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For the falls

Emily Jean Dendinger
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FOR THE FALLS

by

Emily Jean Dendinger

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts (Playwriting)
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Dare Clubb

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Emily Jean Dendinger

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts (Playwriting) at the May 2014 graduation.

Thesis Committee: _____
Dare Clubb, Thesis Supervisor

Kim Marra

Alan MacVey

To my family, friend, and Crystal Gomes.

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PLAY HISTORY

The first draft of FOR THE FALLS received a reading as part of LiveWire Chicago Theatre's Unplugged Reading Series in spring 2012.

ELIOT	John Taflan
MARION	Madeline Long
VERONICA	Nina O'Keefe
CARL	Tim Martin
DOROTHY	Marsha Harmon
ANDREW	Patrick King
JACK	Joel Ewing
DIRECTOR	Krista D'Agostino

The next draft of FOR THE FALLS was produced as part of the University of Iowa's New Play Festival in May 2013.

ELIOT	RJ Mcghee
MARION	Beth Kilmer
VERONICA	Jessica Traufler
CARL	Thomas Eslinger
DOROTHY	Kate Chindlund
ANDREW	Chris Rangel
JACK	Andrew Berger
DIRECTOR	Tlaloc Rivas

SETTING AND CHARACTERS

Setting

Early October 1962. A house built on a waterfall.

Characters

- Eliot - Early thirties, Victor's best friend, quiet but holds his own at a party, always the perfect host
- Marion - Late twenties, Victor's wife, anxious, neurotic, childish, practically a stranger to the others.
- Veronica - Early thirties, Victor's cousin, fashionable, boisterous, speaks before she thinks.
- Andrew - Early thirties, Veronica's fiancé, innocent, average, sees the best in people.
- Dorothy - Early thirties, Carl's wife, maternal, practical, more observant than she appears.
- Carl - Early thirties, Victor's college friend, lawyer, dreamer, probably wears a lot of sweater vests.
- Jack - Late twenties, Victor's brother, wanderer, drives a motorcycles, smokes a lot of pot.

NOTES ON THE PLAY

A Note on Sound

At all times, the rush of a waterfall can be heard.

A Note on Dialogue

A / indicates an overlapping of dialogue, but feel free to play with this. In big group scenes, it is completely appropriate, encouraged even, to adlib. Don't be afraid to let the noise from the living room overtake the action on the patio at times and vice versa.

A PREFACE TO FOR THE FALLS

On February 22, 2012, which also happened to be my 29th Birthday, the phone rang at around ten in the morning. Looking at the caller ID, I was delighted to see my friend Krista calling. Naturally, I assumed she was calling to wish me a happy day so I picked it up immediately. Krista was already crying when I said hello, and it was hard for me to understand her at first, but finally she was able to speak: our friend Crystal had died in the night. She was 27 and had a heart attack while out to dinner with her boyfriend. By the time the paramedics had arrived she was already gone.

Crystal and I had grown apart as so often happens to college friends, but there was once a time when Crystal, Krista, and the rest of us had been undergraduates together at Boston College and then all moved out to the dregs of Somerville, Massachusetts afterwards. In that first year out of school we all spent a lot of time together, working bullshit jobs, drinking too much, talking too much about things we knew nothing about. After that year, I moved to Chicago. Crystal was a talented costume designer and left Boston a short while later to go to graduate school, and then moved to Los Angeles. I don't remember the last time we spoke in person.

After I pulled myself together a bit on the phone with Krista, I asked her what I could do to help. She said I could call people and let them know what had happened. Soon I found myself reaching out to people I hadn't spoken to in years—kids from school, professors, people whose beds I had slept in, who I had traveled to the shore with, acted in plays with. Each call was the same—the joyfulness of hearing a voice you haven't heard in a while, the delivery of the news, a pause and then a reaction. Some

people cried. A beloved theatre professor we both had simply said, “Oh no”. Then came the offers to help, questions about a funeral, where to send cards and flowers—all of the details to show you care that still seem so inadequate in the moment.

At the time I had just started a play on the family who built Frank Lloyd Wright’s *Fallingwater*. Like most of my pieces, this one was inspired by a real historical event that I had fallen in love with. The play was set in 1962, and I wanted it to be based on the family’s closeted homosexual son who has urged his father to commission *Fallingwater*. After I found out I could be sued for writing about this family, I decided to take some creative license and make the story my own. I changed the son’s name to Eliot and invented a plot about the tragic death of a John Cage-esque composer named Victor who had been Eliot’s lover. The play was going to take place after Victor’s death, and it was going to deal with Eliot’s relationship with Victor’s grieving widow. However, as I sat down to write the play all I could think about was Crystal, and our own group of friends.

Death reignites relationships in a way that nothing else can. It brings people together in a shared moment. Old conflicts fall away, annoyances are trivial, and history becomes even more present as we are reminded that we are made up of memories. It reminds us how fleeting time is and the fragility of our own immortality. It also is a harsh indicator that everyone grows up. Crystal’s death was the first encounter our group of friends had to face as adults. It was the first death that I faced of a person my own age. It was terrifying that someone’s heart could just stop beating in an instance and without warning, without regard to life or love or plans or goals.

Over the next week, I found myself on the phone with old friends. It was as though all we wanted was to be near someone else who had known Crystal. I ended up driving to Chicago that weekend where Krista and some other college friends lived. We didn't do much, just sat around and drank too much wine and listened to music. Sometimes we talked about Crystal, but mostly we talked about ourselves. I began to realize that grief is necessary and healthy and important, and also inherently selfish. It forces us to reevaluate our beliefs, dreams, thoughts, and ideology.

As I watched us all wrestle with this death, it was impossible to keep it out of my play. Soon my small cast became a large ensemble with many characters taking on the voices of my friends and me. I decided that Victor had died in a car crash, and the play would focus on the people who loved Victor the most—his wife, his lover, cousin, brother and old college buddy. Additionally, there needed to be a few strangers in the group—people who had never met Victor aside from the stories and occasional holiday cards. The play would still take place on a house built on a waterfall, but the nature of the event changes. The action would occur on the night immediately following the funeral. The action would center on a letter that Victor had written in his youth detailing how he wanted his death to be celebrated. It would conclude with spreading Victor's ashes at sunset.

By choosing to have Victor die in a car crash his death became a mystery—could he possibly have taken his own life or was it really a tragic accident? The character of Veronica was my conspiracy theorist. She is at a place in her life where she's finally happy. Her career is flourishing, she's newly engaged, and utterly in love—the possibility

that all that can be taken away without warning is too much for her. She starts trying to rationalize Victor's death. She latches on to the notion Victor committed suicide because it makes it easier for her to grapple with her own immortality. Interestingly, during the readings and production audiences found Veronica annoying and frustrating. I find her brutally honest and sad. There is a moment when she turns to Eliot and Marion and demands to know why they don't want to investigate her suicide theory. She says to them, "You are the two people who loved him best. You are supposed to want to know what happened." The tragedy is no one knows what happened, and no one ever will, and it's useless to linger on what might never be known.

Another character wrestling with Victor's death is his college buddy Carl. Both Carl and Victor started off as composers, but Carl left music in favor of a more practical life of the law, marriage and children. In the meantime, Victor rose to fame and had the life Carl once dreamed about. In light of Victor's death, Carl starts to fantasize about Victor's success. He questions the choices he's made and wonders if they were the wrong ones. Over the course of the evening, Carl drinks too much, smokes pot, and professes feelings for Veronica he no longer has. It's as if we have all time traveled, he says, trying to reclaim a moment in time that has passed. In the end, Carl finally addresses his fear of being forgotten. He says Victor's art guarantees his immortality, whereas Carl fears he will end up as photographs in his kids' basement. His wife Dorothy points out that although Victor was a talented composer, no one seems capable of describing him as a kind, warm or generous man. Carl is soothed by Dorothy's words, latching on to this question of what kind of life do you lead and how do you want to be remembered.

The question of who a person really is and who they are after they die is central to this play. Everyone remembers Victor differently, and therefore, we can never really know the true portrait of the man. This difficulty became one of the chief challenges of the piece—how do you make an audience care about someone we never even meet? Over the development of this play, that became one of the most interesting aspects for me. As the true ensemble nature of the play was made more apparent, Victor became more of a way into the play rather than the driving force behind it.

The only character in the play that addresses Victor directly is his brother Jack. While the others use Victor's death as an introspective way to evaluate their own mortality or place in the world, Jack is there to say goodbye to his brother. His own relationship with Victor is fraught and complicated, but at the end of the day, he is searching for a way to let go. He finds this by sharing a meal with his brother's ashes, making pancakes and eggs and having the sort of mundane conversation he wishes they could have often had together.

The final scene of the play was the most difficult to find, but also the most satisfying. It's the morning after everything has happened. There's sunshine and breakfast and hangovers and packing up to go home. It's the moment when you start to forget the reason why you are gathered together and begin to remember how much you enjoy the people around you. Conversation stops being about what happened in the past, and starts to be about what is happening in the now. There are photos of wedding dresses and infants, questions about people you haven't yet met, and plans for future, happier gatherings are forged. In *For the Falls*, I wanted this moment to happen organically.

That's why the cast one by one joins each other at the table, sharing a meal. Voices overtake over another, and we stop hearing what they are saying. It is during this moment while no one is even paying attention that Victor's ashes are poured over the side of the waterfall. Only Eliot and Marion watch it occur. Afterwards, they go back and join the others in the happiest kind of ordinary noise in the world, the music of living.

FOR THE FALLS

(Scene 1: October 1962, early evening. Leaves perpetually fall on the concrete patio. A flight of steps leads down to the waterfall and creek below. Some of the leftovers from the funeral buffet are on the patio table. Separated by a wall of glass and sliding doors, a sleek living room with a couch, piano, and bar. Offstage exists the kitchen, stairs to the bedrooms, and the front hallway.

At rise, MARION sits next to a large stack of newspapers. She attempts to make a paper boat. ELIOT sets out a bowl of potato chips and French onion dip, and then consults a piece of paper, which VERONICA tries to snatch away from him. All wear casual clothing.)

	VERONICA
Show me the list—	
	ELIOT
We're waiting—	
	VERONICA
Just show it to me—	
	ELIOT
We're waiting—	
	VERONICA
I won't show Carl—	
	ELIOT
We're waiting!	
	MARION (looking over the side of the railing)
How far of a drop do you think it is?	
	ELIOT
Forty feet.	
	VERONICA
Forty feet? No, not that high—	
	(VERONICA makes another grab for the paper, but ELIOT is faster)
	ELIOT
We. Are. Waiting.	

(ELIOT puts the paper in his pocket and exits.)

VERONICA

I forgot Carl and Victor once jumped from here until Eliot mentioned it.

MARION

That was real?

VERONICA

Of course it was—what did you think?

MARION

I don't know. I guess I thought it was a metaphor or something.

VERONICA

Not a metaphor, just two stupid boys with a death wish.

ANDREW (offstage)

Hey, Vee, Marion's bags—the red room or the blue?

VERONICA (to MARION)

The red room, right?

MARION

I don't know. I've never been here before.

VERONICA

You've never been here? How's that possible? Victor was Eliot's best friend.

MARION

He never invited me.

VERONICA

Victor always stayed in the red room so I'm sure that's where you'll be.

(VERONICA goes back inside.)

VERONICA (shouting)

THE RED ROOM!

(She goes back onto the patio.)

VERONICA

Overall, I'd say it was a good eulogy—a little sentimental, but can't say I blame Eliot after getting thrown in last minute. God, I could kill Jack. All he had to do was show up. I wasn't even expecting him to be appropriately dressed—he just had to show up and give his brother's eulogy.

MARION

Maybe something happened to him.

VERONICA

Nothing happened to him—he's just a little shit, that's all. Was that your sister with you?

