

Peace

A play

by
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CHARACTER NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	AGE	GENDER
Larson Delacroix	The father.	65	Male
Eloise Delacroix	The mother.	60	Female
Annie Delacroix	The sister.	24	Female
Pax Delacroix	The brother.	28	Male

TIME: Early 2000s
PLACE: Boise, Idaho

ACT I

SCENE 1.

Lights up on the living room of LARSON and ELOISE. Decorated for Christmas, but in a more distinctly Pagan style than Christian. The front door is stage right, a staircase is upstage center, and two exits to the guest bedrooms and kitchen are upstage left and stage left, respectively.

PAX is alone, lying on the living room couch. He has an old tape recorder which he is listening to.

PAX (V.O.)

(on tape recorder)

Thursday, December 20th ... it's 4:15am. Right now I would be asleep.

(he groans on the tape. tape clicks)

6:33am. My flight leaves in 20 minutes. Right now I would be ... in the shower--no, breakfast. Two eggs, scrambled, bacon...

(tape click; airport sounds in the background)

8:00am on the dot. But really it's 9:00am here. I'll just stick with Pacific Standard Time for this. Right now I would be stepping into the office--TAXI, taxi, hello, STOP, STOP!

(sound of running)

Can you go to 11th and Olive? Thank you. I've only got these bags...

Sound of talking, shuffling on the tape. Bags being put in the trunk. Trunk slams shut. Pax gets in the cab. Shuts door.

PAX (V.O.)

(on tape recorder)

Can you go to 11th and Olive? Did I already say that? Oh, shit, I've still got this thing on--

(tape click)

8:45am. I think I gave the cab driver too much money for the tip. I never know how that works.

I'm at home. No one else is here. I would be at work right now, fifteen minutes early as usual. Making the first batch of coffee, checking my desk to make sure Alan didn't break anything...

(takes a breath)

God it's weird being home.

Tape clicks. Pax stops the tape. Looks at his watch. Hits record.

PAX

Nine thirteen AM. Working. Just working. Forty-seven minutes until my first break.

He stops the tape. Gets up from the couch. Looks around. Picks up an old clock sitting on the mantle that has been in the house as long as he's been alive.

The front door opens, and a blustery cold wind follows ELOISE as she enters with a pleasant flourish. She is carrying a Himalayan salt lamp.

ELOISE

Paxie! You're here!

PAX

Hi Mom. How are you?

ELOISE

Oh I'm pulling through, Pax, we all are. How was your flight?

PAX

Boring. Cloudy.

ELOISE

Not when you got here, I'm sure. It's been crystal clear for weeks now. Not an inch of snow.

PAX

What is that?

ELOISE

Snow? You don't remember snow?

PAX

No, Mom, I mean in your hands.

ELOISE

Oh! Yes. This is a Himalayan salt lamp. It is an ancient method of reducing allergens and moisture from the air, as well as balancing electromagnetic energy in a room.

PAX

A lamp does that?

ELOISE

Help me find a spot for it?

She begins to find a spot for the lamp.

ELOISE (cont'd)

How are you, dear? I see you let yourself in.

PAX

I'm fine, Mom.

ELOISE

How is Portland?

PAX

Rainy. Cold.

ELOISE

Still your monosyllabic self, I see.

PAX

Sorry, there's just not much to report.

ELOISE

Even after four years?

PAX

Yes. Where's Dad and Annie?

ELOISE

Annie took your father to Wendy's. He wanted a baconator? Is that what it's called? It sounds dangerous. Like a super villain in a comic book or something. I tried to stop him but you know your father.

PAX

Is she really going to buy him that?

ELOISE

Oh no, don't worry, Annie would never do that, especially now. I think she's getting him a baked potato instead.

PAX

Is ... that good?

ELOISE

A potato? There's nothing wrong with a potato, dear. But Larson is being very stubborn. Yesterday I brought a delicious homemade turnip and bean sprout stew to the hospital for him but he wouldn't eat it. Said he needed something that would "put hair on my liver."

She picks up the clock Pax was holding earlier. Tosses it onto the couch and sets the salt lamp in its place.

ELOISE (cont'd)
There we go. Perfect. Can you plug it in?

PAX
You plug in a salt lamp?

ELOISE
Of course. Otherwise it would just be salt.

Eloise takes the clock and goes to the trash can.

PAX
You're going to throw the clock away?

ELOISE
I think so. It hasn't worked in ages.

PAX
It just needs to be fixed up. Let me take it in.

ELOISE
You know what your father used to do? Back when you were a child, he spent about six months trying to quit smoking, but he hid a pack of cigarettes inside this clock. He used to hide so many things in this clock. When I tried to get him to stop eating meat he actually hid a pack of hot dogs in here.

PAX
Oh yeah. He forgot they were in there and then the bottom fell out because of mold.

ELOISE
It smelled like a corpse hurricane in here. I think it's time to throw it away.

PAX
Aw, it's such a big part of the house, though.

ELOISE
Is it? It's just an old broken clock to me.

PAX
I don't know, it has charm, I guess. Memories.

ELOISE
Well, out with the old, in with the new.

Eloise tosses the clock in the garbage. She begins tidying up around the house. Pax keeps trying to help, but finds he has nothing to do.

PAX

So, how is Dad? Is he okay?

ELOISE

You don't know much about the surgery, do you?

PAX

Annie said something about the femoral artery?

ELOISE

Yes, your father had a blockage in his femoral artery which cut the blood supply to his legs. The nerve endings in his feet and legs have died. He really can't feel below his torso.

PAX

Oh my god. Can he walk?

ELOISE

He says he can, and the doctor says that with some physical therapy he will be able to get around, but we'll see.

PAX

How is he taking it?

ELOISE

Still cracking jokes like nothing's wrong. Can I get you a cup of tea or coffee? It's been so long since I've talked to you.

PAX

Not that long.

ELOISE

Four years is long for me. I'm sixty you know.

PAX

I know.

ELOISE

One half of my life is over.

PAX

You're going to live to be 120?

ELOISE

I'm working on it. I wish you could've been here for my birthday party. We brought Celestial in and she read everyone's palms. It was quite a sight, two dozen people with their hands sticking out like she was handing out money. And fortunately out of all the houseguests, only two people are going to die young. Marybeth didn't take the news so well.

PAX

You know I tried my hardest to get out here, but--

ELOISE

Oh, it's alright. You've been to enough of my birthday parties. You are your own spirit, born out of the same stardust that birthed your father, and me, and Annie, and the entire human race, the stardust that swirls around the cosmos for all eternity. You are free to do whatever you wish with your brief existence in this world. But ... I'd appreciate a call every once and a while.

PAX

I call! I call every fourth Sunday, at 2pm on the dot.

ELOISE

Oh, I'm never here on Sunday afternoons. I'm at my ladies retreat in Albertson Park.

PAX

It's once a month. Couldn't you cancel your thing once a month?

ELOISE

You, the master of routine, are asking me to change my plans?

PAX

You're right. I'm sorry, but 2pm is when I call. Can't get around it. I have it scheduled between my 1pm walk and my 3pm jaunt.

ELOISE

Those are the same things, dear.

PAX

No, my walk is for exercise, and my jaunt is for leisure.

ELOISE

Where do you go?

PAX

The same route.

ELOISE

For both walks?

PAX

Jaunt, Mom. The other one is a jaunt.

ELOISE

A jaunt is a walk.

PAX

No, Mom, it's not, it--

Eloise raises her hands above her head, not threateningly, but in a, "Please stop talking so I can gather myself" way. Pax is silent immediately. He knows the routine.

ELOISE

Pax, a jaunt is a walk.

PAX

One is slower than--

Eloise raises her hands again, and Pax is silent. Beat. She lowers her hands.

ELOISE

I spoke with Celestial two weeks before your father's diagnosis. It was very enlightening. She knew this was all going to happen. She said, "Someone very close to you is going to have trouble soon." I knew she was talking about Larson. It's my fault that we didn't catch it earlier.

PAX

What? It's not your fault.

ELOISE

It is. Celestial said those words and I thought immediately of Larson's bad back. He had been complaining of back pain the entire time he was sick. I thought, "Why is Celestial speaking of something I've known for years?" Which was very prideful of me to say, very hateful, very self-centered. And then your father got sick, and I finally understood what she was saying, and I felt terrible.

PAX

Mom, that's ... I mean, it's not your fault.

ELOISE

(pleasantly)

Oh, it is, it is. It's alright, I've come to peace with it, sometimes things are our fault. It is the universe's way of reminding you that you are present in the world.

Eloise goes to a table, her "altar," and picks up a tied up bundle of sage. She hands it to Pax.

ELOISE (cont'd)

Will you light this and spread the smoke around? The energy in this room is very off balance. I need to lay down and meditate.

Pax tries to respond, but Eloise raises her hands again.

She exits with her hands raised. Pax stands there with the sage. He briefly pats his pockets looking for a lighter.

PAX

(to self)

What am I doing, I don't have a lighter.

He searches the room for a lighter.

ANNIE and LARSON enter. Annie wheels Larson in on a wheelchair. Larson is still wearing his hospital gown.

LARSON

Alright, we're in. Let me walk now.

ANNIE

No, Dad.

LARSON

Annie, for Chrissakes, I can walk.

ANNIE

Not right now you can't. You said you had no feeling in your feet.

LARSON

But my legs work. I'm not a cripple.

ANNIE

I don't want to hear it. Hi Pax.

LARSON

Pax! Welcome home! Wanna see my scar?

Before Pax can answer, Larson lifts up his gown, showing off a long scar running down his stomach.

PAX

DAD! You're naked!

LARSON

Funny story. While I was at the doctor I was complaining of pain in my tailbone, and the doctor took a look at me and discovered that while my legs were dying, some flesh eating bacteria had crawled right up into my taint! See?

Again, before Pax can answer, Larson lifts up his robe again and also extends his legs upward.

ANNIE
DAD!

LARSON
Can you see it?

PAX
*(grossed out but also kinda
fascinated:)*
Yeah, yeah, I can see it.

LARSON
Turns out the body can't fight infection when there's no blood there. We'll have to take some pictures. Painful as hell, but it looks pretty amazing, I gotta say. They took a melon baller and just scooped all the bad gunk out.

ANNIE
They didn't take a melon baller, don't listen to him.

PAX
So why the hospital gown?

LARSON
Gotta wear it to give the wound some air, otherwise I'll get an infection and my asshole will fall out. Does anybody have any gum?

ANNIE
Dad, seriously.

PAX
Are you okay?

LARSON
Yeah! I would've walked in the door but Anniebear over here thinks I'm a cripple.

ANNIE
You are! He tried to walk out of the hospital and nearly toppled into a nurse.

LARSON
Oh, she was a nice nurse, though, Pax, I'm sure a lot of guys would've been more than happy to topple into her...
*(he motions that she had big
breasts)*
Annie, could you grab some ketchup?

ANNIE
I don't know if you should be eating ketchup.

LARSON
What's wrong with ketchup?

ANNIE

It might be too rich for you right now.

LARSON

Fine, then go into the kitchen and put a tomato in the blender. I just want something to go with my potato.

PAX

You want ketchup on your baked potato?

LARSON

What are you two, the Food Police?! Annie, ketchup, now!

Annie exits to the kitchen. Larson beckons to Pax.

LARSON (cont'd)

Pax, come here, hurry.

PAX

What is it?

LARSON

Grab my arm.

PAX

Okay.

LARSON

Now pull!

Larson pushes himself up out of the wheelchair, Pax pulling him up. He stands for a moment, getting his balance. Then starts to teeter backwards, and Pax has to keep him upright.

LARSON (cont'd)

It's such a strange feeling, Pax. I can't feel my legs, but I feel the pressure of my feet on the ground.

PAX

Should you be doing this?

LARSON

Just help me over to the couch. I want to sit and eat my food.

PAX

Are you sure?

LARSON

Wait.

Larson reaches under his gown. He takes his hand out and rubs his fingers together.

LARSON (cont'd)

My wound is leaking.

PAX

That's the most disgusting thing I've ever heard.

LARSON

Smells like french fries. We're gonna need a towel.

Annie reenters.

ANNIE

Pax! What are you doing?

PAX

He made me do it!

ANNIE

Sit down, Dad!

LARSON

Just get me to the couch!

ANNIE

You shouldn't be moving at all.

LARSON

There's no way in hell I'm eating my food from a wheelchair. I can walk just fine.

Annie goes to grab Larson's hand.

PAX

Don't grab that hand!

ANNIE

Why?

LARSON

(rubs fingers)
Wound's leaking.

Annie is still.

PAX

Are you going to help?

ANNIE

I'm trying not to puke.

Gotcha.
PAX

Pax helps Larson ease onto the couch.

Aaahhhhh. Much better.
LARSON

PAX
We should've got a towel.

LARSON
Eh, this couch has had worse liquids on it.

Annie, again trying not to puke, takes Larson's baked potato out of the Wendy's bag and sets it on the coffee table in front of him. Larson groans.

LARSON (cont'd)
Why couldn't you buy me a baconator? You know it's my favorite sandwich at Wendy's. You know what my least favorite sandwich at Wendy's is? A baked potato.

ANNIE
A baked potato is not a sandwich.

LARSON
Thank you Yogi Berra.

ANNIE
This is much better for you.

LARSON
Says who? Remember the Atkins diet? You eat nothing but meat. It's good for you!

PAX
I think you eat more than just meat.

ANNIE
Also, Atkins died of a heart attack, Dad.

PAX
That's not true. He did have a heart attack but it didn't kill him and wasn't related to eating meat.

ANNIE
Why are you on his side?

PAX
I'm not, it's just a fact.

ANNIE

How did he die, then?

PAX

Slipped on the ice.

LARSON

Pretty stupid way to die if you ask me.

ANNIE

Where's Mom?

PAX

Sleeping. Sorry, meditating.

ANNIE

Is she alright?

PAX

She was talking about astrology and stardust and reading palms, so yeah, she's fine.

ANNIE

I'm going to go check up on her anyway. She's been up for way too long.

(close, to Pax)

Pay attention to him. You know how Dad is.

(starts to leave, then)

And DON'T stand him up again!

LARSON

Stand me up? I didn't even ask him on a date!

Annie exits upstairs to the bedroom.

LARSON (cont'd)

What is that thing?

PAX

What thing?

LARSON

Where the clock used to be.

PAX

Oh. That's a Himalayan salt lamp.

LARSON

A salt lamp? What the hell is that?

PAX

I don't know. Mom bought it.

LARSON

Of course she did. She's a good woman. Where's the clock?

PAX

She threw it away.

LARSON

She threw away my clock?! I used to hide meat in that clock.

PAX

We were just talking about that.

