

Barricades

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A Thesis
in
The Department
of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts (English/Creative Writing) at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

February 2021

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Abstract

Barricades

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This play reunites three generations of women, Pat (79), Elaine (52), and Julia (23), in the family house during an ice storm. Julia, who lives with her father, visits her mother for the first time in months with the news that her father is getting remarried. Lonely and bitter, Elaine is desperate to reconnect with her daughter and control her happiness. Pat's presence appeases this dynamic, until she reveals her own secret reason for staying at the house. As they spend time together playing a game called Barricades, the three women grapple with the choices they made and the ones they will make. "The past is the past, and the future is the future," Pat says, but is it? Grounded in questions of identity, desire, and betrayal, the narrative explores the complexity of memories and human relationships. Written with a tinge of humour, the work is influenced by Wendy Wasserstein's plays and realistic theatre and portrays three complicated women in 2020.

Acknowledgments

All my gratitude goes to my supervisor, Kate Sterns, who has been my guide in this creative journey and my ally in finding my voice. Thank you for being the O'Connor and Chekhov of supervisors, even during the pandemic.

Additional thanks to the Department of English and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for their financial support. I am also grateful to Greg MacArthur and Cynthia Quarrie, my examiners, for providing invaluable feedback and motivating me to become a better writer.

I express my most affectionate thanks to my partner, Catherine, whose love and intelligence always end up colouring my work and making me a better person. Thank you for being my support system with Romy.

I would also like to thank my friend Valerie for cheering on all my work. We did it!

Finally, my utmost appreciation goes to my family, especially my parents, for always believing in me and encouraging me to become the best version of myself.

Special mention goes to all the women in my life who inspired me for this story and continue to do so.

Barricades

Characters

JULIA, 23

ELAINE, 52

PATRICIA (PAT), 79

Note on casting: Diversity is encouraged and should be present on stage, whether in terms of race, body types, gender, etc. Regarding race, the script should be modified to depict accurately the chosen family's race and cultural background. It is encouraged to cast women of the same age as the characters.

ACT 1
SCENE 1

The living room of a modest house. A sofa. A table with four chairs. Two doors: one kitchen and one front door.

It's January 11, 2020. An ice storm is causing devastation outside.

ELAINE (52) sits at the table next to her mother, PATRICIA (PAT) (79). Both are concentrated on the board game in front of them, an old game called Barricades, the 1970s edition. PAT walks with a cane.

Someone (JULIA, 23) turns the doorknob of the front door. The door is locked. She inserts her key, but the key doesn't fit. PAT hears some rattling.

The actors are encouraged to inhabit the space as if it were their own: get a glass of water, take off their sweater, stretch, play with objects, etc., throughout the play.

PAT

Do you hear that noise?

ELAINE

It must be the storm.

PAT

Is somebody trying to get in?

ELAINE

It would be suicide to be out in this weather!

PAT

Elaine, I hear keys.

ELAINE

Do you think it's...?

ELAINE gets up. At the same moment, JULIA knocks. ELAINE opens the door to greet JULIA. She's dripping.

JULIA

My key doesn't work.

JULIA removes her boots and wants to put her coat on the hook. This familiar action is interrupted by a lack of space on the hooks.

ELAINE

Did you drive in the ice storm?

JULIA

Oh, it was nothing. Do you know why my key doesn't fit anymore? Hi, Mom.

JULIA and ELAINE embrace briefly. There's tension between them.

ELAINE

I had to change the lock. Julia, how irresponsible of you to drive today!

JULIA takes the hanger that ELAINE gives her and puts her coat in the closet.

JULIA

Don't worry, I drove at your speed.

PAT

My beautiful Julia.

JULIA

Hi, Grandma.

ELAINE

I know you were only a little girl, but don't you remember my accident? I spent an entire month in the hospital. I had several fractures on my hips and shoulders, almost lost an arm. I can't believe you came here!

JULIA

I'm here, aren't I?

ELAINE

You're not going outside again until the storm is over and the roads have been salted. Okay?

JULIA

Sure.

ELAINE

I mean it.

JULIA

Okay. I promise. Why did you change the lock?

ELAINE

My key broke in it. Snapped right in two. A few weeks before Christmas.

PAT

I still can't believe you smushed a cake in the process.

ELAINE

It was a cake for Grady's engagement. So beautiful. There's a new bakery down the street and the owner makes this heaven-sent lemon cake with white chocolate icing. I just had to offer it as an engagement present.

JULIA

Grady's engaged?

ELAINE

To a lovely girl. She's Italian. (*PAT rubs her thumb with her fingers to signify that the wedding will be expensive.*) They're thinking about getting married where Celine Dion got married.

PAT

In Montreal?

ELAINE

That's what Grady's mom told me, though she secretly wishes they would get married in the same church she did, here in Ontario.

PAT

Wasn't Grady Julia's first boyfriend?

JULIA

We were five.