MARION

Yeah, she wants me to come stay with them for awhile.

VERONICA

That sounds nice.

MARION

Three kids under the age of five?

VERONICA

But you like kids.

MARION

I don't like my sister. (beat) I didn't know about all the postcards. Eliot said Victor sent a lot of postcards. He never sent me postcards.

VERONICA

Well, that's because you were always with him.

MARION

That's true—I was always with him.

VERONICA

So why would he send you postcards?

MARION

Ow—dammit! (beat) Sorry. Paper cut.

VERONICA

You know you don't have to make a boat, Marion.

MARION

Yes, I do. We all do. That's what Victor's list or rules or whatever it is says—we all make paper boats.

VERONICA

Technically he was only talking about Eliot, Carl, Jack and me.

MARION

I'm making a boat.

VERONICA

Here, let me see it. (MARION hands VERONICA a piece of newspaper and watches as VERONICA makes a boat). When we were little, we used to have these epic boat races at our grandparents' house. I don't want to brag or anything, but mine always won.

(ANDREW enters through the living room and comes out on to the patio.)

ANDREW

This place looks exactly like the photos in Life.

VERONICA

I told you, didn't I?

MARION

Why did Eliot's father build it on the waterfall instead of facing it?

VERONICA

Because he could.

ANDREW (observing the buffet.)

French Onion dip? Now I'm even more sorry I never got to meet him. I want people to eat this at my funeral. Add that to my list, Vee.

VERONICA

You are not planning your own funeral.

ANDREW

Why not? Victor did. I think it's a terrific idea with the way the world's going nowadays, who knows what will happen with Cuba, or what if I get on an elevator at the exact wrong moment, or choke / on a spare rib

VERONICA

All right, all right! I don't know why we're making such a big deal about this stupid list

when he wrote it ten years ago—a lot happens in ten years—Marion happened, and nothing in Victor’s rules take her into account.

MARION

I’m going to spread his ashes tomorrow, that’ll be my part. (to VERONICA) Is there a bathroom close by?

VERONICA

Oh, honey, your stomach again?

MARION

It’s the heat.

VERONICA

Oh my god, are you pregnant?

MARION

No.

VERONICA

Are you sure?

ANDREW

Vee.

VERONICA

What? It’s not a crazy question, and it might be a nice / surprise.

MARION

I’m not pregnant. Can you tell me where the bathroom is?

VERONICA

Inside, first door on your left.

(MARION exits. ANDREW holds up a wonky looking boat.)

ANDREW

What do you think? I call it the Killer Salmon.

VERONICA

The Killer Salmon?

ANDREW

Yeah, salmon are fierce—they can swim up river. That’s pretty fierce, don’t you think?

VERONICA

Kiss me.

ANDREW

I just met these people today, and they're practically your family.

VERONICA

And we're getting married next month, which means they'll be your family. Now kiss me.

(He kisses her lightly on the lips.)

VERONICA

You call that a kiss?

ANDREW

So Victor wanted boats at his wake?

VERONICA

It's not a wake—we're not Catholic. This is...I don't know what it is, but there's no body.

ANDREW

Victor's ashes are here—that counts. (mimes floating the boat, attacking) What do you think? Killer...salmon...fierce?

VERONICA

Get over here, and kiss me again.

(ANDREW kisses VERONICA on the lips. She pulls away.)

Poor Marion.

ANDREW

Not the response I was hoping for.

VERONICA

How does someone hit a tree—it happens, I know that, but not to someone like Victor. I wish you could have met him—you would have liked him, everyone liked him.

ANDREW

Famous composer, dip connoisseur, related to you—what's not to love?

VERONICA

Listen, I need you to do something for me tonight—I need you to be a source of comfort, just try to keep things upbeat. Can you do that for me?

ANDREW

I'll do my best.

(DOROTHY and CARL enter and come on to the patio. They wear formal, black clothing. CARL has two un-inflated blow up rafts.)

DOROTHY

Sorry we're late. You won't believe what / Carl made us stop for—

CARL (holding up rafts)

For the swimming. / Two for a dollar—that's a steal, and they're fun, right?

VERONICA

What swimming?

CARL

In Victor's list, it says we all go swimming.

(ELIOT enters with a tray full of glasses, bottles and ice bucket.)

ELIOT

Did we get the leftovers from the buffet—the pies?

VERONICA

We got the pies. Victor might have planned his own funeral, but I bet he said nothing about food. What twenty-year-old thinks of food at a funeral?

DOROTHY

What twenty year old plans his own funeral?

CARL

Victor had this fear he wouldn't make it to 30 so one night—

DOROTHY

We already know this, Carl.

ANDREW

I don't know it.

CARL

(to DOROTHY) See, Andrew doesn't know it. So, one night when we were all here-and Jack fell down the stairs—

VERONICA

No, he didn't—you're thinking of another night.

CARL

But that's what gave Victor / the idea—

VERONICA

The night Jack fell down the stairs was when that big storm came through, and we all went skinny-dipping / and—

DOROTHY

Does it really matter what night it was? The point is one night Victor got drunk and planned his own funeral. (to CARL) Am I missing anything?

CARL

No, that pretty much covers it.

VERONICA

So what else is on Victor's list?

(ELIOT pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket.)

CARL

I can't believe you kept that.

ELIOT

Victor had it up until a few months ago. He brought over a few things to put in my safety deposit box.

(ELIOT opens the paper.)

VERONICA

God, I forgot how bad Victor's handwriting was.

CARL

Actually that might be mine. Let me see it—

ELIOT

No—it should be a surprise.

VERONICA

Is that part of Victor's plan too?

ELIOT

No, it's mine. It's more fun this way.

DOROTHY

We're not doing everything on that list, are we?

CARL

Of course we are, we owe it to Victor—that's why we got these (holds up rafts)!

DOROTHY

If it were the middle of December, would you still go swimming?

CARL

Yes.

DOROTHY

Then I guess we should be glad it's ninety degrees out.

VERONICA

An Indian summer—we used to be able to go swimming as late as November. Remember that one night, Carl, when you were so hell bent on swimming, but then it started to snow?

ELIOT

That was Victor.

(MARION enters.)

CARL *(to MARION)*

Marion, sweetheart, all day long, I've been looking at you, and all I wanted to do was (he sweeps her up in a big crushing hug). I loved your husband, you know that, right? He was one of my oldest friends, my frat brother—

DOROTHY

A music frat—*(to ANDREW)* let's not fool anyone into thinking you were athletes. Carl's also a very talented musician.

CARL

Not talented enough to have three albums and a church packed with admirers. I've been trying to remember the last time I was here. I think it had to be about eight years ago for that Fourth of July picnic—

(MARION suddenly gets violently sick into the ice bucket.)

Oh, Christ.
ELIOT

You poor thing—
DOROTHY

I'm sorry, I'm / so sorry—
MARION

You have / nothing to be sorry about.
DOROTHY

I'll just take this—
ELIOT

(ELIOT exits with the vomit-filled ice bucket.)

ELIOT
Eliot, I'm sorry / I don't know what's wrong—

DOROTHY
You're not / running a fever.

VERONICA
And you're sure you're not pregnant—

MARION
I'm NOT pregnant.

DOROTHY
Are you allergic to anything?

MARION
No, nothing but nickel and mustard—

VERONICA
Wait, you're allergic / to mustard?

CARL (to VERONICA)
Don't you make your deviled eggs / with mustard?

VERONICA

Oh, shit. Did I know you were allergic to mustard? I must have / I'm so sorry.

ANDREW (*to MARION*)

What can I get you, water—

DOROTHY

Not water / flat soda—

VERONICA

It never even occurred to me.

ANDREW

Flat soda, / that's what my mother always gave us—

MARION

God, this is so embarrassing / I'm so embarrassed

CARL

That's / what we give the kids. I'll get it.

DOROTHY

Do you want to lie / down—

MARION

No, I don't—I'm okay / really

(CARL goes into the house and to the bar where he proceeds to pour soda into a glass and flatten it with a spoon as ELIOT reenters with a bucket and rag and cleans the floor.)

VERONICA

I think I've got some aspirin in my case.

MARION

No, I don't need—oh, god, Eliot, / don't

(VERONICA exits through the house.)

ELIOT

It's fine—I got it.

DOROTHY

At least come in and brush your teeth—here, I'll go with you.

(MARION and DOROTHY go into the house and exit. ELIOT continues to clean the patio.)

ANDREW

Do you want some help with that?

ELIOT

It's all right—most of it made it into the bucket.

ANDREW

Fortunately it's concrete. It would have been a real tragedy if she got sick inside the house. Bet there's a lot of valuable stuff in there, huh?

ELIOT

\$150,000 worth.

ANDREW

\$150,000?

ELIOT

It increased significantly when my father passed away.

ANDREW

Jesus. Well, thank god she got sick out here then—not that she should get sick at all, but just that—

ELIOT

Right.

(ELIOT finishes wiping up the floor and dumps the water over the railing.)

ANDREW

I thought your eulogy was excellent. Vee told me how the brother was supposed to do it, but he didn't show so you stepped in. I think that was really swell of you. I'm a big fan of Victor's work. I mean, I don't know a lot about music. I bought his record for my mother then ended up listening to it more than her. It's actually one of the reasons I started taking lessons—it's only been a couple months, but I can already play a mean Hot Cross Buns. You play too, don't you? Veronica said you and Victor collaborated—

ELIOT

We never collaborated. He just came here to work sometimes.

ANDREW

Well, hey, some people might call that a collaboration—your house, his talent.

ELIOT

Which ones do you like?

ANDREW

All of them really, but if I had to pick, the second one on the first album—of course, I can't remember the name right now—

ELIOT

Waltz in D flat major.

ANDREW

Yes—that's the one!

ELIOT

He composed that here.

ANDREW

Wow, really? That's kind of amazing.

ELIOT

Are you good with a shovel?

ANDREW

A shovel?

ELIOT

There's a box of things we buried that night. You don't have to, but if you want to see / the grounds—

(VERONICA enters the living room.)

CARL (holding up drink to VERONICA)

Does this look fizz-less enough to you?

ANDREW

I'd love to.

(ELIOT and ANDREW exit down the steps leading down to the waterfall.
VERONICA watches them from the living room)

VERONICA

Isn't Andrew terrific?

ANDREW

We haven't really had a chance to talk.

VERONICA

You're going to love him. It's funny—I spent all this time being like career career career, and wasn't at all prepared for how he snuck up on me, but hey, you can't pick who you love, right?

CARL

Here, here. Martini?

VERONICA

Please! So I have a legal question for you. Let's say someone was to take their own life. How would you go about finding that out?

CARL

You'd collect evidence, do a little investigating, maybe some questioning—I'm taking all of this from Raymond Chandler, by the way.

VERONICA

Don't you think it's peculiar that Victor's car went straight into that tree?

CARL

Honestly, I'd rather not think about it. He put away the pillows—did you notice that? Eliot hid all the pillows.

VERONICA

Yeah, because we burned them.

CARL

One—we burned one ten years ago. And it was all Jack. That was the last time we were here, just the five of us—

VERONICA

Oh, don't start saying things like that when everyone is sober, tired and sad.

CARL

I cried at the funeral. Didn't think I would, but—

VERONICA

Eliot's eulogy.

CARL

Did he really just make it up on the spot?

VERONICA

Yeah, he did. And thank god for him. I thought my Aunt was going to have a heart attack when Jack didn't show. I wish I could've cried. I was too angry to cry. Poor Andrew was all ready with the tissues too.

CARL

It was good—really good. It just keeps getting me, and I don't mean just at the funeral, but in the shower or waiting for the train—it's like I'm perfectly fine one minute then suddenly BANG—I'm a wreck all over again. I almost cried at the office.