LARSON

Don't tell your mother but I also hid cigarettes in there sometimes.

PAX

She knows.

LARSON

Really? She never told me. Or maybe she did. I don't know, I'm old. You remember those hot dogs?

PAX

Oh yeah.

LARSON

Did I ever tell you that I ate one of them?

PAX

What? Seriously?

LARSON

Yeah. We were still a vegan household at that point. I think your mom was the only person in Boise, in 1989, who was a vegan. On purpose at least. But I was desperate for animal. I almost ate our cat I was so hungry. After we found those hot dogs in the back of the fridge I was about to toss 'em and then I thought, Eh, what the hell.

Pax gives him a grossed out look.

LARSON (cont'd)

Desperation. Think about the first human who decided to eat a raw oyster.

PAX

Were they gross?

LARSON

I only ate one and no, it tasted like a hot dog. Which actually worried me more. But I thought, "Well, it tastes the same, it must be fine." And then I got the worst food poisoning of my life.

(MORE)

LARSON (cont'd)

Your mother was sweet to take care of me. I waited so long to tell her I ate a hot dog. Didn't want to hurt her feelings. I was hunched over the toilet bowl puking my brains out and blaming it on the salad I ate for lunch. She said, "I ate that salad too," and also that salad doesn't give you food poisoning. So I was dry heaving and sounded like a walrus fucking and finally after a minute or so I blurted out, "I ATE A HOT DOG" and your mother looked at me and then started laughing so hard she was crying. And then I started laughing. You ever laugh while dry heaving? It's stupid but it made her laugh even harder. So she's laughing and I'm laughing and dry heaving, and Annie, she's around five at this point, she walks into the bathroom in her jammies and just watches the two of us laughing our asses off, with the biggest frown I've ever seen on her face, and then walks back out of the room! Like she just couldn't deal with it.

PAX

Sounds a lot like Annie.

LARSON

It does, doesn't it! Your mother started cooking meat again after that. Cooked up a big steak dinner the next night. It was the best thing I've ever eaten. Hey, you wanna grab that old clock for me?

PAX

Out of the garbage?

LARSON

Yeah. Bring it over here.

Pax goes to the garbage, pulls out the clock. He hands it to Larson.

LARSON (cont'd)

Ah, the bottom is still gone. But...

He opens the clock face, rummages around a bit, and pulls out an old dusty pack of cigarettes.

LARSON (cont'd)

Well would you look at that.

PAX

How long have those been in there?

LARSON

You got me. I bet they're still good though. You got a light?

PAX

What are you doing?

LARSON

I'm about to eat lunch. What does it look like?

PAX

Dad, you can't smoke.

LARSON

I could if you'd bring me a lighter. I saw you with that sage. Eloise making you "cleanse" the house. She's a good woman. The sage smells like shit, but she's a good woman.

Larson digs into the clock, produces a Zippo lighter.

LARSON (cont'd)

Nevermind!

(lights the cigarette, takes a long drag)

You want to light up your sage?

PAX

You can't smoke at all, Dad.

LARSON

Says who?

PAX

Says the doctor.

LARSON

You weren't there, how would you know what the doctor said?

PAX

I ... I assume he said you shouldn't smoke anymore.

LARSON

Well he did, but you can't trust doctors these days. Doctors said that red meat is bad for you, but the Atkins diet says otherwise. And just the other day, I met a man at the hospital, says he's on the keto. You know what the keto is?

PAX

Yes.

LARSON

Good, because I have no idea.

PAX

You don't eat any carbs and eat all the fat and protein you want. The body enters a state called ketosis and sheds fat in response.

LARSON

How do you know that?

PAX
Reddit.

LARSON
Where?

PAX
No, the website Reddit.

LARSON
The website read what?

PAX
On the internet, there is a website called Reddit.

LARSON
Why would you call a website that?

PAX
Because, that's what people ... nevermind. Why was he in the hospital?

LARSON
Gout.

PAX
From the meat?

LARSON
I don't know, Pax, I'm not a doctor. The point is, people say smoking is bad, but George Burns smoked a bunch of cigars every day of his life and he died at 100 years old!

PAX
George Burns didn't have a huge scar on his stomach--

LARSON
You want to know what they did?

PAX
No.

LARSON
They cut my belly open and lifted my guts out of the way. The doc just scooped them all up into his arms like a bouquet of flowers. Put 'em on a stainless steel table next to me.

PAX
Can they do that?

LARSON
They have to! You know where the femoral artery is? It's in the back of the body, not up in the front. Gotta get the guts out of the way.

PAX

Why not just put you on your stomach?

LARSON

Cut into my back, sever my spinal cord, I'm paralyzed. Then you gotta wipe my ass for me for the rest of my life.

PAX

I don't know if--

Larson coughs loudly and grotesquely. Pax grabs the cigarette from Larson's hand and puts it out on the baked potato.

LARSON

Pax! You ruined my lunch!

PAX

I'm sorry, you can't smoke.

LARSON

There's an ashtray right there!

PAX

I'm sorry!

Larson goes for another cigarette from the pack. Pax slaps the pack from his hand.

LARSON

What is the matter with you?

PAX

You can't smoke!

LARSON

Don't tell me what to do! Get my cigarettes!

PAX

No!

Pax grabs the old clock and throws it on the floor. Annie enters.

ANNIE

What the hell is going on? Why is the clock on the floor?

PAX

Dad was hiding cigarettes in it.

ANNIE

Still?!

LARSON

Oh the hell with both of you. Annie! I need another baked potato.

ANNIE

Why?

(looks at potato)

Why'd you do that?!

LARSON

I didn't, Pax did!

ANNIE

You put the cigarette--?

PAX

In the baked potato.

ANNIE

There's an ashtray right there!

PAX

I know, I know!

ANNIE

Alright, you're going to Wendy's, then.

LARSON

Get me a baconator this time!

ANNIE

No, no baconator!

LARSON

Put bacon on the potato, at least!

ANNIE

No bacon!

LARSON

Anniebear, I am sixty-five years old! I can have bacon on my potato if I want!

ANNIE

Not if you want to live to be seventy!

LARSON

It's not worth living to seventy if there's no bacon in your life.

PAX

Alright, I'll get you another baked potato.

LARSON
(starts to rise)
 Let me go with you.

ANNIE
 No, Dad, stay down.

LARSON
 I'm fine, I'd like to pick out my own menu item.

Eloise enters.

ELOISE
 Larson. Sit down.

Larson sits.

ELOISE (cont'd)
 Now that everyone's here, I think we can skip the fast food. I have a perfectly good turnip stew in the fridge.

LARSON
 Oh, Ellie, I just want some meat. Is that so wrong?

ELOISE
 Right now, yes. Your blood pressure is far too high. Your body is in recovery mode and deserves rest. Now stay here. Annie and Pax, go into the kitchen and bring in the TV tables.

LARSON
 Oh for Chrissakes, I can move! I'll walk to the kitchen.

ELOISE
 Stay where you are, please. Your energy level is very off right now. I'm going to get some St. Johns Wort. Annie, Pax. Table.

Eloise goes upstairs.

ANNIE
(to Pax)
 Did you miss all this?

PAX
 I ... thought I did.

They go to get the table.

Larson, alone, tries to stand. The process is laborious. He eventually makes it and finds his balance. He tries to take a step forward.

He can't feel his feet, slips, and falls onto his back on the floor, the carpet softening the impact. Still, it's very painful and knocks the wind out of him. He curses under his breath and writhes in pain, then notices that the pack of cigarettes is right by him. He grabs the pack, pulls out a cigarette, and lights it while laying on his back. Takes a long drag. Blows smoke rings.

Pax and Annie enter with TV trays. Eloise descends the stairs a second later.

ANNIE

DAD!

PAX

Dad, are you okay?

LARSON

Much better now.

PAX

Come on Dad, you can't smoke.

They start to help him up.

ELOISE

Wait. Larson, do you want to stay on the ground?

LARSON

Oh Ellie, I don't know. I'd prefer a bed.

ELOISE

Perhaps this can fix your energy levels, being this close to the earth. I just want you to be comfortable.

LARSON

Pax, this is a life lesson right here: Marry a woman who wants you to be comfortable.

ANNIE

Can you please put out that cigarette?

LARSON

On the carpet?

ANNIE

Pax, get the ashtray.

LARSON

Or the baked potato, whichever you prefer.

ELOISE

Can you feel the shift in the energy?

LARSON

Can somebody help me up, please?

PAX

(to Annie)

You want that first or the cigarette?

ANNIE

He'll smoke while we help him up. Get the cigarette.

PAX

Dad, give me the cigarette.

LARSON

You'll have to pry it from my cold dead lips!

ANNIE

Not funny Dad!

Pax tries to take the cigarette from Larson, who fights him from the floor. Larson accidentally burns Pax.

PAX

Ow! Shit!

LARSON

Sorry.

ELOISE

Watch your language, Pax.

PAX

Sorry.

(to Larson)

Just give me the cigarette!

LARSON

Pax, this is the last cigarette I will ever smoke. Just give me that.

ANNIE

You have to start now.

LARSON

Start smoking?

ANNIE

Start -- stop smoking! You have to start to stop smoking! You know what I mean!

LARSON

Honey, I'm fine.

ANNIE

You're not fine, you fell on the floor! You've got a huge scar on your stomach and a leaking hole in your ass!

LARSON

A second hole, really.

PAX

Annie--

ANNIE

GET HIM OFF THE GROUND!

PAX

Dad. Cigarette.

Larson reluctantly hands Pax the cigarette. Pax puts it in the baked potato.

ANNIE & LARSON

Pax there's an ashtray--

PAX

I know! There's already a cigarette in the potato, it just makes sense to put another one in there.

They help Larson up, set him on the couch.

LARSON

Eh, I kinda miss the floor now.

ELOISE

How are your stitches?

LARSON

(pats belly)

Still stitched in I think.

ANNIE

Pax, go flush the cigarettes down the toilet.

PAX

I don't think that's environmentally safe.

ELOISE

It's not, dear, you should compost them.

PAX

I don't think that is environmentally safe either.

ELOISE

That's true. We should burn them all in the backyard, as far away from the house as possible.

LARSON

You want to burn them? Let me burn them! In my mouth!

ANNIE

PAX, just get them out of here!

PAX

Alright, alright.

Pax goes out the front door.

ANNIE

Dad, what the hell is wrong with you?

LARSON

What the hell is wrong with you?

ANNIE

I'm just looking out for you. I don't want you to die. Is that so wrong?

LARSON

I can take care of myself, Annie.

ANNIE

Apparently you can't--

Eloise raises her hands.

ANNIE (cont'd)

Mom--

Eloise raises her hands higher.

ELOISE

This is certainly no way to balance energy. Larson, you need to stop smoking. That is beyond question. I've brought you some St Johns Wort to help you quit. We can also go see Celestial, she specializes in hypnotherapy which will aid in your quitting.

LARSON

That sounds like a blast.

ELOISE

I don't care what it sounds like, you need to take this seriously.

LARSON

Alright, alright.

ELOISE

Annie, you need to give your father some space. He needs to rest, and you need to let him rest.

ANNIE

If you leave him to himself he will never quit, Mom.

ELOISE

No one is going to leave Larson to himself.

LARSON

Thank you for talking about me like I'm not here.

Pax reenters.

ELOISE

Did you burn them already?

PAX

No, I gave them to some kid down the street.

ANNIE

Are you serious?

PAX

He was pestering me!

ANNIE

Pax.

LARSON

That's how I got started.

Blackout.

SCENE 2.

The next day. Eloise is on the couch. She is making a dreamcatcher. A small Buddha fountain is in the corner, along with a spattering of other spiritual items that Eloise has brought into the house. Annie enters from the bedroom, carrying an herbal pill bottle and some small slips of paper.

ANNIE

Mom, what is this?

ELOISE

Shhh, honey. I need to concentrate.

ANNIE

Are you making a dreamcatcher?

ELOISE

Yes.

ANNIE

People make thousands of those every day. They're meaningless.

ELOISE

Mass produced dreamcatchers without any spiritual energy are meaningless, yes. But this one is special. It's for your father. I'm going to hang it over his side of the bed. He's been having some terrible nightmares recently...

ANNIE

Maybe that's because he's in a lot of pain.

ELOISE

Oh, I know, I know. The sounds he makes at night are very disturbing. Last night, in fact, he made the silliest yelping noise. He sounded sort of like a dog caught in a bear trap. Couldn't help but laugh. I think I need to increase the amount of white willow bark he's taking--

ANNIE

MOM!

ELOISE

Yes, dear?

ANNIE

You haven't filled out any of Dad's prescriptions. I went upstairs to check on him, and all I found were bottles of herbal medicines.

(shows the bottle)

What is this?

ELOISE

Ginkgo biloba, it says right there on the bottle--

ANNIE

I know what it is! I want to know why you haven't filled out his prescriptions!

ELOISE

Sweet child, your father is in good hands.

ANNIE

He needs painkillers, Mom.

ELOISE

That's what the white willow bark is for.

ANNIE

White willow bark is not a painkiller.

ELOISE

How do you know?

ANNIE

How do I know? I don't know! That's the problem! No one knows whether or not this stuff works.

ELOISE

People have been using white willow bark for thousands of years as a natural and effective painkiller. You know who was a proponent of it? Hippocrates. Do you know who Hippocrates is?

ANNIE

Of course I know who Hippocrates is--

ELOISE

He was the first doctor!

ANNIE

Mom--

ELOISE

Later on, Bayer synthesized the active ingredient in white willow bark, eventually creating what we know as aspirin. Bayer's not a good company though. Dealt with the Nazi's during the war...

ANNIE

So you're treating Dad's pain with aspirin?

ELOISE

White willow bark.

ANNIE

Whatever. It's not enough, Mom. He's still in pain.

ELOISE

Honey, the universe gives us pain for a reason, we shouldn't ignore it with pharmaceuticals--

ANNIE

Stop. I'm sick of your mumbo jumbo. I went up to check on Dad and he is not doing well. He's sweating and writhing around in bed. These prescriptions are for legit medications.

ELOISE

How do you know they're legitimate? You can't even read what it says on the prescription. You can't trust the medicines that doctors give out like candy these days. Can't even pronounce them, it's all nonsense. How do you even know what's in it?

ANNIE

You saw the doctor write these, I know because I was there. These medicines have been proven to work.

ELOISE

Herbal remedies have also been proven to be effective.

ANNIE

No, they haven't, that's the whole point. Nobody tests herbs.

ELOISE

I just told you about Bayer--

ANNIE

Okay, that's an exception, but aspirin isn't going to help Dad.

ELOISE

Morphine. Have you heard of morphine?

