him tomorrow.... No, I'll do it myself. Put him on the schedule....Yes, first case....No, any discipline problems, I'll handle them myself.

GRETCHEN: Dad, what happened?

DOUGLAS: Nothing. Mystery solved. (*pause*) My surgery this morning. We left a sponge where his prostate used to be.

GRETCHEN: Aren't the nurses supposed to count the sponges?

DOUGLAS: It happened on my watch. I'm the one whose reputation will suffer. Please don't say anything to your mother. I've bothered her enough about my problems.

(DOUGLAS *starts out.*)

GRETCHEN: Where are you going?

DOUGLAS: I'm going to check on her. If she took a Klonopin, it might be interacting with the Xanax. She gets careless with these drugs sometimes.

(DOUGLAS *exits*. GRETCHEN *starts yoga-breathing, goes over to the grocery bags, starts to take them toward the kitchen.*)

DOUGLAS *enters*. *He looks absolutely stricken.*)

GRETCHEN: Dad, what is it now?

DOUGLAS: Your mother.

GRETCHEN: What's wrong?

DOUGLAS: She's not in the bedroom. (*desperately*) All-ee-all-ee-incomefree!

GRETCHEN: Dad, please calm down.

DOUGLAS: That's why the alarm wasn't on. Why didn't you go with her?

GRETCHEN: Go where?

DOUGLAS: Wherever she's gone to. Klonopin knocks her for a loop. She could be sleepwalking. A car could run her over—

(DOUGLAS *sinks into a chair. His hand is shaking.*)

DOUGLAS: I knew it. I knew something terrible was going to happen.

GRETCHEN: Dad, stop catastrophizing.

DOUGLAS: You don't know the situation. You don't have the slightest idea. That last time...when you took her to Grove Park...it took 24 hours before her pulse came down. I had to hospitalize her. She was there for three whole days. Couldn't talk. Wouldn't speak. Not a single word. I thought I'd lost her for good. If anything's happened...I'll swear to Christ I'll kill myself!

GRETCHEN: Calm down, for God's sake, she can't have gotten far.
We'll take my car.

(DOUGLAS *tries to rise. Can't.* GRETCHEN *helps him to his feet.*)

DOUGLAS: I knew this day was coming. Why did I scream at her,
ohmigod, I did this.

GRETCHEN: Shh. It's OK. I'm here.

(GRETCHEN *starts to lead DOUGLAS toward the front door.*
ELEANOR *appears in the doorway, still wearing the sun-hat, looking*
confused and half-asleep.)

ELEANOR: Where are you two going?

DOUGLAS: Eleanor!

ELEANOR: Yes. Did I hear you calling me?

DOUGLAS: Oh Jesus. Oh thank God.

GRETCHEN: Mom, where have you been?

DOUGLAS: You weren't in your room. Where were you hiding? Did
you take a Klonopin?

ELEANOR: A what? No. Gives me a hangover.

GRETCHEN: Mom...what are you doing in that hat?

ELEANOR: Don't you like this hat? I think it's pretty.

GRETCHEN: It's a very pretty hat.

ELEANOR: Douglas, do you like it?

DOUGLAS: Yes. Very nice. I don't remember buying it for you.

ELEANOR: You didn't.

DOUGLAS: What do you mean, I didn't? Who's buying you hats? Why are you wearing it in the house?

ELEANOR: You're right. (*takes it off; realizing;*) I was watering the birches.

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, no you weren't. Wake up.

ELEANOR: If you don't believe me, Douglas, go look for yourself. The ground's still wet. Were you two enjoying yourselves in my absence? I imagine you were. Mulling what to do about your poor old wife.

GRETCHEN: Shh...Mom...you actually went outside?

ELEANOR: (*shivers*) Yes, for a while.

GRETCHEN: Dad was so worried! He was frantic!

ELEANOR: Were you, Douglas? I'm sorry. But you had Gretchen to console you, didn't you. Just like old times.

DOUGLAS: Where did that hat come from?

ELEANOR: Kroger's.