VERONICA

You cried at the office?

CARL

Almost! Marion called Dorothy, and she called me—I was on my way to a lunch with clients, and my boss was with me—I had to keep it together.

VERONICA

I burned my nylons.

CARL

Because Victor died?

VERONICA

No, you idiot, that night with the pillow—I burned my nylons because I wanted to watch the waterfall put them out. It was all very visual with the waterfall and the fire and the darkness—my own artistic expression—

CARL

And you were drunk.

VERONICA

Completely drunk.

(DOROTHY enters into the living room. She has changed into more casual clothing.)

DOROTHY

Did you find the aspirin?

VERONICA (shaking the bottle)

Right here. How's she feeling?

DOROTHY

Better, but why don't you take it up to her?

CARL (handing VERONICA the soda)

This too.

(VERONICA exits offstage.)

DOROTHY

It's getting late. We should call the kids to say goodnight.

(CARL opens the sliding doors as far as they'll go. He picks up one of the rafts and starts to blow it up.)

CARL

Shh, listen.

DOROTHY

I don't hear anything except the waterfall.

CARL

Come out here, and watch the sunset with me.

DOROTHY

But the sun isn't setting yet.

CARL

Just come out here.

(DOROTHY goes on to the patio with CARL. He continues to blow up the raft.)

DOROTHY

Do you think they'll be a lot of mosquitoes tonight? It's been so warm this fall nothing is dead yet. Did you know Eliot's father was famous? Until this morning, I'd never even heard of him, George David Monk—

CARL

George Davis Monk. He designed the house.

DOROTHY

How did you acquire all these famous friends, and why haven't I heard about them before?

CARL (still blowing up the raft)

One time...I jumped off that...railing...into the creek... it had rained a lot and the water was...high...and...Victor dared me to...and Eliot said...we were going to...break our heads open—

DOROTHY

It's a wonder you didn't.

(CARL finishes blowing up the raft. He's out of breath)

CARL

Ohmygod...I need to...not pass out....

DOROTHY

Why did you buy these silly rafts? We're only here for the night.

CARL

We'll use them tonight.

(CARL starts to blow up the second raft.)

DOROTHY

Carl.

CARL

What? They aren't going to inflate themselves.

(CARL continues to blow up the second raft.)

DOROTHY

I didn't bring a swimsuit, I wonder if Marion brought an extra one although she's so tall. Did you remember to tell your mother the baby can't have sweet potatoes, and Suzy only gets ONE snack before bed—

CARL (blowing)

Do you think...we're...old... and boring?

DOROTHY

What?

CARL (still blowing)

When was the...last time... we did something...exciting?

DOROTHY

We went to the Grand Canyon in June.

CARL

Listening to Eliot's eulogy today...I thought about how much Victor had done...three albums...played with the Boston pops...traveled to Europe, and...what have I done?

DOROTHY

Went to law school, married me, had four kids—

CARL

We used to say...I was going to play...in a band...write songs...move to New York—

DOROTHY

Did Veronica say something to you?

CARL

No.

DOROTHY

I'm going to call the kids. Go change.

(DOROTHY goes into the house, picks up the phone and dials. CARL finishes blowing up the raft and exits through the house and offstage.)

DOROTHY (on the phone)

Hey there, sweetie—it's Mommy. Are you having fun with Grammy?

(ELIOT enters on to the patio with a box. He starts to open it as VERONICA enters.)

VERONICA

Marion's asleep—ah, you're on the phone! Sorry!

(VERONICA moves on to the patio and lights a cigarette.)

DOROTHY

Wow, you went to the petting zoo?

VERONICA

Oh, my god—that box.

DOROTHY

And saw a cow! Holy moly!

ELIOT (unpacking)

It's all here—

(VERONICA starts to help ELIOT unpack the box—a strange assortment of things: whistle, marshmallows, graham crackers, Hershey bars...)

DOROTHY (on phone)

Okay, put your brother on.

VERONICA (holding up a bottle of whiskey)

Whiskey never goes bad.

DOROTHY (on phone)

Hey, pumpkin, I hear you went to the petting zoo and—what—Grammy bought you cotton candy

VERONICA (holding newspaper)

A newspaper? For what—the boats?

ELIOT

Victor didn't like to leave anything to chance.

DOROTHY

...and you saw what—a duck—TWO ducks!

VERONICA

Hey, can I ask you something? Did you talk to the police that night?

ELIOT

Only Marion did

VERONICA

But he was leaving your house—did anything unusual happen?

ELIOT

I won at cards—that was pretty unusual.

(CARL, now wearing more casual clothes, enters into the living room as VERONICA and ELIOT continue to unpack the box.)

DOROTHY (on phone)

Yes, Daddy is right here—he wants to say goodnight. (handing phone to CARL) It's Mikey.

CARL (on phone)

Hey, buddy. Mommy and I are having a swell time—we're going sky-diving!

DOROTHY

No, we're not—Carl, tell him we're not!

CARL (on phone)

Just kidding, son, we're not sky-diving. We're going to swim with sharks!

DOROTHY

Carl! Stop it!

CARL (on phone)

All right, we're not doing that either. We're at this boring old house in the woods eating deviled eggs—

DOROTHY

Tell him goodnight and hang up now.

CARL (on phone)

Okay, we gotta go! Love you, son!

(CARL hangs up the phone.)

DOROTHY

What is wrong with you?

CARL

He knows I'm joking.

DOROTHY

He's six, Carl. Now he's going to have nightmares.

CARL

I'm trying to keep things interesting—make him think his parents are hip.

DOROTHY

But we're not hip!

(Enter ANDREW from the stairs.)

CARL
I know—that's the problem.

VERONICA
Where've you been?

(Enter MARION into the living room, carrying a martini shaker.)

ANDREW
Putting the shovels away—it's wild / you can hear the waterfall everywhere.

DOROTHY
Oh, hey, Marion, what's that you got there?

MARION
It's Victor.

ELIOT
Marion's awake.

CARL
That's Victor.

VERONICA
MARION, COME OUT HERE!

(MARION, CARL and DOROTHY move out onto the patio.)

VERONICA
How you feeling, peanut?

ANDREW (pointing to the martini shaker)
Mix up some new drinks for us?

DOROTHY
This is Victor.

ANDREW
He's in there?

MARION
Is it indecent? Oh my god, it's indecent, isn't it? I knew it was—

VERONICA

It's perfect, Marion. Absolutely perfect, Victor would like it very much.

ANDREW (looking at the martini shaker)

You know, it really isn't much different than an urn.

ELIOT (picking up the shaker)

Can I take the top off?

MARION

I'm afraid he might blow away.

ELIOT

Have you looked inside?

MARION

I don't want to.

ELIOT

What if I take it in the house, some place closed off—he'll be perfectly safe.

MARION

But there's nothing to see.

ELIOT

Exactly—it's only ash. The same as what's in a fireplace or grill—oh, god, that was a terrible point of comparison—

MARION

I'm Victor's wife, his ashes belong to me, and I say no!

ELIOT

All right—you're right.

(pause)

VERONICA

Sooo what if we give Victor his very own place of honor? He should be somewhere where he can oversee the night.

(VERONICA takes the martini shaker and moves it to the railing of the patio, and rests it there.)

DOROTHY

But not there—someone might knock it over. Put him on the table.

(VERONICA puts it on the table.)

VERONICA

I hope you don't plan on using this martini shaker again. Or maybe you do. It would make for interesting party conversation. This old shaker once held my husband's ashes, but now it makes one stiff drink. Get it. Stiff. Drink. Nevermind.

ANDREW

Growing up Catholic, I didn't know many people who were cremated. Exactly how does it work? Or is that a completely inappropriate question—that's a completely inappropriate question—don't feel like you should answer it.

MARION

I don't know how it works. Some men took him away, and when they came back they had a box full of ashes. I was supposed to choose an urn, but they were all wrong, and then I thought of this, and it just—

ELIOT

It suits him.

VERONICA

Of all the places Victor could have chosen, you'd think he would've wanted to be near our family or Marion. That's the trouble with following these wishes of Victor's—things change in ten years.

ELIOT

Victor always found inspiration from this house.

MARION

What does he say about how he wants his ashes spread?

CARL

Sunrise—I remember.

DOROTHY

Oh, that's lovely.

MARION

I'm going to be the one who spreads his ashes tomorrow.

VERONICA

Of course you are.

ELIOT

Although it might be nice if we each took a handful. Victor would have liked that.

DOROTHY

I don't think it makes any sense for me to spread his ashes, I hardly knew him.

ANDREW

I never knew him.

ELIOT

Then Veronica, Carl, Marion and me. How about that?

MARION

I think it should be just me.

CARL

Or maybe just you and Eliot.

ELIOT

How about that, Marion—you and me?

MARION

No, it should be only me. I was his wife.

VERONICA

Whatever you think is best. Right, Eliot?

ELIOT

If that's what Marion wants.

(pause)

VERONICA

You know, maybe we should get things rolling with this boat race. After all, I do have a championship to maintain.

DOROTHY

But I haven't made a boat yet.

ANDREW

It's all right, Dorothy, we can be a team—you can sail the Killer Salmon.

DOROTHY

I'm sorry, what?

ELIOT

You go on ahead—I'll set out the rest of the leftovers.

MARION

Do you need help?

ELIOT

No, it won't take me long.

VERONICA (to MARION)

I thought you wanted to sail a boat.

MARION

I do, but mine's so stupid looking.

VERONICA

Don't worry—I'll show you all of my secret sailing tricks.

(MARION, VERONICA, ANDREW and CARL exit with their boats, chatting as they go. ELIOT remains a moment, alone. He goes into the living room and puts on a record. It's a song on the piano composed with the waterfall. He plays it softly, and goes back outside and picks up the martini shaker. The song is scratchy and homemade and composed using the waterfall interwoven with piano. The voices of the others filter up from the creek. ELIOT opens the martini shaker and looks at the ashes. He touches them. He pulls his hand out, and it is covered with fine gray powder. He blows it off his fingers. He puts the lid back on, resets it and exits into the house. MARION comes back up the stairs.)

MARION

Eliot? I've decided to help—

(ELIOT reenters through the living room carrying a tray of deviled eggs. He puts them on the picnic table and starts to go back into the house.)

ELIOT

All I'm doing is bringing the food outside.

MARION

Let me help with that.

What? ELIOT (from the living room)

I SAID I'LL HELP YOU— MARION (shouting)

(MARION starts to enter the house as ELIOT tries to exit with a casserole.)

Watch out—this is hot! ELIOT

Oh, sorry— MARION

(MARION moves out of the way for ELIOT to put the dish down.)

I said I got it—you should go lie down— ELIOT

I don't want to lie down. Give me something to do. MARION

I guess you can bring out the plates, if you want. ELIOT

(MARION exits into the house.)

I thought your eulogy was very moving. MARION

What? ELIOT

Your eulogy—it was lovely. MARION

Oh. Thanks. ELIOT

I didn't know about all the postcards. MARION

Well, now you do. ELIOT

(ELIOT starts to go back into the house. MARION reenters with the plates, which she sets down.)

MARION

I like this song you're listening to—what is it?

ELIOT (shouting from offstage)

Just something Victor was working on.

MARION (shouting)

Victor didn't mention he was working on a new album.

ELIOT (shouting)

It's not really an album, just a few songs.

(ELIOT reenters with another covered dish.)

MARION

I brought the plates.

ELIOT

Great, maybe you can fold the napkins around the utensils, like this?

(He demonstrates.)

MARION

Sure, got it.

(ELIOT exits into the house again, and this time he returns with a potato salad. MARION rolls napkins around utensils. A short pause as they work and MARION listens to the song..)

MARION

Is...is the waterfall recorded in the song?

ELIOT

Victor spent a lot of time out here with a tape recorder.