ANNIE

Of course! I know where you're going with this. Morphine is made from opium.

ELOISE

And when taken safely, opium can be an excellent painkiller.

ANNIE

You want to give Dad opium?

ELOISE

I would, but I can't find a dealer. Larson is going to be fine. He has a high pain tolerance.

ANNIE

Mom, are you living in a bubble? Dad's in a lot of pain. Remember when we helped him up the stairs?

ELOISE

He hardly said a word.

ANNIE

Because he was hurting. Dad doesn't have a high pain tolerance, he just doesn't let on when he's hurt. Did you look at his face?

ELOISE

I've known your father for over forty years, Annie, I know when he's in pain.

ANNIE

Well, your mind must be slipping.

ELOISE

Oh, honey, my mind is sharp as a tack. That's what the ginkgo is for, to improve memory. If you studied anything about herbal medicine you would know this.

ANNIE

Mom, you eat well and do yoga and have hobbies that improve your memory. That's it. This ginkgo doesn't help.

ELOISE

It does, Annie, and I'm sorry that you don't understand.

ANNIE

I hate it when you talk like that.

ELOISE

And I don't appreciate you badmouthing thousands of years of holistic medicine. All I want is to give your father a healthy chance at recovery, not to bog him down with artificially synthesized medicines made by doctors who just want your money and to get you hooked on their drugs. Now, come here. Sit down. Relax. You're so high strung lately, you need to calm down.

(pats the couch)

Come, come.

ANNIE

We don't have time for this.

ELOISE

We have plenty of time, and the time we have is precious. Your father's situation should remind you of that. Every moment you spend in fear, or hate, or sadness, is a moment wasted. Sit down.

ANNIE

No. Not until you promise to get these prescriptions filled out.

ELOISE

I will not touch those things.

ANNIE

Fine. I'll get Pax.

ELOISE

You will do no such thing. Pax is a guest, I'm not going to have him run your errands.

ANNIE

I'll do it myself then--!

ELOISE

Annabelle Jeanne Delacroix. Sit down.

Annie hesitates, then sits. Eloise shows her the dreamcatcher.

ELOISE (cont'd)

Do you think this looks good?

ANNIE

Sure.

ELOISE

Annie. Don't be a sourpuss.

ANNIE

I haven't seen a dreamcatcher in years. I hardly remember what they look like.

ELOISE

Well I don't believe that. It's a very unique shape. How could you forget it?

ANNIE

I mean, I know what it looks like, but not the details of it.

ELOISE

Do you remember making your own dreamcatcher?

ANNIE

Yes.

ELOISE

How old were you?

ANNIE

I don't know. Eight?

ELOISE

You were seven. We made it three days after you lost your front tooth. You remember that?

ANNIE

... Yes.

ELOISE

I've never seen a girl so scared of the Tooth Fairy.

ANNIE

I wasn't scared.

ELOISE

You had nightmares every night.

ANNIE

Ugh, can I go?

ELOISE

Does it still bother you?

ANNIE

I ... it's weird! A woman with wings and a pink tutu flies into your room in the middle of the night and steals your teeth!

ELOISE

She doesn't steal. She buys them. She leaves you money. Or, in your case, homemade granola bars.

ANNIE

I would have preferred money.

ELOISE

The Tooth Fairy was very poor that year. But I remember that third night, when you came into our bedroom crying, your tongue sticking out of the hole where your front tooth used to be. And you came up to the bed and just as sweetly as can be, you said, "Mom, I had a bad dream again." Tell me the dream, Anniebear.

ANNIE

No, it was stupid.

ELOISE

Come on.

ANNIE

Mom, we don't have time for this.

ELOISE

Your father is asleep.

ANNIE

How do you know?

ELOISE

I know. Come on, it makes me laugh.

ANNIE

Ugh. I was in ballet class. The instructor was the Tooth Fairy. She put me in front of the class and made me pirouette. She wouldn't let me stop.

(MORE)

ANNIE (cont'd)

I kept twirling and twirling, faster and faster, until all of my teeth came flying out of my head. She was leaping around the room, catching all my teeth, she had such a malicious grin on her face. Then she buried me in granola.

Eloise laughs at this. Annie can't help but laugh too, which also pisses her off a bit.

ANNIE (cont'd)

I couldn't breathe! I woke up in such a panic.

ELOISE

I remember! And the next morning we made you a dreamcatcher, and you never had a bad dream after that.

ANNIE

What's your point, Mom?

ELOISE

My point is that sometimes the placebo is just as effective as the real thing. Sometimes all you need is the distraction.

ANNIE

I ... don't get it.

She hands Annie the unfinished dreamcatcher.

ELOISE

You want to finish it?

A beat, Annie looking at it.

ANNIE

No.

(stands)

Dad's not having a bad dream.

She drops the dreamcatcher on the couch, grabs her coat, and exits through the front door.

Eloise picks up the dreamcatcher. Looks at it for a second. Then she begins to cry, openly, not loudly, but not holding back either. As she cries, she slowly crushes the dreamcatcher in her hands.

Pax enters from upstairs. Eloise hides the dreamcatcher under the couch cushion but continues crying.

PAX

Dad's finally asleep. He doesn't look very well, though. We might want to take him back to the doctor. I don't know how you do it, Mom, I'm exhausted. Did Annie leave? Did she take the prescriptions?

(notices Eloise)

Are you okay?

ELOISE

Yes.

PAX

Why are you crying?

ELOISE

Because I am so happy to have two amazing children who care so much about their parents, to put off their entire lives for us. To come and stay in our home and deal with what we are dealing with. It truly is a blessing. Come here. Help me up.

He helps her up, and she hugs him.

ELOISE (cont'd)

I love you so much.

PAX

I love you too, Mom.

ELOISE

I want you to know that no matter what you do with your life, I will always love you.

PAX

I ... I know.

ELOISE

I'm going to go nap with your father.

PAX

Okay.

Eloise hesitates to let go of the hug, but she does, and exits upstairs. Pax sits on the couch. Feels something underneath. Pulls out the ruined dreamcatcher. Studies it, then pulls out his tape recorder, checks his watch, then clicks the recorder on.

PAX (cont'd)

11:33am. Would be at lunch, three minutes in. It's Wednesday so ... Louie's, corner table, egg salad sandwich, glass of chocolate milk, maybe an apple. The waitress is Molly today.

(MORE)

PAX (cont'd)

At this point she'd ask if I want the usual. I'd say yes in that self-deprecating way, like I'm boring and not inventive. Which ... is true.

(beat)

Mom is crying. That... that's actually not unusual.

A beat, then he decides to switch the recorder off. He lays back on the couch. Closes his eyes. A beat, then lights dim and then shift into something ethereal. A spotlight shines downstage center. A small table is brought out into the spotlight. On the table is a chess set, preset, and an old, pre-digital chess timer. Two chairs are put on the sides of the table.

As these are being set up, the sound of a clock's seconds hand ticking. Ideally when the set up is finished, the ticking is replaced by the Westminster Chime.

Larson descends from the staircase as the chime nears its end. The sound in the background shifts to the general hullabaloo of a bowling alley, which continues unless otherwise noted. Larson is younger, and is hustling to the table. As he passes Pax he hurriedly wakes him up.

LARSON

Pax! Let's go!

Pax jerks awake. Larson takes a seat on the black side of the chess set.

PAX

(rubbing his eyes)

What's going on?

LARSON

HURRY UP! Get over here!

PAX

Why? What's going on?

LARSON

Are you going to forfeit this game?

PAX
(finally getting it)
 No, no, of course not.

LARSON
 Then sit down.

Pax sits at the white side.

LARSON (cont'd)
 Ready?

PAX
 Yes.

Pax makes the first move of the chess game. As they make chess moves, they also announce the move, e.g. the first move is "Knight to F3."

The game they are playing is game six of Garry Kasparov's 1996 match against Deep Blue. The audience doesn't need to know this (but if someone in the audience does, you should buy them a beer after the show). They play the game at almost lightning speed, reproducing each move with robotic precision.

After the last move:

LARSON
 I resign. Reset.

They begin resetting the chess board.

LARSON (cont'd)
 Don't forget Knight to E5.

PAX
 I know.

LARSON
 It's very important.

PAX
 I know.

LARSON
 Which move?

PAX
(thinks)
 Fifteen.

LARSON
 You lose the game if you don't make that move.

PAX
 Okay.

LARSON
 Begin.

*And they play the same match again,
 with the same precision and speed, and
 reciting each move as before.*

After the last move:

LARSON (cont'd)
 I resign. Reset.

As they reset the board:

PAX
 Can we play something else?

LARSON
 Don't forget Knight to E5.

PAX
 I won't!

*Larson pulls out Pax's tape recorder
 and hands it to him.*

LARSON
 Say it.

Pax clicks the tape recorder on.

PAX
(into recorder)
 Don't forget Knight to E5.

LARSON
 It's a very important move.

PAX
 I know.

LARSON
 Say it.

PAX
(into recorder)
 It's a very important move.

LARSON
 What move?

PAX
 Fourteen -- fifteen!

LARSON
 Say it.

PAX
(into recorder)
 It's move fifteen.

LARSON
 You lose the game if you don't make that move.

PAX
 Okay.

LARSON
 Say it.

PAX
 Really?

LARSON
 Do you want to win this game?

PAX
 I already won it twice.

All sound cuts away immediately. All lights black except the spotlight, which grows in intensity. Larson sits up, leans over the chess table, until he is in Pax's face.

LARSON
(slowly)
 Say it.

PAX
(slowly, into recorder)
 I lose the game if I don't make that move.

LARSON
 You could've been so much more.

PAX
 What?

Say it. LARSON

No. PAX

You could've been a chess champion, you could've been a bowling champion-- LARSON

Stop. PAX

Say it. LARSON

Dad-- PAX

This is not your father. LARSON

Beat.

Say it. LARSON (cont'd)

PAX
(beat; into recorder)
I could've been so much more.

Larson sits back down.

Now listen to it. LARSON

Pax rewinds the tape recorder and then hits play, but all that comes out is the sound of cats yowling. Beat.

Alright. Begin. LARSON (cont'd)

Lights, sound return to normal immediately.

And again they play the same match exactly like before. Pax's energy begins to wane. At move fifteen, Pax moves Knight to E5, but Larson does not do the next move [Rook to C8]. Instead he does a move of his own volition.

PAX
 What are you doing?

LARSON
 Your turn.

PAX
 It's Rook to C8.

LARSON
 It's your turn.

PAX
 You moved the wrong piece.

LARSON
 No I didn't.

PAX
 You move Rook to C8.

LARSON
 No I don't.

PAX
 Yes, you do. It's your move. It's your move after my Knight to E5.

LARSON
 Well ... that's not what I did.

Pax stares at the board, as though he has completely forgotten how to play.

PAX
 What do I do now?

LARSON
 Make your next move.

Beat as Pax thinks. Sound of someone bowling a strike, and the cheers that ensue afterward.

PAX
 I don't want to play anymore.

LARSON
 You have to.

PAX
 Why?

LARSON
Because this game will never end unless you move.

PAX
But you moved the wrong piece!

LARSON
You still have to play the game.

PAX
You moved the wrong piece! Put it back.

LARSON
I can't.

PAX
Dad.

LARSON
It's your turn.

A long moment as Pax studies the board. Then, he hesitantly moves a chess piece. Larson immediately moves another piece.

LARSON (cont'd)
Checkmate.

Beat.

PAX
Reset?

LARSON
Pax.

PAX
What?

LARSON
Pax.

PAX
What?

LARSON
PAX.

PAX
What?!

Quickly, Pax leaves the chess table and lays on the couch.

*Larson takes the chess set offstage.
The lights shift back to normal as
Annie enters.*

ANNIE

PAX!

Pax jolts awake.

PAX

KNIGHT TO E5!

ANNIE

What?

PAX

Uh, nothing! Chess dream.

ANNIE

God, even your dreams are boring. Come on, get up, I need your help. We have to get Dad into the car. The pharmacy won't let me get his prescriptions unless he's there. They thought I was some kind of goddamn methhead or something.

PAX

You do seem a little jittery.

ANNIE

It's because I'm pissed off! Mom didn't fill out Dad's prescriptions! She's trying to give him homeopathic bullshit like echinacea or whatever. Then I almost ran over a squirrel on my way to the pharmacy, the fucking thing was just standing there, staring at me, egging me on. Are squirrels suicidal? What the fuck? And then when I got there the lady at the counter was the most obnoxious bitch I've ever met -- why am I still talking? Come on!

*Annie goes upstairs. Beat. She comes
back down.*

ANNIE (cont'd)

PAX!

PAX

What?!

ANNIE

Come upstairs!

PAX

You really want to move Dad?

ANNIE

We have to.

PAX

But he's up there sleeping with Mom. I bet it looks really cute.

ANNIE

And the pharmacy closes in half an hour so we'll have to wake him up.

PAX

No, just let him sleep.

ANNIE

Pax, I don't want to hear this. He's in a lot of pain. Now get up here.

PAX

No.

Annie storms down the stairs, her hands in fists. Pax backs up.

ANNIE

Oh, are you afraid of your little sister now?

PAX

No.

ANNIE

Why'd you back up?

PAX

I didn't back up.

ANNIE

I'm not going to punch you.

PAX

I know.

ANNIE

I'm thinking about it.

PAX

Put your hands down.

ANNIE

No.

PAX

Annie, come on.

ANNIE

No, you come on. Dad's really hurt. You don't understand, you didn't get to see him at the hospital.

(MORE)

ANNIE (cont'd)

You didn't get to see the terrified look on his face, okay? He almost died. He may still die. Every moment he goes without his medication he has a higher chance of dying. Mom won't help him. She's out of her mind.

PAX

Don't say that.

ANNIE

It's true, she's going insane. And if Dad dies then Mom will die two years afterward, that's how it always goes, there are statistics that prove--

PAX

Annie, you really need to calm down.

ANNIE

Why? Everyone is so calm around here, like nothing's going on! And I'm the only person in this whole house who's actually getting shit done!

PAX

It's not that bad--

ANNIE

(screams)

IT IS THAT BAD!

PAX

People die, Annie! Dad's gonna die. Mom's gonna die.

ANNIE

Not right now they're not.

Eloise enters from upstairs.

ELOISE

What are you two yelling about?

PAX

Nothing, Mom!

ANNIE

We need to get--

ANNIE

No it's not nothing! Dad needs to fill out his prescriptions. We need to get him out of bed.

ELOISE

Honey, you're overreacting.

ANNIE

No I'm not! Everyone's so calm all the time!

LARSON
(off upstairs)
 Annie!

*Larson appears next to Eloise upstairs.
 He looks a little more haggard than
 last time.*

ANNIE
 Dad, what are you doing up?