DOUGLAS: I never bought you a hat at Kroger's.

ELEANOR: No, I bought it.

DOUGLAS: When?

ELEANOR: Today.

DOUGLAS: Today.

ELEANOR: Yes.

DOUGLAS: You actually went to Kroger's.

ELEANOR: Horrible place.

GRETCHEN: Mom, no, but that's fantastic! Congratulations!

ELEANOR: No. No congratulations. I hated every other minute.

DOUGLAS: How did you get to Kroger's?

ELEANOR: I walked.

DOUGLAS: You walked. By yourself.

ELEANOR: All by myself.

GRETCHEN: Well...maybe my visit hasn't been a total loss.

(THALIA has come into the doorway, eavesdropping. ELEANOR has seen her.)

ELEANOR: I'm not sure that had anything to do with it.

GRETCHEN: Oh Mom. All that work we did together, don't you realize how important that was? What was going through your mind before you left? Something must have triggered it.

ELEANOR: Well, I really can't say.

(THALIA enters.)

THALIA: I shamed her.

DOUGLAS: What do you mean, you shamed her?

ELEANOR: Thalia, you really don't have to say anything.

THALIA: She wouldn't leave when I screamed at her, so I made her come after me.

GRETCHEN: *(to THALIA)* You left the house?

THALIA: Yes, Mom, I left the house. *(to DOUGLAS)* Are you going to put me over your knee and spank me?

DOUGLAS: Be careful what you wish for, young lady. Is that your perfume I smell?

ELEANOR: It's mine.

DOUGLAS: No. I don't recognize the fragrance.

ELEANOR: Kroger's didn't use to carry it.

GRETCHEN: Mom, you used too much. You smell like a—

ELEANOR: Like what? Like a hooker? I suppose you think that confirms your Greek prostitute theory. In fact I didn't put the perfume on, this cosmetics girl dabbed it all over me, and believe me I didn't feel whorish. I felt scared to death every second. What's the name of that park I couldn't take you? The one you tried to take me to?

GRETCHEN: Grove Park.

ELEANOR: So many crows! They were like a juvenile gang, flocking all around me...cawing at me...telling me to go back home.

GRETCHEN: Crows are harbingers of death. You must have been feeling terrified.

ELEANOR: Well, of course I felt terrified, when do I not feel terrified?

GRETCHEN: Next time will be easier.

ELEANOR: I'm not sure there'll be a next time.

GRETCHEN: Mom, don't shrug this off, please.

ELEANOR: I proved I could leave the house, that's enough for now. I wonder if bad birds drive out good birds...Well, there must have been some other birds, because this man with binoculars was searching for birds in the trees...He saw me looking at him and he waved...

THALIA: Did you wave back?

ELEANOR: No, I didn't wave back.

THALIA: Bummer.

ELEANOR: Yes, that was cowardly of me, wasn't it. Oh Lord, I have to sit down.

(ELEANOR sits down heavily. The party sounds are returning. Sounds of female laughter. ELEANOR is trying to drown them out:)

ELEANOR: They have these countdown clocks at street corners, telling you how much time you have to cross, isn't that clever? And why aren't people more afraid of the cars? Everywhere they go, they're fiddling with their phones. I had to walk next to the walls to keep from getting knocked over. I was desperate to get back home...but I didn't know where home was...and I was afraid to ask directions...People would think I was senile....

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, shh.

(DOUGLAS is taking ELEANOR's pulse.)

DOUGLAS: It's over a hundred. *(to THALIA)* I hope you're proud of yourself.

THALIA: Proud of myself? I'm thrilled!

ELEANOR: No, don't be thrilled. There's nothing to be thrilled about.

(The party sounds are louder. ELEANOR has edged over to the footstool and taken out the brandy bottle.)

DOUGLAS: Oh for God's sake—Eleanor, what are you doing?

(ELEANOR takes a quick swig. DOUGLAS snatches the bottle out of her hand.)

DOUGLAS: What is this, brandy? What are you doing with brandy?