(ELIOT sets out the potato salad and goes back into the house.)

MARION

It's unusual. Victor usually told me—

ELIOT (offstage)

WHAT?

MARION

VICTOR USUALLY TOLD ME ALL ABOUT THE SONGS HE WAS COMPOSING.
HE DIDN'T LIKE ME TO WATCH HIM PLAY SO I'D GET IN THE BATHTUB
AND LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN. HE DIDN'T TELL ME—

(ELIOT reenters with baked beans. He sets that down.)

He didn't tell me about this one.

ELIOT

What about a bath?

MARION

Victor didn't tell me about this album—or song—or whatever—that's all.

ELIOT

It probably slipped his mind.

(As they talk, ELIOT exits into the house.)

MARION (calling after him)

Did you know about it?

ELIOT (shouting offstage)

It's my house.

MARION

Was he working on it a long time?

ELIOT

What?

MARION

WAS HE WORKING A LONG—

(ELIOT enters with ketchup and a beet salad.)

ELIOT

Maybe since April.

MARION

So he forgot to tell me for seven months?

ELIOT
Maybe he wanted to surprise you.

MARION
It's a different sound.

ELIOT
It's a very different sound.

MARION
Have you listened to it often?

ELIOT
He only showed it to me a day or two before.

MARION
The napkins are finished.

ELIOT
Thanks—would you mind if I made a few small—

(ELIOT starts to refold the napkins.)

MARION
If they're not right, I can redo them—

ELIOT
This'll only take a minute.

MARION
Are you sure, because I / can—

ELIOT
I said I got it.

MARION
The thing about the ashes, I can understand why you want to, but I was his wife, and you were his friend, his best friend, but it just—well, it wouldn't be right.

ELIOT
I'm not arguing with you.

MARION
But I know why you want to.

Okay.

ELIOT

MARION

It's like how sometimes people with artistic inclinations, they see the world differently, like Byron—he was addicted to opium—

Byron?

ELIOT

MARION

He was a poet, he wrote amazing poetry—he also drank a lot and / smoked opium—

Marion—

ELIOT

And sex / he had a lot of sex—

MARION

What are you / talking about?

ELIOT

Lovers.

MARION

What?

ELIOT

You and Victor. You were lovers.

MARION

How do you / figure?

ELIOT

MARION

I found a letter. I was looking for clothing—I don't know if they cremate you in clothing, but I picked out clothes—it was in the drawer with his undershirts, which is funny because I've opened that drawer thousands of times before so maybe he'd just put it there—it was only dated two weeks ago. (beat) I wasn't going to bring it up.

But you did.

ELIOT

I did, yeah.

MARION

Do you want to sit down?

ELIOT

No, I think I'd prefer to stand. (beat) So it's true.

MARION

I think you already know the answer to that.

ELIOT

I did know—you're right, even before the letter. I think I've known for awhile.

MARION

Do you want a drink?

ELIOT

No, thank you. I'm fine.

MARION

Well, I'm going to have a drink.

ELIOT

I read up on it once. I remembered hearing about a man back home. And then I found some studies—did you know that there are studies? Case studies, that sort of thing?

MARION

I imagine there would be. All very clinical.

ELIOT

I'm not angry. I should be angry, but I'm not now—I'm—I don't know what I am—was it for a long time?

MARION

I don't know. Maybe twelve years or so.

ELIOT

Twelve years?

MARION

On and off.

ELIOT

MARION

But we've only been married for ten. Jesus, I thought maybe two or three—that's when my mom died, and I went back to Ohio—I thought maybe that's when—twelve years? Really?

ELIOT

We were good secret keepers.

MARION

Not that good.

ELIOT

I guess not, no. (beat) I should...get the pies.
(ELIOT starts to exit.)

MARION

Wait—aren't you going to apologize?

ELIOT

Apologize? For what?

MARION

Marriage is a sacred bond, and an affair / is an affair

ELIOT

An affair? Is that what you think?

MARION

I don't know, you tell me. Regardless of what might have happened, he was still married to me so what would you call it?

(ELIOT reaches into his pocket and hands Victor's note to MARION.)

ELIOT

Right there, bottom of the page.

MARION

Is that Victor's handwriting? But I thought Carl wrote this.

ELIOT

I hadn't looked at it in years, but last night I skimmed through, most of Victor's changes were small—gin instead of whiskey, pumpkin pie instead of rhubarb—

MARION (looking at paper)

Is that a B?

ELIOT

You know what it says.

MARION

But that doesn't make sense. Does that make sense to you?

ELIOT

Not really.

MARION

That says baby. He says we should have a baby, you and me. Why does it say that?

ELIOT

I couldn't tell you.

MARION

Do you think it's meant to be taken seriously?

ELIOT

I don't know.

MARION

I don't see how we could. Do you?

ELIOT

No. I don't think so.

MARION

Did you ever talk about it, was this something you discussed—

ELIOT

No!

MARION

So you're saying you just opened up this letter and there it was?

ELIOT

That is exactly what I'm saying.

MARION

Were you planning on showing this to me? Because what if I hadn't brought it up, it would have been very convenient for you never to mention it.

ELIOT

But you did bring it up.

MARION

And you never talked about it?

ELIOT

You are looking at me like I have an answer, and I have absolutely no clue! (beat) I thought you might, after all, you're his wife, you must've wanted a baby—

MARION

But not with you! I don't even know why we're talking about this. It's upsetting and insulting and—we're not doing this, all right?

ELIOT

Well, I wouldn't think so, no...although it did cross his mind—don't you find that curious?

MARION

No, I don't want to know—in fact, I don't think we should mention it again. I think we should pretend it never even happened, we should get rid of it—

ELIOT

We can't get rid of it—that's the only copy of the list, and we need it for the rest of the night.

MARION

Does anyone else know about this?

ELIOT

No, I don't think so / I don't know how they could.

MARION

They absolutely can't know—

(CARL enters.)

CARL

Umm sorry...I'm just...I'm going to—

(CARL grabs the bottle of whiskey from the box off the tray.)

Tight race.

(CARL exits.)

ELIOT

Look, we're both in agreement that it isn't something to consider, so let's leave it at that.

MARION

Yes. Right, of course. You know, I might have that drink. What do we have to drink?

(MARION starts looking through the bottles as JACK enters. JACK comes out to the patio as MARION is making the drinks.)

Gin—I don't like gin—vodka, scotch—all right, I'll have gin. You want one—I'm going to make you one (MARION pours gin into a glass). Sorry, it's kind of a heavy pour—

(MARION starts to hand the drink to ELIOT, but JACK grabs it from her. He takes a sip.)

JACK

So, what I miss?

(Blackout.)

(Scene 2: Shortly after the previous scene. VERONICA, MARION and ELIOT are on the patio with JACK, who calmly heaps his plate with as much food as it can hold. ANDREW, CARL and DOROTHY are in the living room, awkwardly eating and eavesdropping.)

VERONICA

Where have you been?

(JACK continues to heap food high on to the plate.)

JACK

Place looks good.

VERONICA

You should have been here hours ago, days—you were supposed to give the eulogy!

JACK

How you doing, Marion?

MARION

I'm fine.

JACK

Really, cause that's not what I heard—I heard you puked in a bucket—

VERONICA

Jack!

MARION

I'm fine. Really.

JACK

How about you, Eliot, are you fine too?

VERONICA

Your brother is dead.

JACK

I know—that's why I'm asking Eliot how he's doing.

ELIOT

I'm getting by.

JACK

Well, look at you guys, a regular bunch of champs. Everyone is fine, getting by—

VERONICA

You missed the funeral—how could you miss your own brother's funeral?

JACK

Do you really think Victor would give a fuck if I were at his funeral or not?

VERONICA

As a matter of fact, I do when your poor mother's all on her own—can you imagine what's going through her head now. And you just deciding not to showing up—no call, no note, nothing—

JACK

I couldn't find a payphone.

VERONICA

Why am I not surprised?

JACK

Why do you even care? I'm sure Eliot gave a much better eulogy than I ever could.

VERONICA

That's not the point. The point is you are Victor's brother. It should have been you giving the eulogy this morning—

JACK

Well, it wasn't so shut up about it.

(JACK puts the plate of food down in front of him, closes his eyes and breathes in deeply.)

DOROTHY (to CARL)

Did I tell you the car was making a funny noise?

CARL

Shhh...

VERONICA

What are you doing?

JACK

Making a memory.

VERONICA

What?

JACK

I'm taking in the smell—it's a full body experience. I took this acting class last month, all about employing the senses—

VERONICA

Jesus Christ.

JACK

Look at this plate of food, think of all the emotions that went into making it—grief, loneliness, despair, comfort, love—

ELIOT

Most of it came from the caterers.

JACK

Greed. Those emotions can be accessed, and they can show us a better way to live our life.

VERONICA

Jack—

JACK

Two seconds.

(JACK breathes in deeply. He nods, opens his eyes, and starts to eat.)

A formal funeral means shit. This is the real funeral, and this is where Victor wanted me—he wrote it all out that night we drank the whiskey, and I fell down the stairs—

CARL (to DOROTHY)

I knew it was the same night!

VERONICA

That was ten years ago.

JACK

And yet (picks up one of the paper boats) I've already missed the boats. What comes next? Dancing, swimming, s'mores—

CARL (to DOROTHY)

S'mores—I forgot about the s'mores.

DOROTHY

This is rude, we're being rude, eavesdropping.

JACK

Can I finish this chicken?

CARL

It's not eavesdropping if they left the door open.

ELIOT

Please do.

ANDREW

The pies are out there—I kind of really want a piece of pie.

JACK

Look, Vee, I just drove two days straight / to be here

VERONICA

You need to go see your mother—

JACK

Tomorrow, all right?

VERONICA

But she's alone tonight—

JACK

Maybe she wants to be alone, did you ever think of that?

VERONICA

Would you want to be alone?

MARION

Veronica, just let him stay already.

(MARION exits through the house.)

Fine, if that's what you guys want.

ANDREW

It would be inappropriate if I snuck out there and got a piece of pie, right?

DOROTHY/CARL

Yes/No

ELIOT (to JACK)

I'll make up the couch for you.

(ELIOT exits through the house.)

JACK

All I want to do is say goodbye to my brother, same as you. So what comes next?

VERONICA

Victor's pain in the ass brother shows up to wreck everything.

JACK

Well, I think we can check that off the list, don't you?

(VERONICA exits into the house. JACK rolls a joint on the patio.
DOROTHY gather up dishes and take them offstage. CARL maybe reads
the paper or tinkers on the piano.)

ANDREW

Soo I'm going to get some pie. Anyone want some?

(ANDREW goes on to the patio and starts to cut a piece of pie.)

JACK

Is that the pumpkin? It's good. You should try it.

ANDREW

I don't really like pumpkin pie.

JACK

You don't like pumpkin pie? What the hell is wrong with you?

ANDREW

Just more of an apple guy, I guess.

JACK

It's not very good, any of it.

ANDREW

It's all been sitting out for most of the day.

JACK

This dip's not bad.

ANDREW

Oh, Eliot just made that. Victor requested it, part of the list, I guess.

JACK

Well, that makes sense—if Eliot made it for Victor.

ANDREW

So you're the brother.

JACK

Yeah. Who the hell are you?

ANDREW

I'm Veronica's fiancé.

JACK

Fuck, she's getting married?

ANDREW

Next month. (beat) I'm sorry for your loss. Victor sounds like a great guy.

JACK

Is that what people have been saying? My brother was some kind of saint?

ANDREW

Well, it is a funeral—people generally say nice things about the deceased.

JACK

See, this—this is exactly why I didn't want to give the fucking eulogy. Victor was the biggest cocksucker prick I know—took what he wanted, when he wanted, didn't give a shit about anyone else. Talented musician—don't get me wrong. Taught at Carnegie Mellon, did you know that?