LARSON
 I just finished my tap dance routine.
(beat)
 That was a joke.

ANNIE
 It's not funny.

LARSON
 I thought it was funny.

ANNIE
 Can you come downstairs please?

LARSON
 Sure, I'll just slide down the bannister.

*Eloise helps Larson down the stairs. As
 they descend:*

LARSON *(cont'd)*
 Annie, the last thing I want is for my daughter to worry ten
 years off her own life trying to preserve mine. Let's go to
 the pharmacy.

PAX
 Are you sure?

LARSON
 Yeah. The white willow bark tastes awful anyway.
(Eloise gives him a look)
 It's true!

ELOISE
 It's not the taste that's important.

LARSON
 You're right, you're right. But I do need something stronger.
 Come on Anniebear.

ANNIE
 We'll be right back.

LARSON

Can we stop by the Wendy's on the way?

ANNIE

No, Dad.

LARSON

You wanna buy me a pack of smokes?

ANNIE

No!

LARSON

Can I have a dollar?

They have exited. Eloise goes to the dreamcatcher on the table.

ELOISE

What is this still doing here?

PAX

Did you really not fill out Dad's prescriptions?

ELOISE

Annie is very misinformed. The last thing I want to do is give your father synthesized medicine.

PAX

You'd rather he be in pain?

ELOISE

Why does everyone in this household think I want my husband to be in pain? I'm providing him with natural painkillers that have been around for millennia. The drugs provided by doctors aren't the only way to heal people.

PAX

Yeah but they're stronger, and proven to be more effective than natural medicine.

ELOISE

That's not true.

PAX

I don't know, Mom, the studies show--

ELOISE

Yes, studies of forty, maybe fifty years.

PAX

Penicillin has been around for a century...

ELOISE
Penicillium fungus has been around for thousands of years.

PAX
But nobody knew it was an antibiotic until--

ELOISE
The Greeks used molds for medicinal purposes two thousand years ago.

PAX
Okay, Mom--

ELOISE
No, it's not okay. You know why your grandfather is dead, don't you.

PAX
Yes.

ELOISE
I don't want that to happen to your father.

PAX
That has nothing to do with the efficacy of modern medicine.

ELOISE
People don't overdose from penicillin.
(beat)
Can you do me a favor?

PAX
You want me to dig up Grandpa's bones?

ELOISE
No. I want you to buy some weed.

Blackout.

SCENE 3.

Later that evening. Larson and Eloise on the couch. They are smoking a joint. Larson takes a hit and passes it to Eloise.

LARSON
Now this was a great idea, Ellie.

ELOISE
I would have preferred to not have you smoke it like this, but there is no place in town that sells a vaporizer.

LARSON
How do you know what a vaporizer is?

ELOISE
How do you?

LARSON
I don't know. How do I know? Maybe MTV.

ELOISE
Well, despite what Annie may think, I don't live in a bubble. I'm hip to new things. I'm cool. Just the other day I sent my first phone text.

LARSON
You did?

ELOISE
I did.

LARSON
Who did you text?

ELOISE
Anniebear. I meant to write, "Hello, how are you?" but instead it came out as, "Jello, hoe ate toy."

LARSON
(laughs)
Did you fix it?

ELOISE
Why would I? It's a much better sentence.

LARSON
Well, this joint works great, honey. Nice thinking.

ELOISE
Thank Pax. He's the one who bought it.

LARSON
Really? How did Pax know where to buy weed?

ELOISE
I think he bought it from the boy he gave the cigarettes to.

LARSON
Well that just doesn't make any sense. Where are the kids, anyway?

ELOISE
I told them to go away.

LARSON

Blunt! I like it.

ELOISE

I appreciate their help, I really do, but they're being a little overbearing.

LARSON

They're doing their best.

ELOISE

I noticed you and Annie filled out those prescriptions.

LARSON

We did.

ELOISE

Have you been ... taking them?

LARSON

I know why you're worried.

ELOISE

It's not that.

LARSON

I did. I took them.

ELOISE

All of them?

LARSON

There's not that many.

ELOISE

Five prescriptions is too many.

LARSON

Ellie, please.

ELOISE

I just worry...

LARSON

Well, don't. I'll be fine. My dad was a foolish, hard-headed man who nearly got himself killed on various occasions. I'm sure his only regret is that he died of an overdose, rather than being mauled to death by lions in Kenya.

ELOISE

Don't say that.

LARSON

(playfully)

Don't tell me what to do, woman.

He goes to tickle her, but gets a pain in his back and must withdraw.

ELOISE

What's the matter?

LARSON

I've just had this stabbing pain in my back. It comes and goes.

ELOISE

Oh. You should be in bed--

LARSON

No, no. I'm sick of laying in that damn bed. I spend so much time there. Do you know how many episodes of *Friends* I've watched? No one should know that much about *Friends*.

ELOISE

Do you want me to get you something?

LARSON

I'm fine. Really. I feel great. Gimme that.

She hands him the joint, and he takes a long drag.

LARSON (cont'd)

What do you think this strain is called?

ELOISE

I don't know, but it seems a lot stronger than the stuff we smoked in the seventies.

LARSON

Very true. This is potent.

ELOISE

They've really studied their agriculture...

LARSON

Remember that weed we bought in Redmond? What was it called?

ELOISE

I think it was just Purple Kush.

LARSON

Weed strains have stupid names.

ELOISE

You think "Purple Kush" is a weirder name than "Oxycontin"?

LARSON

Yeah. They just don't sound scientific. No way medical marijuana is going to last as long as they keep giving them weird names like "Alaskan Thunderfuck."

ELOISE

Larson!

LARSON

What?! That's what they call it! Alaskan Thunderfuck. It's not my fault they give strains weird names.

ELOISE

I'd like to think it's something more tasteful than that.

LARSON

Like what? Alaskan Thunder-marriage?

ELOISE

(giggles)

Alaskan Thunderdating.

LARSON

Alaskan Thunderhandholding?

They are both giggling at this point, having trouble catching their breath. Eventually the giggling stops, and they mellow out and smoke in silence for a moment. Then, Eloise, hesitantly:

ELOISE

What was it like? In the hospital?

LARSON

When?

ELOISE

Before the surgery.

LARSON

It was a little scary.

(beat)

It was the most terrifying moment of my life. I feel bad saying that, because of you and Annie...

ELOISE

What?

LARSON

When she was breeched.

ELOISE

Oh, yes.

LARSON

That was a terrifying moment in my life. It was the most terrifying for a long time. But then, there I was, on my back with my pants off, surrounded by my family and a surgeon ... sounds like a set up to a joke now. I was in so much pain, Ellie. Still am. But then it was unbearable. It was like my entire lower body was on fire, like I was being dipped into lava. This was before we knew what was going on. By the time we made it to the doctors, my lower half was mostly numb with these intense pinpricks of pain. You remember my toes?

ELOISE

Yes.

LARSON

The tips were all black...

ELOISE

Stop.

LARSON

You asked me.

ELOISE

I know, but...

LARSON

I was lying in bed, gritting my teeth from the pain, sweating despite it being so cold, staring at my feet, staring at my toes, trying to move my big toe but it wouldn't move, my toes wouldn't move...

ELOISE

I'm so sorry.

LARSON

You ever have a moment where you suddenly regretted everything you've done with your life? Where all the choices you made seemed trivial at best and abysmal at worst?

A beat of silence.

ELOISE

(quietly)

No.

LARSON

Oh. Well. I don't mean everything. I'm sorry.

ELOISE

I understand.

LARSON
I mean -- moments.

ELOISE
I know.

LARSON
You're the greatest thing that's ever happened to me. You know that.

ELOISE
I know...

He kisses her. It's a little awkward.

LARSON
I love you Ellie.

ELOISE
I love you too.

LARSON
How did you feel? At the hospital?

ELOISE
(a short beat)
Terrified.

LARSON
Yeah...

He expects her to keep talking but she doesn't.

LARSON (cont'd)
Are you okay?

ELOISE
I would rather you not take those drugs.

LARSON
I know, honey.

ELOISE
I don't want you to die.

LARSON
Well, everyone dies at some point. First it'll be me and then you, and then the kids, and then their kids. People will always die. Always. It's just how the cosmos works.

ELOISE
The universe is so beautiful, I want to be a part of it for as long as possible.

LARSON

Don't worry about the universe. Worry about yourself.

ELOISE

I worry about you.

LARSON

Don't. Worry about yourself. Not even that. Don't worry about anything. There's no time to worry so much. Just enjoy yourself. Enjoy the life you were given, because you're not getting another one. I don't care what the Hindu's say, there's no reincarnation, no Heaven, nothing. You just become worm feed. That idea used to scare the shit out of me, Ellie. You know how many years I spent in fear of dying? And then I almost died and now ... now I feel more alive than I ever have. I feel like I was reborn, only in an old, saggy body.

(short beat)

When I die I just want you to throw my body into a shallow grave so that I can be eaten by wild animals and insects. Circle of life.

Eloise is in tears by this point.

LARSON (cont'd)

Why are you crying?

ELOISE

I don't know.

LARSON

Come here.

Eloise puts her head on Larson's shoulder.

ELOISE

I ... I don't know if I feel the same way you do.

LARSON

About what?

ELOISE

Living. Dying. Circle of life.

LARSON

It's okay. You don't have to.

They sit in silence for a moment.

ELOISE

Can you promise me one thing?

LARSON

What?

ELOISE

No more smoking. No more eating that disgusting fast food. You might not live much longer, but I want you here and healthy for as long as possible. Okay?

(a beat)

Okay?

(a longer beat)

Larson?

LARSON

Okay. Okay.

ELOISE

You promise?

LARSON

I promise.

ELOISE

I'll do my best to feed you the most delicious organic food. I can make hamburgers and pizza with whole wheat dough--

LARSON

Honey, it's okay. It's okay. I love your cooking. Even when I have no idea what it is.

Eloise laughs, which turns into a sob, which turns into a yawn.

LARSON (cont'd)

Are you sleepy?

ELOISE

A bit.

LARSON

Go upstairs, get to bed.

ELOISE

What about you?

LARSON

I'm going to finish this and then I'll be up.

ELOISE

Just take it with you.

LARSON

I'd rather the bedroom not smell like weed.

ELOISE

I don't want you to climb the stairs by yourself.

LARSON

It's okay, it'll be a nice challenge.

ELOISE

Don't say that.

LARSON

I already do pretty well with a cane. There's a bannister. I'll be fine.

ELOISE

No. I'll stay here until you're ready. I'll just nap here on the couch.

LARSON

Eloise. You don't need to babysit me. There will come a day when you won't be here to help me get up, or move, or walk up or down stairs. I can do it. I'm not a helpless little thing. Never was, never will be.

ELOISE

What about your back?

LARSON

My back hurt long before I had these problems. Go on, go upstairs. I'll be there in a few minutes. I just want some time to myself.

ELOISE

Why?

LARSON

I don't know. I just do. I've been mollycoddled ever since we went to the hospital. I need some time alone.

ELOISE

You sure you'll be okay?

LARSON

Stop worrying. That's Annie's job.

Eloise slowly gets up from the couch. She kisses Larson on the forehead and then goes upstairs.

Larson takes another drag from the joint, staring out into space for a moment. He then sets it in the ashtray. With a lot of determination and help from his cane, he stands, then slowly walks over to a desk. He opens the drawer and removes a ziplock bag, in which contains a Wendy's bag.

He unzips the ziplock bag and removes the Wendy's bag, the smell of which is nearly intoxicating to him. He then walks to the front door, sets the bag on a nearby table, opens the bag and pulls out a large baconator burger as well as a pack of smokes. He opens the front door and then lights up a cigarette, leaning against the doorframe in the cold moonlight and frigid air, smoking, blowing the smoke outside, and eating the burger, an immense sense of relief all over his body.

Lights fade to black.

END ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1.

Christmas Eve morning. The living room is full of various plants and spiritual odds and ends Eloise has packed into it. Incense burns.

Pax is standing alone, by the window next to the front door. He's speaking into his tape recorder.

PAX

December 24th ... Christmas Eve, obviously. Seven-thirteen in the morning. Trying to remember what I did last Christmas Eve. Usually I go to a movie, but for some reason that doesn't ring true for last year. Maybe it was two years ago that I didn't go to a movie?

Annie enters, clad in pajamas. She watches Pax.

PAX (cont'd)

I mean, in the morning I would've had breakfast: two slices of bacon, scrambled eggs, toast with butter. Glass of milk. I would've made that this morning but Mom doesn't have any bacon because she's afraid Dad will eat all of it. Like he's going to just grab a fistful of bacon and shove it down his throat. Dad's an impulsive guy but not that impulsive.

Anyway, I scrounged up what I could in the kitchen and--

He turns away from the window and sees Annie. He clicks the recorder off.

ANNIE

What are you doing?

PAX

Nothing.

ANNIE

Who are you talking to?

PAX

No one.

ANNIE

You're just talking to yourself?

PAX

Well, I ...

He gestures with the tape recorder.

ANNIE

What is that?

PAX

A tape recorder.

ANNIE

Like, with a cassette?

PAX

Yes.

ANNIE

Why do you have a tape recorder?

PAX

Why are you asking so many questions?

ANNIE

Because you're talking to yourself?

PAX

This is just a thing I do.

ANNIE

Record your thoughts on a tape recorder.

PAX

Yes. Sort of.

ANNIE

Why?

PAX

Why not?

ANNIE

You're not the kind of guy who writes a diary.

PAX

It's not a diary.

ANNIE

Then what is it?

PAX

It's just a ... catalog.

ANNIE

What?

It doesn't matter. PAX

A catalog of what? ANNIE

Just ... my life. PAX

That's a diary. ANNIE

It's not a diary! It's a journal. It's not even a journal. PAX

I don't remember you being this weird. You want some coffee? ANNIE

You drink coffee? PAX

Yeah, I started right after you left. You want some? ANNIE

No thanks. PAX

Annie goes into the kitchen.

So how is Portland treating you? ANNIE (OFF STAGE)

Well. PAX

That's it? ANNIE

I guess. PAX

Look, I know we've been busy with doctor's appointments and other things -- did you wrap your Christmas presents, by the way? ANNIE

Not yet. PAX

Seriously? Go get them! ANNIE

Right now? PAX

Right now.

ANNIE

Pax goes to the coat closet by the front door, grabbing a few boxes he hid in a nook at the top of the closet. Annie reappears with two cups of coffee. She sets them on the coffee table and grabs some wrapping paper. Most of the following dialogue happens while they are wrapping presents.

PAX
I said I didn't want coffee.

ANNIE
Yes you do. You need it. You need the energy.

PAX
I don't drink coffee!