ELEANOR: It's the only thing that calms me. Please don't look at me like that. I'm not an alcoholic.

GRETCHEN: Mom, you're hiding a bottle. You're drinking alone.

ELEANOR: Who else am I going to drink with? Your father quit.
(*pointedly*) Thirty years ago.

DOUGLAS: What's thirty years got to do with it? Where did this bottle come from?

ELEANOR: Don't you remember? Sister Frances used to give you liquor every Christmas.

DOUGLAS: That cabinet is locked.

ELEANOR: Well, I know how to use a screwdriver, don't I.

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, how many drinks did you have today?

ELEANOR: One this morning, and when I got home.

DOUGLAS: On top of your medication.

ELEANOR: No.

DOUGLAS: What do you mean, no?

ELEANOR: I don't take medication.

DOUGLAS: What?

ELEANOR: I told you, the Xanax was making me more anxious.

DOUGLAS: So you stopped just like that.

ELEANOR: Yes.

DOUGLAS: Without tailing off.

GRETCHEN: No wonder you're hearing things.

DOUGLAS: You could have had a seizure! You could have died!

ELEANOR: Well I didn't die, did I? Maybe a nip now and then helped the situation. (*reaches for bottle*) I'll have another one now, thank you—

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, sit down.

(ELEANOR *has started to tremble. The party sounds have become more distinct.*)

GRETCHEN: Mom...you're shivering...are you hearing things now?

ELEANOR: Turn up the furnace.

DOUGLAS: That won't help. You need to sleep this off.

GRETCHEN: Are you hearing voices?

ELEANOR: Yes.

THALIA: Wow. What are they saying?

ELEANOR: (*dissembling*) They're saying turn up the furnace. (*testing*) Douglas, are you angry with me for leaving the house?

DOUGLAS: I'm relieved you're back. I'm sorry the experience was so unpleasant.

GRETCHEN: That's temporary. She'll get over it.

DOUGLAS: Considering what she's going through now? I need more evidence.

ELEANOR: Oh God, if I had a nickel for every time I heard that word. Our lives aren't evidence-based!

DOUGLAS: Right. I'm sorry. Bad choice of words.

ELEANOR: You're not in the O.R., you're in your own house, stop acting like a bloody surgeon!

GRETCHEN: Mom, Dad said he was sorry.

ELEANOR: I'm not one of your nurses, I'm your wife!

DOUGLAS: Then why don't you act like one?

ELEANOR: What?!

GRETCHEN: Dad, that's not necessary either.

DOUGLAS: Scrabble every day. I hate Scrabble.

ELEANOR: You think I'm not sick of it?

DOUGLAS: We're the walking, talking, movie-watching, Scrabble-playing dead! No wonder the code's in the sign of the cross. You turned yourself into a nun!

ELEANOR: Because you run this house like a convent! You're like a Mother Superior with your damn rules! Allbran on Monday, oatmeal on Tuesday, thermostat on 65. "And what would you like for dinner, Douglas?" "That's up to you, Eleanor." "OK, let's have lemon chicken." "No, I want meat loaf." What's in that grocery bag in the kitchen? I'm betting it's ground turkey. It is, isn't it? Oh God, I wish I didn't know you so well!

GRETCHEN: Good job, Mom. Good venting. You too, Dad. Now let's dial it back.

ELEANOR: Gretchen, you'd do well to stay out of this. (*as DOUGLAS heads away*) Come back here, I haven't finished talking.

DOUGLAS: (*to ELEANOR*) I'm getting something to calm you down.

ELEANOR: Don't you dare! I'll spit the pill in your face!

DOUGLAS: Fine. You won't follow my suggestions, I might as well not be here at all.

ELEANOR: Now you know how I feel. I'm curious...it was Rachel, wasn't it?

DOUGLAS: Rachel?

ELEANOR: With the jet-black hair and the skinny legs...and the sparkly blue eye shadow.

GRETCHEN: I remember Rachel.

ELEANOR: I always wondered, did she wear that in the O.R.?