ELAINE

They were attached at the hip. Always hugging and kissing—on the cheek, of course. Julia cried for hours when he turned down her proposal. I thought they would end up together someday.

JULIA

Again, we were five.

PAT

It's never too late. Where's your boyfriend, Julia?

JULIA

I don't have one, and you know that.

JULIA hugs PAT.

PAT

Hello my dear. How are you? How's work?

JULIA

The usual. I thought insurance would turn out to be interesting.

PAT

You did?

JULIA

Mom made it seem like it. Boy was I wrong!

ELAINE

Insurance can be very fun, though maybe not in a junior position. Do you know who's also a junior partner at a firm? Grady.

JULIA and ELAINE sit at the table.

JULIA

What happened with the cake?

ELAINE

I ruined it before I could give it to him. I was holding that thick, spongy lemon cake in one hand and struggling to insert the key in the lock with the other—I was juggling other Christmas purchases, you see. Then, a dog barked, which, in my defence, sounded more like a snarl. I thought, “This is it. There's a dog behind just waiting to pounce on me!” I whipped my head to check, lost my balance, and dropped the cake. Thirty-five-dollars! Though I did eat it. It was only disfigured! I wasn't going to waste it. When I finally put the key in the hole, it broke.

JULIA

I'll give you my key back.

PAT

That's what I call a bad day.

ELAINE
(To JULIA)

You can throw it away. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry, I haven't made spares yet.

JULIA

That's fine.

Pause.

PAT

How were the roads?

JULIA

Icy.

ELAINE

I still don't understand what motivated you to take your car today. I told you: Grandma is here for a few weeks. Would you like something to drink?

JULIA

Do you have tea?

ELAINE

Chai, Earl Grey, or Chamomile.

JULIA

Chai. I wanted to see you. Both.

ELAINE

You're not invincible, Julia. When there's a storm, you stay inside. That's common sense.

ELAINE exits for a brief second to the kitchen to heat some water. She comes back right away.

JULIA

Cars were skidding like bowling balls on a waxed lane. But not mine. With the tires Dad bought me, I didn't have that problem.

At the mention of Julia's father, ELAINE's demeanor changes.

PAT

I'm glad to see you safe and sound. How is your father?

JULIA glances at her mother. She watches her reaction.

JULIA

He's, huh, fine. Just busy with his projects.

ELAINE

And his new girlfriend.

PAT

He's always been busy, that one. Is he feeding you well? You look a bit skinny.

JULIA

He's learning how to cook. (*ELAINE scoffs.*) We've been eating... interesting meals. Most of them taste bland, some are charred. There was one gooey one—I think it was supposed to be a curry—I just couldn't swallow it.

ELAINE

Are you telling me that his new girlfriend doesn't cook?

JULIA

Not really.

PAT

Oh, that's a shame. Your mom's an excellent cook.

ELAINE
(*Almost simultaneously with JULIA*)

He knows that.

JULIA

He remembers that. (*Pause.*) How are you, Grandma?

PAT

In all honesty, I'm cross.

JULIA

Why?

PAT

My only granddaughter didn't call me on Christmas, and then on New Year's Eve. It's what now, the eighth?

ELAINE

The eleventh.

PAT

Already? The eleventh of January, and she still hasn't called me.

JULIA

I'm so sorry Grandma. I swear I meant to. It's not that I didn't think about you, because I did.

(*Pause.*) I don't have any valid reasons not to have called you.

PAT

It's not like I have people waiting in line to see me. I only have my family, and it is disappointing when family doesn't do what family does: care.

JULIA

I do care. I'm here now!

ELAINE

Oh, don't worry, Mom. I got text messages on both occasions.

JULIA

Yeah, so?

ELAINE

A phone call would have been nicer. After all, I haven't seen my daughter in months.

JULIA

I knew I would see you soon.

ELAINE

Maybe, but it would have been a nice gesture to call.

JULIA

Why didn't *you* call?

ELAINE

I didn't want to bother you.

JULIA

You wouldn't have bothered me.

ELAINE

How was I supposed to know that?

JULIA

My Instagram stories. That's the whole point of following me on social media.

PAT

All we're saying, Julia, is that we prefer phone calls. I'm too old for these ridiculously small phones of yours.

JULIA

Alright, next year I'll call you.

PAT

Before that is my birthday. In six days to be precise. I expect a phone call from my granddaughter. I'm turning eighty.

JULIA

How do you feel about it?

PAT

Seventy-nine, I felt nothing about. This year, eight and zero are constantly up in my face. There's no going back.

JULIA

Any regrets?

PAT

Too many.

JULIA

What are you gonna do?

PAT

Die with them.

JULIA

I meant for your birthday.

ELAINE

We're gonna watch *Fried Green Tomatoes* and eat some cake. Her choice.

PAT

Will it be lemon?

ELAINE

If you want.

PAT

I'd rather have one of these double chocolate cakes. They never offer chocolate cake at my place.