ANNIE
Since when?

PAX
Since ever.

ANNIE
Well start up, it's good for you.

PAX
I don't want it!

Annie throws her hands up in the air like Eloise.

PAX (cont'd)
What are you doing?

ANNIE
How come that works for Mom but not me?

PAX
I tried it once and Dad just high fived me.

ANNIE
Tell me how you're doing, Pax.

PAX
I'm good.

ANNIE
That's it?

PAX

Yeah. Do you need a detailed report?

ANNIE

What do you do? Do you work?

PAX

I'm at a call center.

ANNIE

A call center? What do you mean?

PAX

I mean I answer tech support calls.

ANNIE

Really?

PAX

Yes.

ANNIE

...Really.

PAX

Yes! What? What's the big deal?

ANNIE

Oh, I don't know, you were, like, the top of the heap in the Chess Club. You were probably the best debater in high school. You were valedictorian, got top grades in college, constantly on the Dean's List, and you work at a call center?

PAX

It's not that bad, Annie.

ANNIE

Why don't you ever push yourself?

PAX

It's a very competitive call center.

ANNIE

All during school you trumped everyone in chess but Dad had to force you kicking and screaming to the matches. And the bowling league...

PAX

Hey, that was because I lost my bowling ball.

ANNIE

Nobody loses a bowling ball.

PAX
I do. I am the first.

ANNIE
You did not.

PAX
I did!

ANNIE
You are such a liar. You tell me right here, right now that you did not lose that bowling ball.

PAX
I did, I lost it.

ANNIE
Where?

PAX
On the way home.

ANNIE
How do you -- on the way home?! You are such a liar.

PAX
It's the truth.

ANNIE
No it's not!

PAX
Yes it is!

ANNIE
Why didn't you ever get another ball?

PAX
I ... didn't think about it.

ANNIE
You are the worst.

PAX
I don't have to explain myself to you.

ANNIE
Actually, you do. I thought you moved to Portland to start this amazing life after college. Didn't think you'd be working at a bottom-of-the-barrel call center.

PAX
It's not bottom-of-the-barrel, it's very top-of-the-barrel, thank you.

(MORE)

PAX (cont'd)

People have technical problems with their cable modems and someone's gotta help them fix those problems. It's not glorious work but it's something.

ANNIE

You're so much better than that, though.

PAX

No I'm not.

ANNIE

Are you being modest?

PAX

Jesus, I never thought I'd be cornered by my little sister.

ANNIE

And I never thought I'd have to corner you. Do you know how hard I worked just to attempt to be in the same league as you?

PAX

Bowling league?

ANNIE

You know what I mean!

PAX

Annie, it's not that big of a deal--

ANNIE

Yes it is! I studied hard, I took all those dance classes, I knew I wasn't great at it--

PAX

What? You were excellent--

ANNIE

I was terrible and everyone knew it.

PAX

That's not true at all.

ANNIE

Well, whatever, it doesn't matter, does it? We're both big fat losers. Gimme the tape.

Annie snatches the tape from Pax and tapes up a present. Beat.

PAX

You were a great dancer.

ANNIE

What do you want to do with your life?

PAX

Stop asking me that.

ANNIE

I spent so much of my life hoping that you would be doing better than me, Pax. What do you want to do with your life?

Beat.

PAX

Nothing.

ANNIE

...Nothing?

PAX

Nothing.

ANNIE

Are you depressed? You sound depressed.

PAX

I'm not depressed.

ANNIE

You want to do nothing with your life.

PAX

Not like, "I want to kill myself" nothing, just ... I don't have any big ambitions. It's really not that big of a deal. Not everyone has to have big ambitions. The middle of the Bell curve is littered with people who have mediocre ambitions, whose only passion is to keep a flower on their windowsill alive. There's nothing wrong with that.

ANNIE

Yes there is. You just want to work in a call center until you die?

PAX

I guess so.

ANNIE

With no friends.

PAX

I have friends!

ANNIE

I don't believe you.

PAX

You don't have to believe me.

ANNIE

How many friends do you have?

PAX

How many friends do you have?

ANNIE

Fifteen.

PAX

You ... you have fifteen friends exactly.

ANNIE

Fifteen friends and 55 acquaintances, give or take.

PAX

You count them like that?

ANNIE

How else are you supposed to know how many friends you have?

PAX

I ... I don't know.

ANNIE

Alright, how many friends do you have?

Pax thinks.

PAX

Three.

ANNIE

Three?! You have three friends?

PAX

I think.

ANNIE

That's the most depressing thing I've ever heard.

PAX

But they're good friends! Well, Michael's kind of an acquaintance...

ANNIE

Oh my god, Pax. Why did you even move?

PAX

It's not like I had friends here.

ANNIE

Look, I get the whole "introvert" thing and all, but I think even introverts have more than three friends.

PAX

It's hard, okay? Portland's a difficult place to make friends. Nine months out of the year it's raining and no one wants to go out, and the other three months it's sunny and people go outside and bump into other people like they just came out of a fallout shelter. You see these girls sunbathing and they look like ghosts wearing bikini tops and high waisted sailor shorts. Everyone is polite but no one wants to be your friend.

ANNIE

That sounds depressing.

PAX

It's not, I'm just saying it depressingly.

ANNIE

You're such a talented person, why are you wasting your life?

PAX

I'm not wasting my life.

ANNIE

Why don't you move back home?

PAX

Portland's great, Annie

ANNIE

Doesn't sound like it.

PAX

What about your life?

ANNIE

We're not talking about my life.

PAX

What are you doing now? Where do you work?

ANNIE

Doesn't matter.

PAX

Oh but my job does?

ANNIE

Okay. Fine. I'm a waitress at Denny's.

Beat.

PAX

You didn't drink and drive...?

ANNIE

No, Pax, I'm not an idiot. My friends drove me to Mulligan's.

PAX

You started at Mulligan's?!

ANNIE

I didn't know any better!

PAX

No, that's awesome. That place is a glorious dump.

ANNIE

Not anymore, from what I hear. They renovated it. It's all hip college students now.

PAX

Aw, that's terrible. That place used to be full of punk weirdos. It was great. I knew a guy there who used to smash their plastic ashtrays with his fist, just for the hell of it.

ANNIE

And that makes them different from college dudes how?

PAX

Touche. Still weird to think of you going there though. My little sister, boozing it up.

ANNIE

I'm not really that big of a drinker.

PAX

I expected you to be a China Blue kind of girl.

ANNIE

I'm not against China Blue. My boyfriend hated that place--

Pax gives her a surprised look.

ANNIE (cont'd)

Ex-boyfriend.

PAX

You had a boyfriend?!

ANNIE

This is what happens when you never call!

PAX

Who? Who was it? Do I know them?

ANNIE
I don't know. Chester Trenton?

PAX
... Dad Sweater?!

ANNIE
He doesn't wear sweaters anymore.

PAX
That guy?!

ANNIE
I know...

PAX
He has such a stupid name!

ANNIE
Stupider than Pax?

PAX
Yes! Pax means "peace" in Latin, Chester Trenton means
"caution: do not enter" in Douchebag.

ANNIE
He's not that bad of a guy.

PAX
Isn't he way older than you?

ANNIE
Well, he's thirty-six now...

PAX
... Whoa.

ANNIE
It was a phase. Anyway we only dated for like, six months. It
wasn't a big deal.

PAX
I always saw him at the Neurolux, wearing his dad sweaters,
even in the summer. That guy was a lightweight.

ANNIE
Oh, believe me, I spent plenty of time helping him puke into
the toilet and not onto my shoes.

PAX
I can't believe you dated him.

ANNIE
Me neither.

PAX

How did that even start?

ANNIE

I hiked up to Table Rock with a bunch of friends. He was part of the group, a friend of a friend. I don't know, we just sort of hit it off up there.

PAX

Was he wearing a sweater?

ANNIE

Yes. But I convinced him to take it off.

PAX

Did it peel off him like skin, revealing his raw musculature underneath?

ANNIE

What?

PAX

Cause he wears them all the time, it's like his skin--

ANNIE

Okay, gross.

PAX

So you tamed the wild beast. Is he still around?

ANNIE

Joined the Army.

PAX

At thirty-six?

ANNIE

Well, he was thirty-three then.

PAX

That's fucking weird.

ANNIE

Yeah, I know. He was kind of aimless...

PAX

Do you have a boyfriend now?

ANNIE

No.

PAX

Cats?

ANNIE
Shut up.

PAX
Why did you do all this after I left?

ANNIE
You got me.

PAX
Next you're gonna tell me you started ballet dancing again.

ANNIE
(sighs)
You done wrapping your presents?

PAX
(gets the hint)
Yeah.

ANNIE
Good. Help me put them under the tree.

They take the presents and situate them underneath the Christmas tree.

PAX
This tree is nuts.

ANNIE
All this Pagan shit is Mom's. Look at this.

She takes an ornament from the tree and hands it to Pax.

PAX
A satyr with a huge dick.

ANNIE
It's some kind of fertility god. Uncle Max refuses to bring his kids in the house until that tree is gone.

PAX
(looking over the tree)
Why? It's not that bad -- oh, no, there are more dicks.

ANNIE
There's like fifty dicks on that tree, I swear.

PAX
Why so many dicks?

ANNIE
I don't know and I don't want to know.

PAX

You think Mom's gone off the deep end?

ANNIE

No. But she's certainly gone somewhere.

An awkward beat.

PAX

So, can you get me a free Grand Slam?

ANNIE

(laughs)

Shut up.

An alarm on Annie's cell phone goes off.

PAX

What's that?

ANNIE

Time for Dad's medication.

PAX

You need an alarm for that?

ANNIE

It's important that he takes them on time.

PAX

Isn't that Mom's job?

ANNIE

Should be.

Annie exits upstairs.

A beat as Pax studies the tree. He finds an ornament that is pretty much a pink vagina. Takes it in one hand with the satyr ornament in the other.

PAX

(to the satyr)

Hey big boy, check out what I found.

He starts putting the satyr's enormous penis into the vagina, giggling like a schoolboy as he does.

Eloise enters from the kitchen, looking around.

ELOISE
Pax, have you seen my sage?

PAX
(startled)
Jesus, Mom, you scared the shit out of me.

ELOISE
I know, it's fun to do that sometimes.

PAX
I thought you were asleep.

ELOISE
Nope, just in the back yard.

PAX
What? It's Christmas Eve. It's too cold to be outside in your pajamas.

ELOISE
I wanted to watch the sunrise and do a few yoga poses.

PAX
Mom, you're insane.

ELOISE
It's a beautiful day outside. I just wish it would snow. We haven't had proper snow in the valley in years. There's always one day where it falls and melts in the afternoon, but nothing that sticks. I miss snow.

PAX
The last thing we need is for you to get pneumonia.

ELOISE
I don't get pneumonia, I have a Neti Pot.

Eloise opens the desk drawer, stops, then pulls out the Wendy's bag.

ELOISE (cont'd)
What is this?

PAX
What is what?
(sees it)
Oh. Oh boy.

ELOISE
Where did this come from?

PAX
I don't know. Honest.

She opens the bag, pulls out the cigarette pack, which is empty. She crushes the pack in her hand and puts it back in the bag.

PAX (cont'd)

Are you alright?

ELOISE

I need to get your father.

But before she can head upstairs, Annie appears, coming down.

ANNIE

Mom, there you are. Dad's breathing is really shallow and he's trying to talk to me but it's not making any sense. He doesn't sound good.

ELOISE

(flat voice)

He seemed fine when I got up.

ANNIE

We need to get him to the hospital.

ELOISE

Just give him some more Vicodin.

ANNIE

No, Mom, it's not working. He needs to go to the hospital.

ELOISE

I told you it wouldn't work.

Eloise sits on the couch, puts the bag in her lap.

ANNIE

(to Pax)

What's going on?

PAX

I don't know.

ANNIE

Shit. Call an ambulance.

PAX

Really? Is it that bad?

ANNIE

I don't know! Just call 911! Hurry!

Pax pulls his phone out of his pocket and begins to call.

PAX

Mom. Mom! Are you okay?

ELOISE

(a little distant)

I'm fine, dear.

PAX

(into phone)

Hi, I live at 212 Olive and I think my Dad is having a heart attack or a stroke or something...

ELOISE

He'll be fine...

PAX

(into phone)

No, he's upstairs and I'm ... my sister is upstairs with him--

Annie appears at the top of the stairs.

ANNIE

Pax! Hang up!

PAX

What?

ANNIE

It was gas.

PAX

It was what?!

LARSON (OFF STAGE)

IT WAS GAS.

PAX

Are you kidding--?

(into phone)

Yes, I'm here. Um, false alarm, I guess. It was gas.

Pax hangs up quickly. He looks at Eloise.

PAX (cont'd)

I guess it was gas.

ELOISE

Your father always did have trouble with his stomach...

Larson comes downstairs, being helped by Annie.

ANNIE

Dad, you had us all scared half to death.

LARSON

I'm fine, I'm fine.

PAX

Where are you going?

LARSON

The shitter. I just opened the floodgates.

PAX

What about the one upstairs?

LARSON

The one upstairs is always colder than a witch's tit in space. I can't stand it. I sit down on the toilet seat and my balls shrivel up into raisins.

ELOISE

The heating vent's closed. You should open it.

LARSON

The vent's closed? That's it?

ELOISE

Yes.

LARSON

Oh. Well too late I'm down here. I gotta go.

He half hustles off. Annie, exhausted, sits on the couch.

ANNIE

That man. I swear to god that must've been the longest fart I've ever heard in my life. It sounded like a broken bassoon.

Pax starts laughing.

ANNIE (cont'd)

What?

PAX

A broken bassoon!

ANNIE

(starts to laugh)

That's what it sounded like!

PAX

Did it stink?

ANNIE

Oh my god yes. It smelled like if someone threw rancid eggs at a bowl of burnt popcorn.

PAX

(laughs harder)

What!

ANNIE

It smelled like if Old Faithful was filled with hot dog water.

The two of them are laughing wildly now. Eloise continues to stare ahead.

ANNIE (cont'd)

I asked him why he was having trouble speaking and he just shrugged and said, "My mind was on farting." How can you deal with him day after day, Mom?

Annie notices the bag on Eloise's lap.

ELOISE

I don't know.

ANNIE

What is that?

ELOISE

What do you think?

She gets up and hurls the bag toward the kitchen door. She goes to the front door and puts on a pair of slippers.

PAX

Where are you going?

ELOISE

I need to be outside.

PAX

You were just out there.

She opens the front door. A burst of cold wind flows into the room. Pax puts his hand on Eloise's shoulder.

PAX (cont'd)

Mom--

But she shrugs it off.