DOUGLAS: (*to GRETCHEN and THALIA*) Don't listen to this. She doesn't know what she's saying.

ELEANOR: Your father was always partial to blondes. I think Rachel might have been the exception.

DOUGLAS: Complete fabrication.

ELEANOR: Those women on the boat you danced with—every last one of them was blonde.

DOUGLAS: You're the one I danced with. There weren't any blondes.

ELEANOR: He bundled me off to the stateroom, so he could be free to do what he pleased—

DOUGLAS: Oh really, Eleanor—

ELEANOR: —God only knows what that included.

DOUGLAS: —After you panicked on the dock you couldn't even face the stewards. I had to bring you all your meals.

ELEANOR: You brought me my meals, then off to the nightclub!

DOUGLAS: Nightclub. There was no nightclub on that ship.

ELEANOR: Tell me, is Rachel still at St. Mary's? (*to GRETCHEN*) They're such erotic places, hospitals...life and death and all that surgical testosterone...Is she still assisting you?

DOUGLAS: Eleanor...let's get you to bed.

(DOUGLAS *starts to lead ELEANOR away.*)

ELEANOR: Take your hands off me! I'm not your child! She's your child!

GRETCHEN: Dad, let her go.

DOUGLAS: (*to GRETCHEN*) You really ought to leave. Take Thalia with you.

GRETCHEN: And miss this? Not a chance.

ELEANOR: Yes, please stick around. I want you to hear what a fool I've been.

DOUGLAS: Everybody please get a grip! There was nothing between me and Rachel!

GRETCHEN: So you remember her too.

THALIA: Busted!

ELEANOR: Then why did she wink at you?

DOUGLAS: Wink at me! What are you talking about?

ELEANOR: I came in from the kitchen to collect the plates...You were talking to Sister Frances...Rachel caught your eye and she winked.

DOUGLAS: Never.

ELEANOR: Then why did you wink back?

GRETCHEN: I remember that too.

DOUGLAS: Stop saying you remember, you were much too young.

GRETCHEN: I was fifteen and you made me the hostess because Mom was too scared to answer the door. I remember that wink and I remember the blue eye shadow. I went out and bought some for myself.

THALIA: Eew, Mom. Creepy.

ELEANOR: Yes, it wasn't enough to take my place. (to DOUGLAS)
She had to pretend to be your mistress too.

DOUGLAS: Mistress, please, that's absurd—

ELEANOR: (to GRETCHEN) And you never said anything to warn me.
Well, you had your own fish to fry.

DOUGLAS: Will you both please stop this nonsense?

GRETCHEN: Admit it, Dad. You were flirting your ass off that night.

ELEANOR: Just like on shipboard.

DOUGLAS: Nothing happened on shipboard, except your nervous breakdown! You were pregnant that summer, don't you remember how frightened you were? You kept saying you didn't want to be a mother, you didn't think you were capable, any little sound set you off, the engine noise, the weather, you couldn't stand the crowds, we sat at the Captain's Table, you never said a word to anyone. You thought you were unattractive, you kept harping on that, that's why you imagined I was carrying on. It's all paranoia, just like this business with Rachel.

ELEANOR: Douglas, I saw the fucking STD report!

THALIA: Whoa, Grandpa.

DOUGLAS: Hold on now. There's an explanation.

ELEANOR: Yes. You operated on an AIDS patient, and your hypochondria got the better of you. That's the lie I've told myself all these years.

DOUGLAS: How could you have seen that report?

ELEANOR: I steamed it open, I read it, I resealed the envelope. Better question, why did you have it sent to our address? Was that your clumsy attempt at a confession?

(Pause. All eyes are on DOUGLAS.)

DOUGLAS: You have no idea what an O.R. is like.

ELEANOR: Oh I can imagine.

DOUGLAS: It's a combat zone.

ELEANOR: No fidelity in foxholes.

DOUGLAS: You get so close to the people you work with every day—I know that's no excuse—

ELEANOR: How many others from the "combat zone"?