ANDREW

I heard, yeah—

JACK

But let's not pretend he gave a shit about his students. Rodents, he called them, rodents who wasted time he could be spending on his own stuff. Used to delight in telling kids they had no talent. After the first class, he would call them in to his office one by one and

tell them whether or not they should hang up the towel right then and there. If they didn't listen, and showed up to his class anyway, he'd pretend they weren't there.

ANDREW

Did he really do that? How do you know?

JACK (gesturing to the pot)

Cause he told me. Hey, want some?

ANDREW

Oh, uh, no, better not.

(ANDREW checks to see VERONICA isn't looking, and then takes a hit.)

JACK

Isn't this place the absurd? How much money do you gotta have to say, I know, I'm gonna build a whole fucking house ON A WATERFALL.

ANDREW

I think it's kind of great.

JACK

It's sickening, that's what I think. Spend more time here, and you'll start to think the same thing. All it does is make it hard to hear people so you gotta raise your voice to be heard, soon the next thing you know, everyone's shouting without even realizing it. Do you know once I lit a pillow on fire—one of Eliot's dad's designs.

ANDREW

Why'd you light it on fire?

JACK

Hell if I know. I was on drugs. Victor thought it was funny. He thought it was an ugly pillow—it was an ugly pillow.

ANDREW

Well, I think it's great you made it.

JACK

It was crazy—I've been all up and down the west coast, but never drove cross-country before.

ANDREW

Oh, yeah? Where have you been?

JACK

Let me see—LA, San Francisco, San Diego, everywhere really, worked for a while as a fisherman near Seattle. Victor and I used to send each other postcards. Victor was big on postcards.

ANDREW

I've always admired that—thought about it myself.

JACK

Oh, man, you gotta—if you're thinking about it even a little, you gotta go. When there's nothing between you and highway and bugs, man, before I drove my bike I wondered what all those streaks on the windshield were when you're going really fast on the highway—did you know they're thousands of smashed bugs?

ANDREW

I did, yeah—

JACK

Yeah, now imagine that's your face, and you're on a bike with only a visor. Every time you ride, it's like a thousand little deaths.

(VERONICA goes out to the patio.)

JACK

Look, Vee, I met your fiancé!

VERONICA

Andrew, can I speak to you for a minute?

JACK

I'm going to find more chicken.

(JACK goes into the living room and exits.)

ANDREW

There she is, my paper boat champ—

VERONICA

Don't rub it in.

ANDREW

Second to last is not last, but you are clearly still upset so—

VERONICA

Jack shouldn't be here. He hasn't even seen his mother—

ANDREW

He wants to say goodbye to his brother—that seems reasonable—I say we let him stay.

VERONICA

You say? Since when do you have a say in this matter? These are my friends, you're supposed to be here with me, you're supposed to be comforting me, not sucking up to Eliot or floating boats with Dorothy—

ANDREW

I was trying to be helpful!

VERONICA

You're not being helpful—you're being the exact opposite of helpful!

ANDREW

Then tell me what I'm supposed to do.

VERONICA

You're a smart man. Figure it out.

ANDREW

OK, I'm sorry. I'll do better or try harder or—I don't know.

(ANDREW starts to exit.)

VERONICA

Where are you going?

ANDREW

To get another beer.

(ANDREW exits. MARION comes out onto the patio with VERONICA.)

VERONICA

Can you believe it? Jack blows off the funeral, and then he has the nerve to show up here.

MARION

He said he tried to call.

VERONICA

How's your stomach?

MARION

Better, I think.

VERONICA

Have you eaten yet?

MARION

No, I don't want to. You should eat something though.

VERONICA

I think I'm going to.

(VERONICA starts to make up a plate.)

VERONICA

Ew, beet salad—who thought that was a good idea? Victor hated beet salad.

MARION

He wouldn't go near them. He said they smelled bad.

VERONICA

That's absurd. Beets don't have any smell at all.

MARION

I think it was the vinegar.

VERONICA

I think he's just picky. (beat) This is hard. When you called to tell me the news, I thought that somehow you must've gotten the wrong information.

MARION

That's how it felt when the police called me. I called Eliot right after because I half-expected him to still be there. That happened sometimes, Victor would fall asleep and forget to call.

VERONICA

I was at my office in New York, getting ready to go home. I don't even remember what I said.

MARION

Oh no—that's what you said.

VERONICA

How do you remember that?

MARION

I remember what everyone said.

VERONICA

Were things between you and Victor happy? I mean did Victor seem all right to you?

MARION

He seemed like Victor.

VERONICA

So nothing unusual, no late nights, big fights—

MARION

All couples fight sometimes.

VERONICA

But you two were happy?

MARION

Where are you going with this?

VERONICA

How many times had Victor driven the road between Eliot's house and yours?

MARION

I don't know. Hundreds, I suppose.

VERONICA

And they've played cards together on Tuesdays since they were practically infants.

MARION

Right.

VERONICA

It's not even five miles—he knew that stretch of road like the back of his hand.

MARION

But the weather was bad—

VERONICA

It rained.

MARION

And he probably drank too much.

VERONICA

He always drank too much.

MARION

I still don't see where this is going.

VERONICA

He drove into a tree—head first on a route he had gone on hundreds of times.

MARION

And what—you think he did it on purpose?

VERONICA

I've been debating whether or not to bring it up, but after the funeral I went into Victor's study and found his diary. He had nothing written down after last week, no appointments, no engagements—

MARION

He never used his diary.

VERONICA

He had concerts and appointments written in it.

MARION

I gave him that diary for Christmas, he used it for two months and forgot about it.

VERONICA

Then why was it in his desk?

MARION

Where else would a diary be?

(ELIOT enters the living room.)

VERONICA

But there's nothing after the beginning of the month—

MARION

Did you look at the month before that or the month before that one?

VERONICA

There was some writing in it—

MARION

Yes, back in January when he first got the thing.

VERONICA

See, this is why I didn't tell you.

MARION

Victor did not commit suicide. The police would have said something.

VERONICA

But would they have really? A respected, accomplished musician—

MARION

Please stop talking about this.

(Enter ANDREW into the living room wearing overly large fishing waders. He starts to sing and DOROTHY enters.)

ANDREW (singing)

If you knew Susie,
like I know Susie
Oh! Oh! Oh!
What a girl
There's none so classy
As this fair lassie
Oh! Oh! Holy Moses
What a chassis

VERONICA

Oh, god, what is happening

I told him to be helpful

MARION

Maybe he thinks this is helpful

(MARION and VERONICA enter into the living room as CARL accompanies ANDREW on the piano.)

VERONICA

This isn't helpful,
This is bad, this is mortifying

I'm leaving

I'm serious

He can find his own way home

ANDREW

We went riding,
she didn't balk
Back from Yonkers
I'm the one that had
To walk
If you knew Susie, Like I know
Susie
Oh! Oh! What a girl!

(MARION, DOROTHY, ELIOT and JACK applaud.)

DOROTHY

That was—

ELIOT

Awful.

DOROTHY

Really awful.

CARL

So what you're saying is you want an encore?

VERONICA

Where did you even find those?

ANDREW

In the hall closet. I'm thinking they could be a hit on the runaway. Maybe it'll edge out the mink, make a real splash. What do you say?

VERONICA

Funny, Andrew.

CARL

Hey, remember that time Victor wore your mink, Vee, and wandered around the house saying "I'm wearing Aunt Mim's fur, I'm wearing Aunt Mim's fur"?

JACK

We don't have an Aunt Mim.

CARL

I know—that was the hilarious part.

VERONICA

That was the night after Carnegie Hall, wasn't it? I'm almost positive it was. That was the night Victor met you, Marion. He'd been playing with the symphony, and we were all there—me, Marion, Eliot—

ELIOT

Not Eliot.

VERONICA

You weren't there?

ELIOT

The night Victor met Marion? No, I wasn't with you that night.

VERONICA

Are you sure—the night at Carnegie Hall—I could've sworn you were there—

JACK

I was.

VERONICA

No, you weren't, Jack.

JACK

Yes, I was because right after the show, I introduced Marion to Victor—

VERONICA

What are you talking about, I introduced them—

JACK

No, I introduced them.

VERONICA

No, you didn't—

JACK

You introduced Marion to me at the beginning of the concert, and said, this is my new freshman pet, Marion—she's from Ohio, and I said, "Oh, wow, Ohio—that's the buckeye state, right? Isn't it funny they'd name a state after a deer's eye?" and you said—

VERONICA

Oh my god, Jack—

JACK

Close! But it was more like, "God, Jack, you're such an idiot" or something like that.

VERONICA

Jack, you're such an idiot!

JACK

And then afterwards, when you were powdering your nose or some shit, I introduced Marion to Victor, and I know I introduced them because I remember Victor's face. We were outside, waiting for a cab, and it was the first time he'd ever noticed a woman.

VERONICA

That's not how it happened. Marion, tell him that isn't how it happened.

MARION

No, I think he's right—

JACK

HA! See, Vee!

MARION

No, he is because then I got in the car, and turned to you and said—

VERONICA (realizing)

That's the man I'm going to marry.

DOROTHY

And then you did.

MARION

And then I did. For ten years—almost ten—it would've been ten in November. (beat) I felt like I'd won the jackpot.

(pause)

ANDREW

You know, I read somewhere that scientists think that when you die the brain stays alive for an extra eight minutes. I like to think that maybe those eight minutes extend into a lifetime and those are where we stay for eternity, in the brightest spots of life, the wishbone moments.

VERONICA

What the hell are you talking about?

ANDREW

Nothing, I just found that to be a comforting thought.

VERONICA

Because you're talking about heaven.

ANDREW

Well, not necessarily—I don't think it has to be heaven.

VERONICA

Then that doesn't make any sense.

ANDREW

Why not?

VERONICA

Because it's either heaven or it isn't.

DOROTHY

Does anyone want to listen to a record?

CARL

Does it say anything / about that on the list?

ANDREW

Fine, it can be heaven then.

DOROTHY

Elvis / or Patsy Cline?

VERONICA

But you / said it wasn't—

JACK

Elvis!

ANDREW

I don't know what it is—I just thought it would be something nice to say!

(The same music ELIOT and MARION were listening to before plays.)

DOROTHY

Sorry, I think I did something wrong—I was trying to play Patsy Cline.

CARL

What is this?

JACK

Not Patsy Cline.

MARION

It's Victor's. Eliot played it for me earlier. There's a waterfall in it.

CARL

Like in the music?

ELIOT

He tried to compose it using the waterfall.

VERONICA

Did he really? Oh, well, then let's definitely hear it. Start it again, Eliot.

(ELIOT starts the record again, louder this time. A scratchy, homemade piano song with the waterfall.)

ANDREW

How about that—there is a waterfall / in here.

CARL

He's pulling from John Cage.

DOROTHY

Who's that?

VERONICA

It's lazy, that's what it is—you can barely hear the piano.

ELIOT

It isn't finished.

(JACK starts to roll a joint.)

CARL

It's not about the piano, he's making his listener see what happens when music stops sounding like music.

VERONICA

It's a waterfall—you can go out to the patio and hear the same thing.

CARL

You're missing the point.

ANDREW

I kind of like it.

MARION

I do too.

VERONICA

This is just bad, it's not music at all—it's a bunch of noise.

ANDREW

You know, maybe this isn't a conversation for tonight.

(ELIOT turns off the record.)

VERONICA

Why? Because Victor isn't here? Even if he were I'd say the same things to him that I'm saying to you. I'd tell him this isn't music—you can't dance to this—then I'd ask him when he's going to write something that I can dance to. I used to judge his concerts by the minute I fell asleep. If I made it to the forty-five mark, it was a good show, and I wouldn't have made it five minutes into this thing, I'd be asleep in two, I'd—

(VERONICA breaks off, almost in tears. ANDREW starts to move towards her).