Help your father.
ELOISE

And she exits. Pax and Annie alone for a moment, a little lost. Annie goes to the bag, picks it up.

What the fuck?
ANNIE

Did you buy that ...?
PAX

Of course not. Did you?
ANNIE

No.
PAX

Are you lying?
ANNIE

No!
PAX

How can I be sure?
ANNIE

Just trust me.
PAX

Do you think Dad went off and bought it himself?
ANNIE

I don't know.
PAX

What if he just had it there.
ANNIE

For a week?
PAX

Maybe. Remember the hot dogs in the clock?
ANNIE

So ... what do we do?
PAX

Go get Mom before she dies of hypothermia.
ANNIE

PAX

I meant about Dad.

ANNIE

Don't worry about Dad right now. Go get her. Carry her into the house if you have to, I'm not letting Mom turn into a popsicle.

Pax heads outside. Annie sits, trying desperately to stop the tears brimming in her eyes, which takes considerable effort. She takes the throw blanket on the couch and curls up with it on the couch. As she does, the broken dreamcatcher falls out of the blanket and onto the floor. She doesn't notice it. Instead, she closes her eyes and puts a hand to her chest, trying to slow her breathing. In doing so, she falls asleep.

Lights shift as they did for Pax's dream. A younger Eloise enters. She is dressed like the Tooth Fairy -- pink tutu, pink fairy wings, and a wand with a large novelty molar on the end. She bourrees into the room with her arms high in fifth position. (All of Eloise's movements in this scene are as balletic as possible.)

She quietly moves over to Annie, still asleep on the couch. Carefully, she attempts to open Annie's mouth and remove a tooth. Annie wakes up with Eloise's fingers in her mouth.

ANNIE (cont'd)

(fingers in mouth)

Mom?!

ELOISE

Annie! Finally you are awake. Get up, we have a lot to practice.

ANNIE

What are you doing in my mouth? Why are you dressed like the Tooth Fairy?!

ELOISE

Where are your slippers?

ANNIE

My what?

ELOISE

Your ballet slippers! Where did you put them?

ANNIE

I don't have ballet slippers--

ELOISE

Did you lose them again?

ANNIE

No, I -- what is happening?

ELOISE

How many times do I have to tell you to keep track of your ballet slippers? You know those things cost a fortune. I can't go buying you new ones every week.

ANNIE

You don't need to buy me new ones.

Eloise produces a shoebox, which she hands to Annie.

ELOISE

This is the last pair, okay?

ANNIE

Mom--

ELOISE

Do you know how many teeth I had to pull to get these for you? A lot of kids are going to be drinking soup for a long time, that's all I'm saying.

Annie opens the box. She pulls out a pair of sparkly, ruby red ballet slippers.

ANNIE

What. The. Fuck.

ELOISE

Put them on! See if they fit.

ANNIE

I'm dreaming, right? This is a dream.

ELOISE

We can wax existential later--

ANNIE

No. Tell me this is a dream.

ELOISE

(lying)
It's ... not.

ANNIE

Then why are you dressed like the Tooth Fairy?

ELOISE

Because I am the Tooth Fairy.

ANNIE

Okay. Then this is a dream.

ELOISE

We don't have time for this!

Eloise claps twice, and a ballet bar appears.

ANNIE

Where'd that come from?

ELOISE

The ballet store! My word, you are dense today.
(indicating her clothes)
Now take those off and put your slippers on.

ANNIE

You want me to take my clothes off?

ELOISE

Well you're not going to dance dressed like that, are you?

ANNIE

I'm not going to dance, period.

ELOISE

Of course you are. That's why you're here.

ANNIE

No it's not.

ELOISE

Yes it is.

ANNIE

I'm here because Dad's injured--

ELOISE

Not there. Here.

Beat.

The dream?

ANNIE

Eloise makes an "Ehhhhh"/sorta-kindamaybe noise and gesture (as if to say, "This is kinda-sorta-maybe a dream").

Is this a dream or not?

ANNIE (cont'd)

Put your slippers on and I'll tell you.

ELOISE

No.

ANNIE

Why not? Are you scared?

ELOISE

Beat. Annie is a little surprised to hear this.

Excuse me?

ANNIE

Are you afraid to dance?

ELOISE

No, of course not.

ANNIE

Then let's get to it!

ELOISE

Why are you doing this?

ANNIE

Because I love you.

ELOISE

But you're not my mom, you're the Tooth Fairy--

ANNIE

Tooth Fairies can love too! Take off your clothes!

ELOISE

Annie takes off her shirt, revealing the top of a leotard underneath. She is a little surprised by this as well. She then takes off her pajama pants, revealing the rest of the leotard as well as white tights.

ANNIE

I am totally dreaming right now.

As she puts the slippers on, Eloise claps twice again and a simple piano ballet practice track begins.

ELOISE

Repeat after me: plie, tendue front, plie, tendue side, plie, tendue back, plie, then releve into fifth, turn around, and start again.

ANNIE

Mom, what are you--

ELOISE

One, two, ready, go.

Eloise and Annie perform the simple ballet exercise with the accompanying piano music. When they finish:

ELOISE (cont'd)

Good, but your plies need to be lower.

ANNIE

Are you serious? Those plie's were--

Annie stops. Something is happening in her mouth. She reaches in and pulls out a tooth.

ANNIE (cont'd)

What the FUCK?!

ELOISE

Give it here.

ANNIE

I JUST LOST A TOOTH!

ELOISE

I can see that. Give it here.

ANNIE

No! Stop! I don't want to lose my teeth!

ELOISE

Well you better get your plie's lower then. Now gimme the tooth, I need it to pay off your slippers.

ANNIE

No.

ELOISE
Give it!

ANNIE
No!

ELOISE
Oh come on, what else are you going to do with a tooth?

ANNIE
Stick it back in my mouth!

Eloise angrily takes the tooth from Annie. She puts it in a pocket and then produces a granola bar, which she hands to Annie. Ballet piano starts again.

ELOISE
Next! Plie, tendue front, degage, degage, plie, tendue side, degage, degage, plie, tendue back, degage, degage, then hold the arabesque. Got it?

ANNIE
Can I have my tooth back?

ELOISE
One, two, ready, go.

Another short ballet exercise. When they are finished, Annie holds the arabesque and Eloise looks at her appraisingly.

ELOISE (cont'd)
Hmm. Your back leg is a little low.

ANNIE
I'm trying as hard as I--

Her words are cut short as she spits out another tooth onto the floor along with some blood. She looks down at the tooth, then up at Eloise. Eloise shrugs, then bends down and picks the tooth up.

ELOISE
This is going too slow. We're going to skip ahead to pirouettes.

ANNIE
What do you mean "Going too slow"?

ELOISE
We need you to be perfect.

ANNIE
For what?

ELOISE
For everything.

ANNIE
But I don't want to be perfect!

Eloise laughs loud and hard in response to this.

ELOISE
You're funny.

ANNIE
It's true! I don't want to dance! I tried that already. I've moved on.

ELOISE
Have you?

ANNIE
Yes!

ELOISE
Then why are you dreaming about it?

ANNIE
I ... I don't know!

ELOISE
Come on, pirouettes.

ANNIE
No. You're going to make all my teeth fly out.

ELOISE
How am I going to do that? I'm not even touching you.

ANNIE
I don't know, you have some weird ... fairy magic or something. I won't do it.

ELOISE
Then you'll be a failure.

ANNIE
I'd rather be a failure than eat mushy foods for the rest of my life!

ELOISE
You really want to live the rest of your life a failure?

ANNIE
Sure!

ELOISE
Just like Pax?

Beat.

ANNIE
This is different.

ELOISE
You keep telling yourself that.

ANNIE
Pax intentionally screwed his life up.

ELOISE
And this failure is unintentional? Doesn't seem that way.

ANNIE
I was dealt a shit hand.

ELOISE
Do you remember how many dance schools you auditioned for?

ANNIE
All of them.

ELOISE
And how many rejected you?

ANNIE
All of them.

ELOISE
Pirouette, please.

Annie does a simple pirouette.

ELOISE (cont'd)
Not bad. Did you give up when they rejected you?

ANNIE
No.

ELOISE
Don't lie to me. Pirouette.

Annie pirouettes again.

Yes. ANNIE

Why did you give up? ELOISE

I ... ANNIE

Pirouette. ELOISE

Again. *(Annie does)*

Again. *(she does)*

Again. *(she does)*

Why did you give up?

Beat. Annie tries to answer but can't.

Pirouette. ELOISE (cont'd)

Annie pirouettes. Eloise keeps saying Again, Again, Again, and Annie keeps pirouetting. At some point Eloise replaces Again with Get it, saying it louder and louder until Annie is almost a blur, spinning and Eloise shouting at the top of her lungs, GET IT! GET IT! GET IT!

Then, exhausted, Annie stops, collapsing to the floor. Breathing hard, she is still for a moment, and then she starts checking her mouth to see if her teeth are still there. They are.

Oh thank god. ANNIE

She looks at Eloise.

Don't forget to keep your leg up. ELOISE

And she bourrees off. The bar disappears. Annie puts her pajamas back on. She sits on the couch. Looks at her ruby slippers. Then rips them off and tosses them away. Lies down on the couch, closing her eyes.

The sound of a toilet flushing. Beat. It flushes again. Another beat. Larson shouts from offstage:

LARSON (OFF STAGE)

ANNIE!

Annie startles awake. Larson enters.

LARSON (cont'd)

Annie, come help me, the toilet's backed up and every time I try to plunge it I feel like I'm going to lose my balance and fall in.

Annie gets up. Larson notices that she's sweating and breathing hard.

LARSON (cont'd)

Are you alright?

ANNIE

Yeah, just ... bad dream.

She notices the broken dreamcatcher on the ground. Picks it up. Examines it.

Blackout.

SCENE 2.

Pax, alone, on the couch. Sometime late at night. Talking into his tape recorder.

PAX

It's ... I don't know. Midnight? One o'clock? I can't sleep. Right now I would be sleeping. That's ... at least that's a routine for everyone. Not just me. It's something we all do.

(long pause)

Am I afraid? Is that ... is that what this is? Being afraid? I don't know if Annie is right. I just ... enjoy being alone. I don't have to have a lot of friends to have a good life. I can stay at home and do the same thing every day. That's not a problem. It's my life. It has nothing to do with her.

(beat)

You know, in twenty years from now, when you find this tape and you haven't even thought about it in years because, uh, you don't do this anymore, I guess, when you find it you're going to laugh. This is going to be funny to you. You're going to think about Dad and laugh. And he won't care because he'll be dead. Maybe. I wouldn't be surprised if he lived to be a hundred. But, yeah, you'll laugh, regardless.

(MORE)

PAX (cont'd)

You'll say Man, those were some crazy times.

*(beat; he's a little stream of
consciousness at this point)*

And your wife, she'll -- I mean, you'll have a wife, you've got to have a wife by then, right? -- she'll say Why were they so crazy?, and you won't have an answer, because really you'll be thinking, Those times weren't crazy at all. They were the antithesis of crazy. They were the most boring years of your life. You didn't do anything then. You didn't do a goddamn thing. You woke up -- you'll have this all on tape, too, you fucking idiot, everything you've ever done -- you woke up, showered, brushed your teeth, had two eggs, bacon, orange juice, drove to work, worked, had lunch at Louie's, egg salad, every day, every day, went home, watched TV, fell asleep, do it all again tomorrow, forever and ever until you die, and your legacy will be a bunch of goddamn cassette tapes.

Beat. He stops the recorder and stands up. He is still for a moment. Then he opens the recorder and takes the cassette out. He begins pulling the tape out from the cassette and letting it fall to the floor until it's all out. He picks up the tape and goes to the trash can, throwing the tape and then the cassette away. He looks at the recorder for a second, then throws it away as well.

Another moment, looking around, unsure. He looks at his hands.

Blackout.

SCENE 3.

Christmas morning. Presents have been unwrapped, wrapping paper is all over the floor. Larson and Eloise on the couch, Annie standing, Pax sitting on the floor.

Larson has just opened a present.

LARSON

Annie, what is this?

ANNIE

It's a blood sugar monitor.

LARSON
What does that mean?

ANNIE
It's for your diabetes, Dad.

LARSON
I don't have diabetes.

ANNIE
Yet.

PAX
You think Dad's gonna get diabetes?

ANNIE
He just ate six candy canes in half an hour.

LARSON
How does this work?

ANNIE
Well, the thing pricks your finger and then you put a drop of blood on one of those white strips...

LARSON
This thing pricks my finger?

ELOISE
It doesn't hurt, I've had it done before.

LARSON
It has to hurt a little bit...

ANNIE
Try it.

LARSON
Right now?

ANNIE
Sure.

LARSON
Honey, I just drank a pint of eggnog and ate six candy canes, this thing's going to say my blood is entirely sugar.

PAX
One hundred percent sugar! It's a Christmas miracle!

LARSON
I'm gonna prick my finger and eggnog is going to come dripping out.

ANNIE
Come on Dad, just try it.

LARSON
Fine, fine.

Larson pricks his finger with the machine.

LARSON (cont'd)
Ow! You two were liars!

ELOISE
Oh it's just like a bee sting, Larson.

LARSON
A robot bee with a death wish. Now what do I do?

PAX
Put a drop of blood on the strip.

ANNIE
You're getting blood everywhere!

LARSON
No I'm not, just on my pajama pants. Oh and my shirt. Damn it.

Pax helps Larson put blood on the strip. Pax then puts the strip into the monitor.

LARSON (cont'd)
Now what?

ANNIE
Just wait a second.

LARSON
What's it going to say?

PAX
(looking at monitor)
It says, "You're dying."

ANNIE
Pax, stop.

PAX
"You are becoming a candy cane."

LARSON
Not a bad way to die.

ELOISE
What does it really say, Pax?

PAX
It just says two hundred. What does that mean?

ANNIE
Two hundred? That's not good, Dad.

LARSON
It's not?

ANNIE
No, two hundred is bad.

LARSON
How do you know?

ANNIE
I just know! It's too high.

LARSON
Too high of what?

ANNIE
Blood sugar!

LARSON
I have two hundred blood sugars?

PAX
Is there an instruction booklet?

ANNIE
I have friends who are diabetic, and their number is always around one hundred.

LARSON
Well if they're diabetic, wouldn't one hundred be bad?

ELOISE
That means two hundred is worse.

LARSON
Yes, two hundred is one hundred more worse.

ANNIE
No, I mean they keep it in check. One hundred is good.

LARSON
Oh, well two hundred's not that bad then.

ANNIE
No, Dad, it is bad.

LARSON

I mean at least it's not six hundred.

ANNIE

(sighs)

Whatever.