DOUGLAS: None. No others. I swear to God. One time with Rachel. One horrible mistake. We'd just finished a cystectomy.

ELEANOR: How very romantic.

DOUGLAS: Last case of the day, we went out for a drink, it got out of hand. Two weeks later she asked to be transferred to another service. I never spoke to her again.

ELEANOR: That was the winter you locked up the liquor.

DOUGLAS: That had something to do with it, yes.

ELEANOR: One time only.

DOUGLAS: I swear to Christ.

ELEANOR: Those women on the boat....

DOUGLAS: All in your mind.

ELEANOR: Did you ever think of leaving me?

DOUGLAS: Never. I never wanted anyone but you.

ELEANOR: Then you're as big a fool as I am. A man whose wife who couldn't leave the house? Or have people to the house, without hiding in the kitchen? Totally dependent on her husband for every blessed little thing? Not a day went by I wasn't afraid of losing you.

DOUGLAS: All these years...if only you'd said something....

ELEANOR: How? I couldn't. After that party? I hardly spoke to you for a week. I felt like screaming my lungs out, but I'd lost the power of speech...I kept telling myself, don't be angry, it's just an innocent flirtation, don't make an issue, he'll just twist it and make it worse...Good Lord, when I think of all the ways I stifled myself...all the years I wasted...all the places I could have gone...I could have written travel books!...The Agoraphobic's Guide to Europe...to India...I always wanted to go to India...and the Moon! I used to dream about going to the Moon. All these other people walking around in space suits, but I didn't need a space suit, I knew the secret, I knew how to breathe in an airless environment, because that where I've spent all these years.

DOUGLAS: And I let that happen.

ELEANOR: Don't take all the credit. You didn't lock me up, you didn't chain me to the piano, you didn't ruin my life all by yourself! We've done that together. And helped ruin our daughter's life in the process.

GRETCHEN: Hey, the jury's still out on me, all right?

ELEANOR: Never took you anywhere. Too scared! Too selfish! I left all the parenting to your father, and he managed to rob you of your childhood. You never had a proper mother, and now you treat your daughter like you're both in high school. That has to stop, or Thalia will end up doing phone sex on the radio.

THALIA: Is that a thing? Sounds like a plan.

ELEANOR: Oh it does, does it? By the way, Thalia, where did you go when you left the house?

THALIA: Noplace special. Just hanging out.

ELEANOR: With who?

THALIA: This guy.

ELEANOR: What guy? You don't know any boys around here.

THALIA: He wasn't a boy. He had a car. A yellow Porsche.

GRETCHEN: Ohmigod.

THALIA: Hello. By the time you were my age, you had sex with three different dudes.

GRETCHEN: That's absurd.

THALIA: That's what you told me.

GRETCHEN: Are you saying you had sex with this Porsche guy?

THALIA: None of your business.

GRETCHEN: Of course it's my business!

THALIA: So how many dudes was it?

GRETCHEN: It doesn't matter how many. One. One dude. If I said anything else, it was to get you to open up.

THALIA: Is that what they taught you in shrink school? Next time think twice before you overshare.

ELEANOR: Sound advice. So tell me, Thalia. How did you meet Mr. Yellow Porsche?

THALIA: I went on Tinder.

ELEANOR: With a broken phone?

THALIA: Yeah, we hooked up before Grandpa smashed it.

ELEANOR: What happened to him?

THALIA: He left. He drove away.

ELEANOR: Before you went to Kroger's?

THALIA: What are you talking about? I didn't go to Kroger's.

ELEANOR: Thalia, I saw you. You followed me to Kroger's. You were worried about me.

GRETCHEN: Wait. You mean there wasn't any boy?

THALIA: Yeah, no, not today.

ELEANOR: Why did you invent him?

THALIA: Hey, all of you, lay off, all right?

ELEANOR: Let me guess. Thalia...are you by any chance a virgin?

THALIA: Seriously? Leave me alone.

GRETCHEN: Are you, Thalia?

THALIA: Yeah, OK, I'm a virgin.

DOUGLAS: Thank God for small favors.