VERONICA (*to ANDREW*)

Definitely don't do that.

(JACK offers VERONICA his joint.)

Yes, give me that.

(VERONICA takes the joint from JACK.)

CARL

So what's next on Victor's list?

ELIOT

Carl plays his newest song.

CARL

God, it doesn't really say that, does it?

ELIOT

Want to see for yourself?

MARION

What will you play?

CARL

I don't know—I hardly play anymore.

DOROTHY

That's not true—you play carols at Christmas for the kids

CARL

But I haven't written anything in years—I don't even know if I remember anything of mine—he really wrote that? Why would he write that? How could he know whether or not I'd still be composing—why would any of us know that?

VERONICA

I think he meant it to be kind.

CARL

Well, he shouldn't have just assumed something like that! It's not kind, it's—I don't know what is it, but it's not kind!

DOROTHY

Honey, you don't have play if you don't want to.

CARL

Yes, I do—it's on the list, and we have to do what's on the list! I'll just play something by Victor, what do I know of Victor's...

(He thinks, and then he plays. It's a sweet song that's completely different from the song we have just heard. ANDREW reaches for VERONICA. They dance. JACK reaches for DOROTHY. They dance. ELIOT goes out on to the patio and lights a cigarette. MARION follows him. Throughout the following, the others continue to dance in the background. ELIOT offers MARION a cigarette. She takes it. They smoke for a moment.)

MARION

Veronica asked me if I was pregnant earlier, and obviously I'm not. The thing is, we had been thinking about a baby for awhile. At first, Victor said the time wasn't right, but then after my mom died, I started to worry that something would happen—his plane would crash or he'd have an aneurism, and I had this thought that maybe if we did have a baby, I'd at least have something to hold on to.

ELIOT

He told me about the baby, and then he asked me to be the godfather.

MARION

But aren't you an atheist?

ELIOT

Well, yeah, but I'd give the kid great christening gifts.

MARION

It's strange that Victor can go from writing something like this to the song we heard earlier.

ELIOT

It sounds like more of his early work. He listened to a lot of Mozart back then. And waltzes—Mozart and waltzes.

MARION

He asked my opinion a lot, although I don't know about music.

ELIOT

He said you were very helpful.

MARION

I'm sure you were much more helpful. You actually understand music, I never really did anything, I mean not really except...

ELIOT

Except for what?

MARION

It's kind of embarrassing because it sounds cliché, but sometimes, well, he called me his muse.

ELIOT

He called you his muse?

MARION

I know, who really says that, who calls someone his muse? It's absurd.

ELIOT

It's not that absurd.

MARION

It is, it really is. Completely absurd.

ELIOT

He said the same thing to me.

MARION

No, he didn't—did he really?

ELIOT

You hear this song playing—

MARION

He wrote it for—

Me. ELIOT/MARION

No / for me— MARION

I'm sorry, but that's what he said. I inspired him. ELIOT

I inspired him! MARION

What did you get for Christmas? ELIOT

From Victor? I don't know if I remember—oh, yes I do! A record. Beethoven, I think. It was nothing I wanted. Why? MARION

I got the Complete Chopin Preludes. ELIOT

I think I might have liked that more. MARION

I think he mixed them up. ELIOT

Do you really? MARION

It's possible. ELIOT

I don't think so. Well, maybe. Were you two together a lot? MARION

A lot more than you think. That trip he took to Paris last spring— ELIOT

You went with him? But I went with him— MARION

ELIOT

You flew in on Saturday, I left that Friday.

MARION

Sounds like a lot of planning.

ELIOT

It was a lot of planning.

MARION

Did you ever resent me?

ELIOT

Of course I resented you.

MARION

Did you ever talk about me?

ELIOT

Yes.

MARION

Often?

ELIOT

More often than I would have liked. (beat) Did you and Victor talk about me?

MARION

No. Never. (beat) Did you sleep in the same bed?

ELIOT

Do you really want to know?

MARION

Yes.

ELIOT

Yes.

MARION

Oh...did his snoring ever wake you up?

ELIOT

His snoring, not really, but the talking—

MARION

Yes! It was more like moaning!

ELIOT

I tried to record it once. I set up the tape recorder, but as soon as I did, he stopped.

MARION

That's a genius idea though. I wish I had thought of it.

ELIOT

Even if we managed to capture it on tape, he probably would have denied it.

MARION

He thought he was lightest sleeper, but the end of the world could have come and gone, and he would have stayed sound asleep.

ELIOT

Aren't you starting to find this kind of funny?

MARION

No, I'm not finding it funny—it's awful, I feel awful, I just want to hit him, shake him—

(ELIOT picks up the martini ashes.)

ELIOT

Shaken not stirred?

MARION

Did you...did you really say that?

(ELIOT pours two drinks and hands one to MARION.)

ELIOT (raising glass)

To Victor—a real son of a bitch.

MARION

A real son of a bitch.

(They drink.)

MARION

Did you ever listen to this song together?

ELIOT

All the time.

MARION

Us too.

ELIOT

It takes a certain kind of person to listen to your own work over and over again.

MARION

Sometimes we danced to it in the living room. Now you're going to tell me you did too.

ELIOT

Of course we did.

MARION

Of course you did.

(ELIOT stands up and extends his hand to MARION. She takes it, but they both start to take the female stance. MARION takes the male position and they waltz. The song ends. They break apart. Inside, the others applaud.)

VERONICA

That was / lovely, Carl.

MARION

Eliot—

DOROTHY

I told you he / could play, didn't?

MARION

Eliot, what if we did—

CARL

I can't believe / I remembered that—

DOROTHY

Play another / one—

VERONICA

Can you play that one that goes (she hums something)

MARION

What if we did have a baby—

DOROTHY

Oh, wait / do you mean (she hums something else.)

JACK

Do you know / anything by Elvis?

VERONICA

Yes, that's it! That's the one!

(Both VERONICA and DOROTHY hum a song. Everyone talks over each other. The noise inside should overtake MARION and ELIOT so we can't quite hear what MARION is saying. CARL starts to play another song, something livelier. It becomes a party you'd want to be at.)

ELIOT

I'm sorry, what?

MARION

A baby—hypothetically, I mean—

(ELIOT shuts the glass doors. The music and action inside is muted, but still audible.)

ELIOT

You're cut off.

MARION

But I'm not drunk.

ELIOT

No one says they're drunk, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't be cut off.

MARION

It kind of does make sense, if you think about it—

ELIOT

No, it doesn't— it makes so little sense that I don't even want to hear how you are going to try to make it make sense.

MARION

A collaboration between the two people he cared for most—

ELIOT

Listen to me, you do not want a child—a child ties you down, and you have so much life ahead of you. I know you don't want to hear this now, but it's not impossible you might even fall in love again someday.

MARION

That won't happen.

ELIOT

You say that now, but it does get easier. We forget that—think about your mom.

MARION

That was different. She was sick and suffering—she wanted to die—we don't know what Victor wanted except for what he wrote, and why else would he write that—
Did you want a baby?

ELIOT

I don't know. I suppose on some level I did, but it never seemed possible. You did though.

MARION

I did, yeah. (beat) You know, it's not like it couldn't be done. If we tried tonight—

ELIOT

Tonight? You want to do this tonight?

MARION

I'm only saying if we did, the timing would work out. I could say I found out I'd conceived right after the funeral. You could still be the godfather, of course, but everyone would think it was Victor's—no one would need to know you had anything to do with it at all.

ELIOT

And thank for god for that, right?

MARION

I don't know—why are you getting angry over this?

ELIOT

Because as always, I'm the one who gets passed over.

MARION

We're only talking hypothetically

ELIOT

And hypothetically you asking me to father a child no one even knows I conceived once again relegates me to the backseat.

MARION

I didn't think of it like that.

ELIOT

And why should you? It's all been very straight forward for you. You fall in love with Victor, you marry him, you want a family, you have his baby. Victor dies, you spread his ashes—that's the way it's always worked for you, so why should it suddenly be any different now.

MARION

This is about the ashes, isn't it?

ELIOT

I don't understand why we both can't spread them.

MARION

Because he chose to be here with you—

ELIOT

In something he wrote ten years ago—

MARION

And altered a few months ago! He didn't change it—he changed what kind of pie we ate, what we drink, but he didn't change that, so tomorrow when I spread his ashes that's it for me—that's goodbye, where as you get to be with him for the rest of your life so you want to talk about being passed over, then explain to me how that's not being passed over?

ELIOT

Because no one will ever know that's why.

(ELIOT exits into the house where the party is going strong. MARION watches them from the patio. After a moment, she exits down the stairs.)

(Scene 3: Much later in the evening. DOROTHY is asleep on the couch. ANDREW is asleep in a chair. On the patio, CARL dozes, stoned out of his mind. VERONICA and JACK attempt to make s'mores over a Citronella candle. They share a joint as VERONICA tests out her marshmallow.)

VERONICA
Almost there.

JACK
These are going to be awful.

VERONICA
They're going to be great.

JACK
I'm not eating mine first.

VERONICA
Wimp.

JACK
Can I tell you again how sorry I am that I missed the boat race, heard you had a killer performance—

VERONICA
How the hell was I supposed to know Andrew would be so good at making paper boats?

JACK
Should've waited for me.

(JACK closes his eyes and breathes in deeply.)

VERONICA
Oh my god, are you making another memory?

JACK
So what if I am?

VERONICA
You're an idiot.

JACK

Being in touch with my senses does not make me an idiot. It makes me alive. So walk me through this again—you think my brother off'ed himself?

VERONICA

How else would you explain it?

JACK

My brother was a shitty driver?

VERONICA

Was he?

JACK

I don't know. I hadn't talked to him in months. Had you?

VERONICA

We talked at Christmas. What the hell is wrong with us?

JACK

He didn't make much of an effort either.

VERONICA

But we're his family. He might have been in trouble, like mental trouble—

JACK

Like the kind of trouble that makes you off yourself?

VERONICA

Or maybe things were getting to be too much with...this thing.

JACK

With Eliot you mean?

VERONICA

Yeah.

(pause.)

JACK

Is he OK?

VERONICA

Eliot?

JACK

Yeah. Is he OK?

VERONICA

Well. His—Victor died.

JACK

How was his eulogy?

VERONICA

Good. Heartbreaking. It was exactly what...you little fucker.

JACK

What?

VERONICA

You did it on purpose.

JACK

I have no idea what you're talking about.

VERONICA

You knew if you didn't show, Eliot would—god, you're a fucker.

JACK

I never said anything. But they loved each other, you knew it, I knew it, they knew—

VERONICA

Let's stop talking about it, all right.

JACK

I'm not sorry I said something that night—there's no reason they couldn't have been happy if they wanted—

VERONICA

I just said not to talk about it!

(pause)

JACK

No way—no way would Victor have off'ed himself. And I'll tell you why for a couple of reasons: first of all, no ghost. Right before I came here I drove to the crash site. It looks like nothing ever happened—a few downed branches, but nothing worse than a bad storm passing through. So I'm sitting there in the grass, thinking about my brother, and I don't feel a damn thing. Places that have witnessed violence like suicides—they don't feel like

that, there's bad energy—hence ghosts. But that place is so fucking peaceful you can hear the cars on the interstate. Victor loved his life, but he's got better things to do now. There's no way he's hanging around here.

VERONICA

What were your other reasons?

JACK

What?

VERONICA

You said you had a couple of reasons.

JACK

Oh, yeah. Right. So remember the eclipse?

VERONICA

Back in February?

JACK

Yeah, that eclipse. Five planets in alignment—that kind of shit never happens, and it definitely can't happen without some serious side effects. Think about it, first Faulkner passed—

VERONICA

Faulkner died?