LARSON

Oh Annie, I'm only teasing you.

ANNIE

You don't care about your life.

LARSON

That's not true.

ANNIE

You make no effort to keep yourself healthy.

LARSON

Annie, I'm doing my best, but as far as I'm concerned I've lived my life. I have two grown children and a lovely wife. If I die tomorrow I've died doing what a parent should do. It doesn't bother me anymore.

ANNIE

It bothers me.

LARSON

You're projecting.

ANNIE

What?

LARSON

You're projecting your issues onto me.

ANNIE

Excuse me?

Eloise puts her hands up. Larson starts to speak and she puts a hand over his mouth. Then Annie starts to speak and Eloise puts a hand over her mouth as well. After a second she lowers them.

ELOISE

It's Christmas, you two.

An awkward pause.

PAX

Okay, so ... we still have one more round of presents to open.

LARSON

Yes, that's right, that's right.

ELOISE

Pax, you're first.

PAX

(taking his present)

Who's this from? Oh, Annie!

Pax unwraps the present. Inside is a voice recorder.

PAX (cont'd)

A voice recorder?

ANNIE

Yeah, a digital one. Now you don't need to use tapes anymore.

ELOISE

What do you need that for, Pax?

PAX

I don't need it, actually.

ANNIE

You don't?

PAX

No. But thank you.

ANNIE

Why not?

PAX

Uh, no reason.

ANNIE

You're not doing your diary thing anymore?

PAX

It's not a diary, we can talk about it some other time, okay?

ANNIE

You know how much that thing cost?

PAX

It would be pretty inconsiderate of you to leave the price tag on a Christmas gift, Annie.

LARSON

Alright, settle down, the both of you. Annie, you're next.

ANNIE

This one is from Pax. Hope it's not something I don't need.

She unwraps the present and pulls out a pair of ballet slippers. She just stares at them while the room is silent.

PAX

I just thought you might--

She looks at him with murder eyes and he shuts up. She then puts the slippers back in the box and sets it aside.

ANNIE

Mom?

ELOISE

What? ... Oh, right, my turn. This one's from your father.

Eloise begins methodically unwrapping the present so as to save the wrapping paper.

PAX

Mom, stop.

ELOISE

I want to save the paper.

PAX

Why? What are you going to use it for?

ELOISE

Oh, I don't know. Origami?

ANNIE

Just let her do what she wants, Pax.

PAX

Maaaam, just rip it open.

ANNIE

Shut up Pax!

PAX

Dad, tell her to rip it open.

LARSON

Your mother is a grown woman, she can unwrap presents however she likes.

(to Eloise)

But please, honey, hurry up.

ELOISE
I'm finished, anyway.

She sets the perfectly unwrapped paper off to the side.

PAX
That was quick.

ELOISE
I've been doing this for quite a few years, Pax.

She opens the box. Inside is a Tibetan singing bowl.

ELOISE (cont'd)
Oh my goodness. It's beautiful.

PAX
What is it?

ELOISE
It's a Tibetan singing bowl.

PAX
(looking even more confused)
Oh, of course.

LARSON
I had Annie drive me out to that place on Orchard, the place that looks like a head shop. I guess they weren't a head shop after all.

ANNIE
But they did sell bongos.

LARSON
Oh yeah. Well I guess head shops sell these things too.

ELOISE
It's beautiful.

LARSON
Try it.

She takes the stick and strikes the bowl, then circles the stick around the rim to produce sound. It hums for a moment.

LARSON (cont'd)
I couldn't really understand the guy that well but from what I gather that was hand made in Tibet.

ELOISE

And here I was expecting a gift card to Cracker Barrel.

LARSON

Did you look under the bowl?

Eloise looks under the bowl. There's nothing there. She sticks her tongue out at him.

ANNIE

I actually made Dad think about what to give you this year.

ELOISE

Well, I love it. Thank you so much.

PAX

Alright, your turn Dad.

LARSON

Me? My turn?

PAX

Yep, it's the last one and you're the oldest.

LARSON

I'm the oldest, eh? I guess I am. I am the oldest person in this room.

Larson starts searching for the last present through the wrapping rubble around him.

PAX

How does that make you feel?

LARSON

Well, son, it makes me feel old.

PAX

That's a given.

LARSON

Nothing works like it used to. I had the worst bowel movement this morning...

ANNIE

Ugh, stop.

LARSON

These things are important when you're my age! Every time you shit it's like a little miracle sliding out of your ass. Well, "sliding" is giving it too much credit. It's more like...

PAX

Please don't finish that sentence.

LARSON

(still searching)

You sure there's a present here...?

ANNIE

Dad, sit back, I'll find it.

LARSON

When I was your age I didn't think I'd make it past fifty. I worked myself a little too hard. And the smoking and the 1970s and all that. That's life's little trick, kids: if you wreck your body thinking you're going to die early, that's when you live the longest. That's God's sense of humor.

ELOISE

Are you suggesting that if you live healthy, you die young?

LARSON

Obviously not, because you're still here.

ELOISE

Oh, I'm still quite young.

PAX

Mom's gonna live to be 100.

ELOISE

That's the plan.

ANNIE

Here it is.

LARSON

Ah, thank you honey. Who's this from?

PAX

Me.

LARSON

Pax! My favorite child who is a male.

Larson grumbles pleasantly as he rips the wrapping.

LARSON (cont'd)

It's a box!

ANNIE

Dad, you've said that for every present.

LARSON

I know but this box is bigger than the other boxes. I could really use a box like this...

He chuckles to himself and opens the box. Pulls out the old clock.

LARSON (cont'd)

Well I'll be.

ELOISE

Is that the clock?

PAX

Yeah.

LARSON

You got me the broken clock?

PAX

No, Dad. I took it in. Got it fixed. Listen to it.

Larson puts the clock up to his ear.

LARSON

Well I'll be damned. It's ticking! Haven't heard that sound in years.

ELOISE

That must've cost you a fortune, Paxie. That clock was given to us by my grandmother.

PAX

It didn't cost that much. Anyway it doesn't matter. I had some money lying around. Look at the back.

LARSON

What's this...? A door? You put a door on it?

Larson opens the back of the clock. He stares at it for a second, then laughs uncontrollably.

ELOISE

What? What is it?

Larson hands the clock to Eloise. She looks and then turns her head.

ELOISE (cont'd)

Pax!

PAX

Sorry.

ANNIE

What! I want to see.

Annie looks at the back of the clock.

ANNIE (cont'd)

What the hell is that?!

LARSON

It's my diseased taint!

ANNIE

Pax, that's disgusting! Where'd you get that picture?

PAX

From Dad!

LARSON

(proud of himself)

I took pictures.

PAX

It's just a little reminder in case you decide to try and hide cigarettes in there.

LARSON

Well, I'm never going to put anything in this clock ever again, not if I have to look at my own diseased taint every time I do...

Eloise daintily closes the back of the clock and stands to put it somewhere.

ELOISE

Thank you for fixing the clock, Pax.

LARSON

Yes, thank you, it means a lot to me.

PAX

You're welcome.

LARSON

All of your gifts mean a lot to me. Annie, I will check my blood for sugar every day. And Ellie, this cane you got me is just perfect. I'm very lucky to have all of you. I mean it.

PAX

Thanks, Dad.

ANNIE

We love you too.

LARSON

So is that it?

PAX

Is that all the presents? I think so.

LARSON

Good. I love you all very much but my feet are really hurting me. I think I'm going to lie down. Ellie, can you help me upstairs?

ELOISE

Of course.

Larson uses his new cane to get himself up. Eloise comes beside him and the two head upstairs.

ANNIE

We'll take care of the garbage.

LARSON

I know you will. Merry Christmas you two dunderheads.

ANNIE

Merry Christmas Dad.

PAX

Merry Christmas.

Larson and Eloise exit. Annie and Pax begin gathering trash in silence for a while. Then:

ANNIE

Ballet slippers?!

PAX

A voice recorder?

ANNIE

It was for your diary thing!

PAX

It's not a diary, and I don't do it anymore.

ANNIE

Well I wish you would've told me before I spent three hundred bucks on that thing.

PAX

Three hundred dollars?! When did you buy it, 1998?

ANNIE

Look, I'm sorry that I care enough about you that I would spend that much money.

PAX

Oh, I didn't realize we were basing the level of our love with money. Those slippers weren't cheap either, by the way.

ANNIE

I can't believe you did that.

PAX

What's the big deal, Annie?

ANNIE

Oh, I don't know, I just haven't worn ballet slippers in eight years. And then after I have to watch Dad futz around with a blood sugar monitor that he desperately needs, and you all make fun of me--

PAX

We didn't make fun of you!

ANNIE

It felt like it. And then I open that box. You know how embarrassing that was? To open up your present and here's a pair of fucking ballet slippers? Why? You want me to start up again?

PAX

Well, I don't know. I thought you might want to.

ANNIE

I don't.

PAX

Like, deep down.

ANNIE

Don't get all Dr. Phil on me.

PAX

Okay, fine, I kept the receipt, you can take them back.

ANNIE

Pax, do you give a shit about me?

PAX

Do I -- are you serious? Of course I do! I bought you the slippers!

ANNIE

I don't want slippers! I don't need you trying to fix my life. I need you to help, to be a part of our life, of Mom and Dad's life. I need you to help me take care of them.

PAX

They don't need constant attention.

ANNIE

Oh yes they do. You have no idea. You should move back, then you'd find out.

PAX

What? They're just ballet slippers! I just want you to dance again! That doesn't require me moving back.

ANNIE

You have no life there. You have nothing. You have no reason to be in Portland, no reason to be away from your family. I work so hard to keep our parents from dying.

PAX

Jesus Christ...

ANNIE

It's true! If I wasn't here they would be dead by now.

PAX

I'm sure they're grateful.

ANNIE

If they are they don't mention it.

PAX

How many times do you think they saved you from dying? Probably more than you know.

ANNIE

That's different.

PAX

I mean, they could've thrown your infant body into the mouth of a lion.

ANNIE

That's murder, not saving.

PAX

You want me to take the slippers back or not?

ANNIE

Yes.

PAX

Seriously?

ANNIE

Yes! I don't dance anymore.

PAX

Why not?

ANNIE

Because it's not a part of my life anymore.

PAX

Why not?

ANNIE

Stop asking me! What do you care?

PAX

Oh, I don't know, I'm your brother and I care about you because you're my sister.

ANNIE

If you cared about me you'd help me with Mom and Dad.

PAX

You don't need to help them, Annie. They can take care of themselves.

ANNIE

Dad had major surgery--

PAX

Just put the slippers on.

ANNIE

What?

PAX

Put them on. I want to see if they fit.

ANNIE

No.

PAX

Come on. Do something for yourself for once. Forget about Mom and Dad. Forget about me. Just put the slippers on, Cinderella.

ANNIE

You put them on.

PAX

Okay.

Pax goes to the box and pulls out the slippers.

ANNIE

What are you doing?

PAX

I'm putting them on.

ANNIE
Stop, you're going to stretch them.

PAX
I don't care.

ANNIE
You won't be able to get a refund!

PAX
I don't care!

*Pax, now wearing the slippers, stands
in what he believes to be a ballet
position.*

PAX (cont'd)
Alright. What do I do?

ANNIE
What do you mean what do you do?

PAX
Is this ... Am I in position? Ready to go?

ANNIE
No, you look stupid.

PAX
This is what you do though, right? Feet like this, hands like
this.

ANNIE
No, that's not what you do at all.

PAX
Then show me.

ANNIE
I know what you're trying to do and I'm not buying it.

PAX
That's fine.

Pax starts to kick his leg out.

ANNIE
Stop it, take them off.

PAX
I saw you in class a couple of times. Don't you do this?

ANNIE
Kick like a kung fu master?

PAX
Yeah.

ANNIE
No.

PAX
Yeah you do. Deck a jay.

ANNIE
Deck a jay?

PAX
Isn't that what it's called?

ANNIE
Are you on pills or something?

PAX
(kicking his legs out)
Deck a jay, deck a jay, pleeyay, pleeyay--

ANNIE
Dégagé! You mean *dégagé*.

PAX
Yes, that.

ANNIE
That's not a *dégagé*, that's a *grand battement*, sort of. A *dégagé* is just a little off the ground, like this.

Instinctively she snaps into fifth position, arms in first, and does a perfect dégagé.

PAX
How's that different from what I'm doing?

ANNIE
Well, you're kind of doing this--

She does a grand battement.

ANNIE (cont'd)
--but your leg looks like shit.

PAX
Hey now, constructive criticism, please.

ANNIE
Stop being a doofus. Put your feet like how my feet are now.

PAX

How do you do that without twisting your ankle?

ANNIE

It's actually a pretty normal position for your feet to be in.

He attempts fifth position.

ANNIE (cont'd)

Christ. I wish you had taken ballet classes. You look terrible.

Eloise enters quietly from upstairs and sits at the staircase to watch.

ANNIE (cont'd)

Now just kick out, lightly. Keep your foot pointed and try to push through the ball of your foot until it comes up off the ground.

Pax does a couple of dégagés.

ANNIE (cont'd)

That's not too bad.

PAX

Yeah?

ANNIE

Yeah. Also you're a crafty son of a bitch. Give me those slippers.

PAX

(as he takes slippers off)

See I knew you liked it!

ANNIE

Shut up.

PAX

You don't have to be a world class ballerina to teach.

ANNIE

Alright, I get it.

PAX

You know what? Why don't you move to Portland? There are a ton of dance schools out there--

ANNIE

How do you know?

PAX

Because, every time I drive by one I think of you, and I say the name of it in my tape recorder and write it down later. It's a pretty long list, longer than a Boise list, I'm sure.

ANNIE

I don't want to dance.

PAX

Sure you do. Everybody wants to dance, but most of us don't. But you do! People love that.

ANNIE

What?

PAX

I don't know, it made sense in my head. Come on! Move to Portland!

ANNIE

I'm not just going to pick up my life like that.

PAX

Why not? What's keeping you here? Besides Mom and Dad.

ANNIE

My friends, my job...

PAX

You'll find new friends, and you hate your job.

ANNIE

How do you know I hate my job?

PAX

It's Denny's. How could you not hate it? Come on. Get out of this place.

Eloise comes downstairs.

ELOISE

You look beautiful, Annie.

Pax and Annie startle.

ANNIE

Mom! You scared the shit out of me.

ELOISE

I know, it's fun to do that sometimes.

ANNIE

How long have you been there?

ELOISE

The way you hold yourself when you're in fifth is very elegant. You don't slouch your shoulders. You don't look so worried. It's like you've lifted this huge burden from your body.

ANNIE

Well, that's ballet, not the real world.

ELOISE

It could be, though.