GRETCHEN: So all this time you've been torturing me.

THALIA: Ohmigod, why is everything always about you? Maybe I want a secret life, like you, like Grandpa, like everybody else in this fucked-up family. Or maybe I just like to make things up, did you ever think of that?

ELEANOR: Wouldn't that be interesting? If all this teenage sex was just a silly myth?

THALIA: Don't worry, it's not a myth. Except in my stupid case.

ELEANOR: Then it's high time you found yourself a real boyfriend, stop trying to frighten everybody. There's nothing wrong with virginity, so long as you don't make a habit of it. (*hears barking; calls*) Yes, Zenda, I'm coming. Gretchen, I didn't mean to minimize your contribution. You're probably a very competent therapist. I'm sure you'll find a new job somewhere.

GRETCHEN: I wish I had your optimism.

ELEANOR: You have all my anxieties, you might as well have my optimism. I've wasted my life, try not to waste yours any more than you have already.

(ELEANOR *heads for the kitchen.*)

DOUGLAS: Eleanor?

ELEANOR: What, Douglas?

DOUGLAS: You really feel your life has been a waste?

ELEANOR: How else am I supposed to feel?

DOUGLAS: I've been an arrogant prick, I know that.

ELEANOR: I married an arrogant prick.

DOUGLAS: It's the surgeon in me. If you can change I can change. I'm already halfway to retirement.

ELEANOR: You'll never retire. And do what? Wait to die?

(ELEANOR *exits. From the kitchen, a scratching sound has started up—paws on wood.*)

ELEANOR: (*off; to ZENDA*) Yes, yes, I understand what you're saying.

(ELEANOR *re-enters, starts opening drawers, anxiously hunting for something. ZENDA has started barking eagerly.*)

ELEANOR: Where on earth did we put it?

DOUGLAS: Where did we put what? What are you looking for?

ELEANOR: Here it is.

(ELEANOR *takes a leash out of the drawer.*)

ELEANOR: (*uneasily*) Isn't that miraculous? He's asking to go out.

(ELEANOR *puts on the sun-hat, heads back toward the kitchen.*)

DOUGLAS: Eleanor, what do you think you're doing?

ELEANOR: Apparently there's a whole world outside. With air you can breathe. I might start with Grove Park, I gather people bring their dogs there. I might run into that birdwatcher, the man I should have waved at.

THALIA: Yay, Grandma!

DOUGLAS: Is this how it's going to be?

ELEANOR: With any luck, yes—this is how it's going to be. (*to GRETCHEN*) Do you know how to make a turkey meat loaf?

GRETCHEN: Mom, you're a little wound-up right now. Why don't you let Dad go with you?

ELEANOR: Absolutely not. Can you make a meat loaf or can't you?

GRETCHEN: It's been a while since I cooked, but I'll give it a shot.

DOUGLAS: Eleanor...how long do you plan to be gone?

ELEANOR: Until I start to fibrillate.

DOUGLAS: You're scaring me, Eleanor.

ELEANOR: And don't forget to buy Thalia a new phone.

(ELEANOR *exits toward the kitchen. ZENDA's barking turns into eager yelps.*)

ELEANOR: (*to the unseen ZENDA*) Are you ready for the great outdoors? Chin up, darling! Ears back! Here we go!

(DOUGLAS *starts toward the kitchen.*)

DOUGLAS: (*uneasily*) Eleanor?

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Pantry door open.

DOUGLAS: You are coming back to me, aren't you?

(No answer. The sound of ZENDA's barking sweeps in the direction of the street. DOUGLAS starts toward the front door. GRETCHEN and THALIA bar the way. DOUGLAS backs off. GRETCHEN and THALIA exit toward the kitchen. DOUGLAS goes to the front door, opens it.)

ALARM PANEL VOICE: Front door open.

(DOUGLAS stands at the front door, staring out helplessly.)

DOUGLAS: All-ee all-ee incomefree!

(Lights slowly fade as ZENDA's barking fades. END OF PLAY.)