JACK

Yeah, in like April. Then Marilyn Monroe—

VERONICA

That, I knew about.

JACK

Then Herman Hesse?

VERONICA

Who?

JACK

Next it was ee cummings and now Victor—you see where I'm going with this, right? Five artists, five planets, each one on his or her own planet. It's so obvious—that's what the eclipse was all about.

VERONICA

Which planet is Victor's?

JACK

Well, how the hell should I know that? But Victor knew. (beat) Do you ever wonder if living people can have ghosts because being here tonight, I keep thinking I'll run into us, younger versions of you and me and Victor and the rest, and man, the things, I'd tell those guys.

VERONICA

Like telling Victor not to get into that car?

JACK

No, you don't mess with stuff like that. Just all the things you wish you had told people more often. OK, I'm pissing in the woods.

VERONICA

Do you think it had anything to do with what I said that night?

JACK

Veronica, I really don't think it was a suicide—

VERONICA

But if it was, I told them not to be together, Victor's career was taking off, and Eliot's dad and—

JACK

If Victor wanted to be with Eliot do you think anything you or I or any one said would've stopped him? (beat) OK, now I'm really going.

VERONICA

Jack?

JACK

Jesus—now what?

VERONICA

You guys used to let me win, didn't you?

JACK

It was Victor's idea.

(JACK exits down the stairs.)

CARL

Do you really think Victor would do that?

VERONICA

Live on his own planet? Of course, he would, he'd love that. I didn't realize you were awake. Want a marshmallow?

CARL

Sure. Do you really think Victor committed suicide?

(VERONICA fixes CARL a s'more, which she hands to CARL.)

VERONICA

The Victor I knew would never have, but this Victor makes music out of waterfalls so who knows what kind of person he was.

CARL (eating s'more)

Making music out of nature isn't suicidal—but this—this is lethal! (spitting it out) What the hell is that?

VERONICA

Listening to a waterfall all day—wasn't that a form of torture used by the Japanese?

CARL

I think I might be joining Victor—seriously, what was that?

VERONICA

We roasted the marshmallows over the Citronellas—are they really that bad? They don't smell bad. The marshmallows were a little stale—they were in Victor's box.

CARL

That's what we're eating!

VERONICA

I don't think marshmallows can go bad, the graham crackers on the other hand—

CARL

Oh god.

VERONICA

Oh no—we threw those away. These chocolate bars though, they last forever. Don't you wish people were more like chocolate bars?

CARL

I don't know, but I'm eating it.

(CARL takes the chocolate bar from VERONICA and starts to eat it.)

You know if you were going to kill yourself you might not want anyone to know, especially because of life insurance so it would be in your best interest to make it look like an accident.

VERONICA

That's what I'm saying!

CARL

In that case, you probably wouldn't leave a note. So what do we do?

VERONICA

You believe me?

CARL

It sounds suspicious enough that we should at least consider it. Maybe we can question the police.

VERONICA

Or hire a private investigator because now the question becomes why would he commit suicide.

CARL

I might be able to get his medical records.

VERONICA

You would do that?

CARL

Sure, I would! What's the point in being a lawyer otherwise?

VERONICA

He had an office at Carnegie Mellon, we should check there too.

CARL

Maybe we should go in undercover.

VERONICA

Undercover, I like that.

CARL

Let's do this, let's leave right now—

Now? VERONICA

Right now, I'll drive— CARL

You can't drive. VERONICA

We could sail then, take the rafts down the creek, straight into the Alleghany, we'd be there by noon— CARL

You're drunk. VERONICA

Yes, but that doesn't mean I can't steer. Let's go, you and me—I'm serious, we can't think— CARL

Carl— VERONICA

I think I'm in love with you. CARL

What? VERONICA

I think I've been in love with you for years— CARL

Oh god. VERONICA

We need to act on times like these, before it's too late and the world comes crashing down— CARL

You are not in love with me. You are drunk and stoned and sad and— VERONICA

CARL

I should have told you years ago.

VERONICA

All right, all right, stop it—you have a lovely wife, who you love—

CARL

I know, I do love her, but I think I also love you. Is that possible? Can a person be in love with two people at the same time?

VERONICA

No, it's not possible. You always love one more than the other, and right now I am telling you that you love your wife.

CARL

Do you believe in time travel?

VERONICA

Like the Twilight Zone?

CARL

It feels like we've fallen back in time—the stars, the waterfall, even the glasses—the glasses are still the same—isn't that odd? Do you know what I keep thinking about? What a great bomb shelter this place would make—isn't that morbid? But you could stay here forever and no one would find you—can I kiss you?

VERONICA

No.

(CARL kisses VERONICA. She pushes him away.)

CARL

Do you remember when I jumped off this railing?

VERONICA

After the flood? Sure I do, it was one of the stupidest things I've ever witnessed.

CARL

I felt so alive that night. I have to do something to remember I'm alive, Vee, because Victor's death, it's making me question things. I didn't have a song. I haven't written one since the summer after college. But I remember Victor's songs not mine—what does that say?

VERONICA

He wasn't better than you—he just maybe wanted it more.

CARL

But that's what I mean, only Victor did exactly what he said he would. He packed a whole lifetime into a few years, and that's the sort of thing that gets you a church full of admirers. The Times published his obituary and people who never even met him mourned him. Hundreds of people all over the country might have done exactly what I did tonight, and played a song he wrote when they couldn't remember how to play one of their own. Every time they play that song, they'll remember him. Whereas when I die, what will I have? Legal briefs? Old family photos in my kids' basements? Who's going to fill my church someday?

(VERONICA stands up and kisses CARL on the cheek.)

VERONICA

It's cold. I'm going to go in and get a sweater.

(VERONICA exits through the house as the phone rings. ELIOT answers it. CARL lies back down.)

ELIOT (on phone)

Hello?

This is Eliot, who is this?

Hello, Suzy. Your Mommy is— (looks over and sees DOROTHY sleeping)

There's a monster living in your closet?

Sure, I understand—monsters can be pretty scary.

Well, you know how to get rid of monsters, don't you?

Just go right up to him and say HI—

Then invite him to come over for a Coca Cola—

Because monsters are lonely—that's why they bother you, they don't want to be alone anymore.

(ELIOT notices CARL outside.)

You know what, Suzy, you're daddy is right here—

(ELIOT pops his head out the door.)

ELIOT

Carl, your daughter is on the phone.

CARL

Suzy?

ELIOT

There's a monster in her closet.

(CARL runs over to the phone and picks it up. As he starts to talk to her, DOROTHY wakes up.)

CARL (on the phone)

Suzy, honey, it's daddy? Is everything okay?

(ELIOT begins to clean the patio, going back and forth between the patio and living room, carrying bottles.)

CARL (on the phone)

Yes, I heard there was a monster in your closet, but what did we say—the monster isn't real, right—it's just...he's what...that's right, he's just lonely...yes, he's a friendly monster...uhhh, sure, he can come to dinner...I don't know what monsters eat, but we can—

ELIOT

Mac and cheese.

CARL

Mac and cheese. Monsters love mac and cheese—hey, what do you know? You love that too!...okay, princess, go back to sleep now and when you open your eyes Mommy and I will be home. I love you too. Buh bye.

(DOROTHY is awake by now. CARL hangs up the phone.)

CARL (to ELIOT)

Thank you.

ELIOT

You're very lucky.

(ELIOT exits.)

DOROTHY

Who was that?

CARL

Suzy.

DOROTHY

Monsters?

CARL

She's fine. Eliot took care of it.

DOROTHY

How long ago did I fall asleep?

CARL

A few hours.

DOROTHY

Why didn't you wake me?

CARL

I don't know.

DOROTHY

Where's everyone else?

CARL

I don't know.

DOROTHY

What time is it?

CARL

I don't know.

DOROTHY

Carl?

CARL

Yeah?

DOROTHY

Are you stoned?

CARL

Yees?

DOROTHY

Carl, why are you stoned right now?

CARL

Because my friend died—my very famous friend, and I’m old and boring—and it was on the list—

DOROTHY

Oh, forget the list!

CARL

Dorothy—

DOROTHY

It was ten years ago!

CARL

We owe to him!

DOROTHY

Why? The man is dead—

CARL

He was my friend—

DOROTHY

He couldn’t even bother to RSVP to our wedding

CARL

He had his career to think about, that’s called drive—

DOROTHY

No, that’s called being self-centered. You know, I read Victor’s obituary too, and while it lists his accomplishments and talents, nowhere does it say that he was a good person, or a kind or compassionate one, or that he was someone who plays carols for his kids or makes great paper boats or invites monsters over for dinner, and maybe it’s old and boring, but if the only thing your obituary can say is that you were a great artist, well then, to me, you’ve missed out.

(DOROTHY kisses CARL. She starts to take her clothes off. He tries to keep them on.)

CARL

Whoa, whoa—what are you doing?

DOROTHY

I thought swimming was part of Victor’s funeral plans, and if you’re so keen to do what he says—

CARL

Right, yes, but it's pretty dark down there—what if you step on a rock or a snapping turtle or an eel—

DOROTHY

An eel?

CARL

There are eels around here, and leeches. Snakes too. Cotton mouths.

DOROTHY

It's October.

CARL

There's no season for snakes!

DOROTHY

Then I guess you should probably come down and protect me.

(DOROTHY, now almost completely naked, steps onto the patio. She picks up an inflatable raft and exits down the stairs to the water. CARL frantically starts to take off his clothes, and goes after her, taking the other raft with him. Inside, VERONICA enters, wearing a sweater. She wakes up ANDREW.)

VERONICA

Carl thinks I'm right.

ANDREW

Huh?

VERONICA

Jesus, Andrew, the suicide. Carl is going to get Victor's medical records.

ANDREW

Veronica, your cousin didn't commit suicide.

VERONICA

You can't tell me that until you have proof.

ANDREW

But there might never be proof.

VERONICA

There has to be—a letter, a note, maybe it's in the music—

ANDREW

You have to let this go—

VERONICA

Suicide I can wrap my mind around. A person wanting to kill himself—it's a shame, but it happens. I get it. My friend's husband came back from the Korea and blew his brains away in their woodshed last winter. It was horrific, but there was no doubt. I only wish Victor hadn't left us any doubt. I wonder if Marion knows and isn't saying—

ANDREW

Please do not talk about this in front of Marion.

VERONICA

Oh, I already brought it up to her.

ANDREW

Veronica, are you completely out of your mind? The woman is spreading her husband's ashes tomorrow!

VERONICA

I thought she would want to know, I'd want to.

ANDREW

What is the matter with you? Don't you think the last thing these people need is this crazy notion you've concocted about a man they all love killing himself?

VERONICA

I loved him too.

ANDREW

Then what does it matter how he died?

VERONICA

You know what, maybe you shouldn't have come—no, that's not fair. I wanted you to come.

ANDREW

I'll do whatever it is you want me to do, but you have to tell me.

VERONICA

So you'll help me investigate this suicide theory?

ANDREW

That I won't do.

VERONICA

But you said—

ANDREW

That's not comforting anyone! The point is Victor is dead, now is the time to remember all the things that you loved about him, celebrate that and let the rest go.

VERONICA

Fine, I'll do it myself.

ANDREW

Veronica—

VERONICA

Leave me alone.

(VERONICA exits. ANDREW starts to go after her, but stops. He lights a cigarette. He goes to the record player and starts to softly play the song from earlier as ELIOT enters.)

ANDREW

Sorry—was I playing it too loud?

ELIOT

No, it's fine. Keep playing it, if you want.

ANDREW

I can't tell if I like it or not. Like on one hand, I kind of just want to hear the piano and on the other, I kind of just want to hear the waterfall, which is exactly not the point, I suppose.