ANNIE

Right, well, the both of you can just stop it, okay? You're not going to change my mind. I don't want to dance anymore.

She exits, taking the slippers with her.

PAX

Annie! Come on.

(beat)

I really do not understand her.

ELOISE

It's alright. You don't have to. That's my job. And your father's.

PAX

Why doesn't she want to do what she loves? She loves it, doesn't she?

ELOISE

She did. That was years ago, you have to remember that. When I was fifteen, I wanted to be a jazz singer like Billie Holliday. Kept getting yelled at by my father for singing in the bathtub. But I had a pretty good voice. Not a Billie Holliday voice, but good. And then, one day, I just stopped. I wasn't as determined as Annie was, though. Never have been. I just moved on. It happens.

PAX

Yeah but ... she is so talented--

ELOISE

And so are you.

Eloise stands, heading for the kitchen.

ELOISE (cont'd)

Wash your hands, we're going to need some help making dinner.

She exits into the kitchen. Pax stands alone for a moment.

Then he takes the voice recorder out of his pocket. Turns it on. Beat.

PAX

(into recorder)

Note to self: buy Annie tickets to the Portland Ballet.

Blackout.

SCENE 4.

The morning after Christmas. Dark outside. Pax and Larson are on the couch, setting up a travel-sized chessboard. As they do, the Westminster chime plays on the newly refurbished clock, eventually tolling six bells.

LARSON

It's six in the morning.

PAX

I know how clocks work.

LARSON

Well, you kids and your iPhones. The Westminster chime was the first alarm clock, you know that?

PAX

I thought roosters were the first alarm clocks.

LARSON

By that logic the sunrise is the first alarm clock.

PAX

The Big Bang, if you want to go back far enough...

LARSON

When is your cab supposed to be here, smartass?

PAX

Half an hour or so.

*Larson (white) makes his first move.
Pax counters.*

LARSON

The Sicilian Defense? You are so predictable.

PAX

Me? You're the one who opened up with E4.

LARSON

It's a good move!

PAX

So is the Sicilian Defense.

As they continue playing:

LARSON

Eight pawns across the board and everyone ends up doing the same thing, every time.

PAX

Because it works. It's proven. Strategy is nothing more than codified concepts passed down from generation to generation. People win chess matches not because of innovation, but because of learned strategies. Nobody takes chances, they just do what they were taught.

LARSON

But somebody had to think up those strategies in the first place.

PAX

Which is why there are eight pawns but only one Queen. Eight pieces who follow orders and one with all the power.

LARSON

But those pawns, with their limited power, also have limited movement.

PAX

Exactly. The routine limits you.

LARSON

Is that a bad thing or a good thing?

PAX

Depends. Sometimes you're taken quickly, but sometimes you're unnoticed and make it to the end of the board.

LARSON

And become a Queen.

PAX

If you're lucky.

LARSON

There is no luck in chess, only mistakes that the other player notices.

PAX

Speaking of which, are you really going to leave your bishop undefended like that?

LARSON
 It's a tactic. *(beat)*

PAX
 Bullshit.

LARSON
 Take it, I dare you.

Pax studies the board. He then takes Larson's bishop.

LARSON (cont'd)
 Ha, you fell for it.

PAX
 I did not--

Larson moves.

LARSON
 Check.

PAX
 Damn it.

LARSON
 Alright, time out for a second, I have to take my pills.

PAX
 Do you need help?

LARSON
 Not unless you want to swallow them for me.

Larson gets himself up with help from his cane. Pax tries to assist but Larson waves him off. Larson heads to a table where a large selection of pill bottles sit.

LARSON (cont'd)
 I'm fine, I'm fine. I can't feel my legs but that doesn't mean I can't walk.

PAX
 How's your ... you know ...

Pax gestures to his own crotch region.

LARSON
 Oh, that's nearly gone. Now it just looks like a second asshole. Your mother said that, not me.
 (MORE)

LARSON (cont'd)

She's really got a filthy mouth on her. In order to clean out the wound she had to sit me in the bathtub with this machine, like a fan, but it goes underwater. What the hell are those called?

PAX

A propeller?

LARSON

I guess so. I laid in the tub and she turned it on and had to point it right at my junk. Most humiliating moment of my life. But it didn't even matter because it hurt like a son of a bitch. And your mother, god bless her, was so patient with me, even when I was swearing my head off and clawing the porcelain off of the tub.

PAX

That sounds awful.

LARSON

I'm glad it's gone. If you had asked me when I was twenty what I'd be doing with my life now, I definitely wouldn't say that I'd be sitting in a bathtub with a fan blowing water up my ass.

Larson is still for a moment, lost in thought.

PAX

You okay?

LARSON

Did I ever tell you I was a boxer?

PAX

What? No.

LARSON

This was before you were born. It's how I started smoking. I was seventeen, I was kind of a hooligan, getting into trouble a lot. And since it was Shelley, Idaho, the moment anyone did anything, everyone in town knew about it. My dad was fed up with my bullshit and took me to a guy's house. Larry Fizinski. World War II vet, I think he was in the same platoon as my dad. Guy was five-foot-six if he was lucky, 120 pounds soaking wet. But built like a brick shithouse. Had the biggest shoulders I've ever seen on a man. And he had this barn that he renovated after the war into a boxing arena. Dad said Fiz would box some of the other guys in the platoon, guys a foot taller than him, a hundred pounds heavier, and knock them out cold every time. Had a killer uppercut. Broke a few teeth.

(MORE)

LARSON (cont'd)

So I guess kids would show up to this barn and Fiz would throw gloves on them and teach 'em how to move, how to fight. Fiz thought I was great. I was a terrible boxer at first, but I could shoot the shit like nobody else, and he liked that. I actually ended up being pretty good, had a really nice one-two that always kept my opponent guessing. But Fiz got me started smoking. Guy chain smoked like it was going out of style. I kept pestering him for a cigarette and finally he gave me one as long as I paid him a nickel. That was the end of that. After a match, lighting up a cigarette was the greatest feeling, all that adrenaline mixed with the nicotine. What I wouldn't give to get that feeling again.

PAX

Why'd you stop boxing?

LARSON

I had a practice fight about two years in and got knocked out so hard I got a concussion. The guy who hit me, Andrei something-or-other, Russian kid, good kid but dumb as a bag of soap, he got kicked out six months later for fighting with rocks in his glove. You'd see him, he'd pull his gloves off and...

*(he puts his hands out, palms
down)*

Blood, all over his knuckles. I never understood it; he could KO a guy without 'em.... My mother was furious and pulled me out, which made my dad so angry.... They had a fight that night so loud the neighbors called the cops and Dad had to be put in the drunk tank.

PAX

Holy shit. Why didn't you ever tell me that before?

LARSON

I don't know. Got a lot of stuff in my brain, you know. Can't remember it all at once. The last time I saw Fiz was May 12th, 1966, the day I graduated high school. Gave me a strong handshake, had this big beaming smile on his face. He was so proud of me. Still not sure why. Then he died two months later of lung cancer. Never went to a hospital until he was coughing up blood and bits of his own lung. Stubborn son of a bitch.

*Larson plops back onto the couch. He
contemplates the chess board.*

LARSON (cont'd)

God I want a cigarette.

He makes a move.

LARSON (cont'd)

Checkmate.

PAX

What?!

LARSON

You left your king wide open.

PAX

Damn it. I was trying to misdirect you.

LARSON

Misdirection is for children. When you're my age, you'll see David Copperfield with a deck of cards and you'll say, "Who gives a shit?"

PAX

Do you think you're going to get lung cancer?

LARSON

Probably. Who knows. I quit, the doc says my lungs should open up and scrub themselves clean in a few years. I've lived my life. Lived longer than my dad, too. But you live long enough, you're gonna get cancer.

(beat)

You should wake your mother and Annie up, say goodbye.

PAX

No, I said goodbye last night. Let them sleep.

LARSON

You know your mother was crying last night. Not downstairs, but once she got into the bedroom. I know, she cries a lot. But she thinks you're not coming back. She saw that twinkle in your eye.

PAX

What twinkle?

LARSON

You've got a plan.

PAX

I do?

LARSON

Yep. I saw it too. Just like with the bowling. You had the same twinkle. Still don't understand what you like about that game.

PAX

I like it because in order to get the highest score you have to roll the ball in the exact same pattern every time. Sounds easy but it's actually very difficult.

LARSON
Sounds stupid. Give me a football and someone to hit.

PAX
You wanna play another game?

LARSON
Sure.

They start resetting the board. Annie creeps into the room, wearing pajamas and the ballet slippers.

ANNIE
(loudly)
Goodbye, Pax.

Pax and Larson both startle.

LARSON
Jesus Christ!

PAX
Annie!

ANNIE
Mom's right, that is fun to do.

PAX
What are you doing up?

ANNIE
Couldn't sleep. It's really beautiful outside. Have you seen the snow?

LARSON
It's too dark out.

Annie goes to the window, pulls the curtain open.

ANNIE
I know, that's what makes it so beautiful. All that pristine, white snow. No footprints, no grime from car tires and dirty exhaust pipes. For a moment everything's quiet.

LARSON
That's cause everything's dead.

ANNIE
Dad.

LARSON

Once, in Shelley, it snowed six feet overnight, and in the morning when we were digging our way out of the house, we dug out our cat, Killer, just frozen solid on the porch, like a cat popsicle.

ANNIE

Jesus, that's horrible.

PAX

Why didn't you let him inside?

LARSON

Oh, Killer would go off on his own for weeks at a time. He was a bit of a loose cannon. We tried to keep him indoors but he would scratch everything to bits and eat all of my mother's plants. My dad picked his frozen body off the porch and in his mouth was a dead bird. So at least he died doing what he loved: killing stuff.

PAX

But why was he just sitting out there?

LARSON

What do I look like, a cat psychologist?

Larson starts to wander towards the kitchen.

ANNIE

Where are you going, Dad?

LARSON

I'm going to start some coffee. You want some?

ANNIE

Sure.

LARSON

Pax?

PAX

No thanks.

LARSON

Still don't like coffee?

PAX

Not really.

LARSON

(as he leaves)

What is the matter with you...?

PAX

(to Annie)

Why are you up? I already said goodbye.

ANNIE

You're not going to say anything?

PAX

About what?

ANNIE

I'm wearing the slippers.

PAX

I know.

ANNIE

You didn't say anything.

PAX

I didn't know I was supposed to.

ANNIE

I asked if you were--

PAX

What is your point, Annie.

ANNIE

(a little embarrassed)

I'm ... trying ... I'm ... probably ... I might take some classes. Again.

PAX

Okay.

ANNIE

"Okay"? That's it?

PAX

I'm glad.

ANNIE

You are so frustrating, Pax.

PAX

What? What do you want me to say?

ANNIE

Just tell me you're proud of me or something!

PAX

Annie, you're my sister. I'm always proud of you, even when you work at Denny's and date Dad Sweater. Why do you think I bought you those ballet slippers in the first place?

ANNIE

(she's tearing up)

I know, but, it's just ... you're so enigmatic.

PAX

(teasing)

Nice word choice.

ANNIE

Shut up.

Eloise appears at the top of the stairs. She listens, unnoticed.

PAX

Remember when you were in that Nutcracker recital?

ANNIE

Oh, god.

PAX

You were so good!

ANNIE

I was not.

PAX

Yes you were. You were the best dancer there, I'm serious.

ANNIE

How would you know?

PAX

I don't know, I could just see it! You were graceful and beautiful, the other kids were just hopping around like toads.

ANNIE

You know my nickname in middle school was "The Sugar Plum Fairy," right?

PAX

Cause you were fat? I mean, not fat fat, like--

ANNIE

Fat for a ballerina.

PAX

Yeah. I mean, no--

ANNIE

It's okay, I understand.

Pax grabs Annie by the shoulders.

PAX

Annie. You were so wonderful in that recital. That's all I'm trying to say.

ANNIE

I was just a kid--

PAX

Take the compliment!

ANNIE

Alright! Alright. Thank you.

PAX

You should move to Portland. I'm sure you could find a lot of dance opportunities there.

LARSON

(offstage)

God damn it. Annie! Come here! I forgot how the coffee thing works again.

ANNIE

Be right there!

She gives Pax a look as if to say, "I can't leave him."

PAX

You don't have to take care of Dad.

ANNIE

Somebody does.

PAX

Mom's here, she is still healthy--

ANNIE

She does what she can.

PAX

She does enough! Annie, don't just give up like that--

Annie puts her hands up. Pax is silent. She slowly lowers her hands. Short beat, then she smiles.

ANNIE

Hey, it worked.

She exits.

PAX

You can come down anytime, Mom.

ELOISE

Oh, good, you are beginning to sense my energy.

PAX

Are you all morning people?

ELOISE

Just me. Annie is just nervous a lot, and your father only wakes up when he needs to pee. Which is often. I try to wake up with the sunrise, it's what nature intended, though this time I woke up because you are all being very loud.

PAX

I'm sorry.

ELOISE

It's alright. It'll be good to send you off.

PAX

Mom, do you think Annie needs to stay here? To take care of Dad? I mean, he seems to be doing alright with you.

Annie and Larson reenter.

ANNIE

(to Pax)

He didn't plug it in.

LARSON

How was I supposed to know it wasn't plugged in?

ANNIE

The clock was off!

LARSON

Why does a coffeepot need a clock?

(to Eloise)

Honey, what are you doing up?

PAX

We were being loud.

ELOISE

And I wanted to say goodbye.

Sound of a car horn outside.

PAX

Cab's here.

ANNIE

And ruined the snow.

ELOISE

Did it snow last night?

Eloise goes to the window as Pax grabs his suitcases. She stares out at the snow. Pax ad libs hugs and goodbyes with everyone. Eloise is last. She gives him a big, long hug.

ELOISE (cont'd)

I have a present for you, Pax.

PAX

What? It's after Christmas, Mom.

ELOISE

I know, but I saw you playing with it the other day and I thought you should keep it.

She reaches in the pocket of her robe and hands Pax the satyr with the huge dick. An awkward silence.

PAX

Thanks.

ELOISE

You're welcome, dear.

PAX

Okay, well, I have to go. I'll see you next time.

ELOISE

Not four years from now, I hope.

PAX

Of course not. I'll call you when I get home.

LARSON

We love you, son.

PAX

I love you too.

Pax opens the door to a blustery cold wind. He looks back one more time, specifically at Annie, then exits. Door closes. Silence. Eloise goes to Larson. He puts his arm around her and they walk slowly off into the kitchen. Annie is alone.

She stares at the door, then slowly sits on the couch. She pulls the dreamcatcher from her pocket, now pretty ugly due to being meticulously repaired using tape and glue.

Lights fade to black.

The end.