ELIOT

The balance is off.

ANDREW

Yeah, maybe that's it. The balance is off. That's not true for his other stuff. It's usually always so deliberate. Or something. I don't know. I know nothing about music.

ELIOT

No, I think you might be right. He was trying to make it make sense, trying to balance both the piano and the waterfall rather than choosing one. He should have done what came naturally, instead he thought he could have both at the same time, which was really, well, it was unfair of him.

ANDREW

Unfair to who—the piano or the waterfall?

ELIOT

I don't know.

ANDREW

Yeah, I don't either, but that's kind of great too, like a chicken and an egg—which came first, the piano or the waterfall? I have no idea what I'm talking about. I just say these things, but for a song like this, when he's clearly trying to make something new, can you have one without the other?

ELIOT

I guess not.

ANDREW

Don't tell Vee, but this is really starting to grow on me.

(ANDREW exits. ELIOT stands there a moment, listening as VERONICA enters.)

VERONICA

Did you and Victor fight that night?

ELIOT

Not really, no.

VERONICA

Not really or no? Which is it?

ELIOT

No.

VERONICA

What was the last thing you said to him?

ELIOT

Does it matter?

VERONICA

Were you putting pressure on him or—

ELIOT

“Pull the door hard behind you.”

VERONICA

What?

ELIOT

The door handle sticks so I told him to pull it hard, and I only remember because it's such a stupid thing to say to a person you're never going to see again.

VERONICA

But you didn't know you were never going to see him again.

ELIOT

I didn't, no.

VERONICA

How was he?

ELIOT

He was Victor.

VERONICA

Was he healthy?

ELIOT

I assume so.

VERONICA

Was he happy?

ELIOT

Shouldn't you be asking Marion these questions?

VERONICA

I already asked her—

ELIOT

Well, then there you go.

VERONICA

But you would know.

ELIOT

How could I possibly know more than his wife? She's the one married to him.

VERONICA

Except he spent all this time here with you.

ELIOT

He was working on an album.

VERONICA

You know that's not the only reason.

ELIOT

Marion spent every day with him. If something were wrong she would know.

VERONICA

Yes, but...but everyone knows you're the one he loved.

ELIOT

...

VERONICA

Please don't make me say it again.

ELIOT

Yes.

VERONICA

Yes what?

ELIOT

He was happy. *(beat)* I have to go do something.

VERONICA

Right now? What could you possibly have to do right now?

ELIOT

It will only take a second.

(ELIOT exits, and VERONICA shouts after him.)

VERONICA
Eliot—

ELIOT
One second!

(pause)

VERONICA
You don't think it had anything to do with what I said that night?
The night with the whiskey...Jack fell down the stairs...

(ELIOT reenters.)

ELIOT
I barely remember that night, and I don't think anyone else does either.

VERONICA
Do you think he had cancer? He might have had cancer—he smoked a lot of cigarettes—they say it gives you cancer, and Victor always said he never wanted to linger in his death, he wanted to go fast, like a match so maybe if he had cancer—Marion's mom had cancer—

(Enter MARION from the stairs. She hears them from the patio.)

MARION
Victor did not commit suicide. It was an accident.

VERONICA
You don't know that.

(MARION enters the living room.)

MARION
He was wearing his seatbelt.
(Enter ANDREW.)

VERONICA
Then there must have been something wrong with the car—did either of you ask about car? If he was still driving that old Ford, who knows what kind of shape it was in like maybe the brakes were going, or the transmission. Jesus Christ, he could have at least bought himself a new car! It had to be the car, don't you think?... Don't you think it was the car?...What is wrong with you two? You're the two people in the world who loved him best—you're supposed to want to know what happened.

(CARL and DOROTHY enter, now in a state of half-dress)

Because it seems to me that a man, a healthy, talented, capable man can't just die, he can't just drive his car off a road he knew all too well and hit a tree. There has to be more to it, there has to be—

ANDREW

Veronica, you have to let this go now.

VERONICA

I can't let it go—if he committed suicide then we have to know why, we have to get to the bottom of it—we have to know the truth—

ANDREW

You are never going to know the truth.

VERONICA

But we have to at least try—we have to know what happened—
He hit a tree—

ANDREW

Let it go.

VERONICA

Why would he run into a tree?

ANDREW

Let it go.

VERONICA

But—

ANDREW

Let it go.

VERONICA

But that's....that's so hard.

(Maybe VERONICA finally cries. Maybe she doesn't. Either way, ANDREW embraces her and she doesn't pull away. They exit together. The remaining four look are quiet for a moment.)

ELIOT *(to CARL and DOROTHY)*

Where have you two been?

CARL

Oh, uh, we were just—um—looking at the um stars or—

DOROTHY

Oh my god, Carl, they know what we were doing.

(CARL and DOROTHY exit together.)

ELIOT

We should consider calling it a night too.

MARION

You really can hear the waterfall everywhere. I never realized how loud it is. And Victor liked it?

ELIOT

He loved it.

MARION

Does it ever make you crazy though?

ELIOT

It makes me feel like I'm never alone.

MARION

I didn't matter, did I?

ELIOT

Of course you did—

MARION

It's okay—you can say I didn't, but I would just like to know. It changes things, like the way one grieves, but I'd really appreciate if you could just tell me.

ELIOT

I have something for you.

(ELIOT hands MARION a postcard.)

MARION

This is from Niagara Falls, we went there on our honeymoon.

ELIOT

I know. He sent it to me.

MARION

He sent you a postcard on our honeymoon?

ELIOT

Just read it.

MARION (reading the postcard.)

“The falls are beautiful. Come see us when you get a chance. Marion sends her love—she’s everything—“

ELIOT

Just maybe not out loud.

(MARION reads it quietly for a moment. She takes it in.)

MARION

He sent this to you?

ELIOT

Yeah.

MARION

And he said these things about me.

ELIOT

...Yeah.

MARION

Thank you for this, really. You didn’t have to give it to me.

ELIOT

No, I did.

MARION

Why do you suppose he wrote that—about the baby?

ELIOT

I’ve been thinking about that too, and I think maybe he didn’t want us to be alone.

MARION

I’m very sorry for your loss.

ELIOT

Thank you.

(Blackout.)

(Scene 4: The next morning. Sunshine and birds. The patio is completely covered now in leaves as if autumn arrived overnight. Pancakes, bacon and sausages sizzle on the grill. JACK pours more pancakes on the griddle. A bowl of batter is on the table. He sets an egg timer. He picks up the ashes, and looks at them a minute and then places them on the picnic table.)

JACK

Whoa. Heavy. (beat)

(He looks at the batter and the ashes and then back to the batter, considering a disturbing possibility.)

Gross.

(The egg timer goes off. JACK goes over to the grill and starts putting pancakes on a plate. He looks back at the ashes. An idea. He picks up another plate and fills that one with pancakes. He puts the two plates across from each other. He pushes the ashes in front of one, and JACK sits down across from them. He puts forks in front of both plates.)

JACK

Looks good, right? I burned the edges just the way you like them. That's how Mom used to make them, remember? (he takes a bite) Mmm...good... Look at us, you, me, a beautiful day, and a stack of pancakes—we're the luckiest sons of bitches in the world. Hang on... (JACK closes his eyes. He breathes. He opens one eye and looks at the ashes skeptically.) Don't you laugh at me...More syrup?...allow me—there's this place in San Fran that makes great pancakes and get this—they put pineapple in them. Next time you visit, I'll take you, and this year, you're coming for a visit—

(Enter VERONICA and ANDREW, now in bathrobes.)

JACK

Hey, good morning—please join us.

ANDREW

Are those pancakes?

JACK

And bacon too.

VERONICA

Oh my god, my head—

ANDREW

These look great, Jack.

(JACK puts pancakes on plates for VERONICA and ANDREW. They sit.)

Hey, these are really good—
VERONICA

Made ‘em from scratch—
JACK

Vee, / let’s get the recipe.
ANDREW

Is it Nana’s recipe?
VERONICA

(CARL and DOROTHY enter, also in bathrobes.)

What is that smell?
DOROTHY

Jack made pancakes.
ANDREW

From scratch!
JACK

I’m dying / I think I might actually be dying.
CARL

I know—
VERONICA

This is it—
CARL
ANDREW
I don’t know about you, Dorothy,
but I feel great.

I hate you both.
VERONICA
DOROTHY
Terrific.

I told you I have aspirin.
DOROTHY
VERONICA
Jack, I really think these are almost
as good as Nana’s.

Wait, you had aspirin?
CARL

JACK

They're better—perfection on a plate

DOROTHY

I told you that—

ANDREW

We should go on a walk before we
leave—

CARL

Did you? When—

VERONICA

It is perfection—because this
is Nana's recipe.

DOROTHY

When your head was in the toilet bowl.

(ELIOT enters with mugs and a pot of coffee. At some point over the
following, MARION enters. No one notices her except ELIOT.)

ELIOT

Who wants coffee?

JACK

They aren't Nana's, I made them up.

CARL

Oh, right. You did. Hey did I tell you
Suzy called?

VERONICA

I think I remember what Nana's taste
like, and they tasted like this.

DOROTHY

You did, several times.

ANDREW

Hey, Vee, what about a walk before
we had back to the city? Smell that
air you can't find air like that in
Manhattan.

CARL

See, look at that—high
as a kite and still a good dad.

JACK

Mine have almond extract
Nana's had—

CARL

It's like the splitting kind of
headache, right here
At the front part of your
skull.

ELIOT

Milk—anyone?

Or sugar?

I've got tea too.

Would anyone prefer tea?

VERONICA

Almond extract.

DOROTHY

Veronica, what's your
wedding dress look like?

JACK

Huh. Maybe they are Nana's. Maybe you need a little
Pancakes, Eliot?

ANDREW

Right, those are the worst.
hair of the dog?

Eliot, I'll take two sugars.

ELIOT

CARL

	In a minute.	Oh, god, the smell would make me sick. Jack, good pancakes!
VERONICA Oh, god, Dot, it's gorgeous!	ANDREW Eliot, do you see a lot of deer around here?	JACK Hey, Eliot, hope it's cool I used your sausage ELIOT You know its venison, right?
VERONICA Andrew, don't listen! Lots of lace up here--	JACK (singing) Wise men say only fools rush in But I can't help falling in love with you Shall I stay Would it be a... something!	ANDREW Hey, look—a deer! CARL Would you mind if I brought the kids here sometime? Maybe take them fishing?
DOROTHY Sounds beautiful.	VERONICA Sin.	ANDREW Have you ever taken them fishing before?
VERONICA And then the neckline's like this— And it has little sleeves, Very Jackie, long gloves—	JACK Would it be a SIN If I can't help falling in love with you Like the river flower surely to the sea Darling so it goes Some things are meant to be Take my hand Take my whole life true Because I've made Wonderful pancakes For you Who's still hungry...	CARL Nope, it would be an adventure. We took them to the Grand Canyon this summer. Now that that was an adventure. The car broke down just outside of Toledo Hot as Hades, and then the baby got into the diaper bag and ate all the Desitin which of course made her so sick...
DOROTHY I like long gloves		
VERONICA Well, it'll be November.		
DOROTHY Right, of course.		
VERONICA And let me tell you about the bridesmaid's dresses. They're pale pink with a flower right here. Did I tell you I'm not wearing a veil? Just a headband with a little bow. Something simple...		

(The happiest kind of ordinary noise in the world. At some point, unnoticed by the others, MARION picks up the martini shaker and looks at ELIOT and nods towards him. Together, they dump out the ashes, and as they do, everything becomes silent except for the waterfall. MARION sits the martini shaker on the railings and sound immediately returns.)

*MARION and ELIOT join the others—chewing, drinking, talking,
laughing—all the sounds of living.
Blackout. End of play.)*