Too many residents with diabetes. Or perhaps, one of those volcano cakes.

ELAINE

You mean a lava cake.

PAT

That!

JULIA

Flu season coincides well with your birthday.

PAT

Aren't I lucky to have a daughter who will take me in? I hate it when we're trapped in our apartment, forbidden to walk outside, borrow a book, or play Scrabble. We're not children or pets. It takes a toll on us. Last year, Mr. Wong looked ten years older when he opened his door after the two-week confinement. The man could barely walk!

ELAINE

It's not good for your health. I'd rather have you stay here.

PAT

In my old house.

JULIA

It's crazy to think that this house used to be yours before it was Mom's.

PAT

Yet your grandfather and I spent thirty-four years in this house.

JULIA

You must have a lot of memories here.

PAT

Most of my memories are related to this house somehow. A lot of firsts and lasts.

ELAINE

I'm glad you're here. We can play Barricades.

ELAINE exits to the kitchen.

JULIA

Barricades? Is that...?

PAT

We used to play it when you were a child.

JULIA

Wow. I had completely forgotten about this game.

PAT

We can start a new one. I was losing anyway.

JULIA

What are the rules again?

ELAINE brings back a cup of tea. She hands it to JULIA.

ELAINE

If Grady does end up marrying the Italian girl, you know that Grady's older brother, Ben, is newly single?

JULIA

Why are you trying to set me up with Grady or Ben?

ELAINE

You're twenty-three and I've never met any of your partners. Should I be worried?

PAT

She'll bring someone home when it's serious.

JULIA

I'm not gonna talk boyfriends with you.

ELAINE

Ben is very respectable. He's an entrepreneur.

JULIA

In what?

Pause.

ELAINE

I don't know, but he's very successful.

JULIA

For all we know, he could be revolutionizing the dildo industry. Do you want me to marry a sex toy entrepreneur?

PAT

Jesus, I hope that's not what he's doing!

ELAINE

I'm sure that's not what he's doing. Something to do with computers. He's handsome, especially with his beard. A bit older than you, but you're mature. You could date an older man, as long as he's not closer to my age than to yours.

PAT

I strongly believe that relationships should happen between two people of the relative same age. Would you think it right if I were to date someone who's fifty? Or worse, forty? They'd be younger than my own child! That's just wrong.

JULIA
(*To ELAINE*)

Didn't you say that Dad was disgusting for dating a younger woman?

ELAINE

He absolutely is.

JULIA

So, he's gross but you want me to be the younger woman?

ELAINE

I want you to find someone.

JULIA

Look, this is not one of those stories where the parent sets up the child with the love of their life.

I don't wanna date Grady or Ben, and I don't want you involved.

ELAINE

You don't have to know that I'm involved. I can invite them to a barbecue in the spring.

JULIA

That would be the prime example of a set up.

ELAINE

But you wouldn't know!

JULIA

You just told me your plan!

ELAINE

I told you an *example* of a plan.

JULIA

I won't come to your pool party or picnic or whatever it'll be.

PAT

Ah, nothing has changed.

ELAINE

What?

PAT

You and Julia. Even though you don't live together anymore, you're still bickering.

ELAINE and JULIA

We're not bickering.

PAT

How about a game of Barricades? I'm dying to play. Literally.

JULIA

I haven't come here to fight.

ELAINE

Why have you come, then?

JULIA
(Avoids the subject)

To play this game with you. Please explain the rules again.

ELAINE

Should I be concerned?

JULIA

I don't think so. I mean, no.

ELAINE

Are you pregnant? Is that why you don't want to go on a date with Ben?

JULIA

God. No. That's not why I don't wanna date Ben.

PAT

I really want to play, Elaine.

ELAINE

You'll tell me, though?

JULIA

Yes, I will.

PAT

You have five pawns.

ELAINE

Soon?

PAT

You have five pawns. I'm yellow, you're red, and she's blue. You roll the dice, then you move whichever pawn you want according to the number you've got. Your goal is to move upward. If

your pawn ends up on a barricade—these little white blocks here—you can move the barricade, though you cannot place it on the first line.

JULIA

But anywhere else is fine?

PAT

Absolutely. You can also eat another pawn if you get the exact number. For example, let's say that you're here and I'm here and you get a five. You can decide to either eat me or move any other pawn.

JULIA

Let's say I get a six. Can I go over your pawn?

PAT

Sure can.

ELAINE

The person who reaches this circle, at the top, wins the game. Easy enough?

JULIA

Only one pawn must reach the top?

PAT

One of us will win.

JULIA

That should be a piece of cake.

PAT

Don't talk too soon.

They each roll some dice to see who will play first. The order is Julia, Pat, Elaine. They all play two turns during this conversation.

ELAINE

About Ben...

JULIA

Oh my god, let it go! Why are you so obsessed with finding me someone suddenly? I'm not twenty-seven years old in the eighteenth century. I'm twenty-three in the twenty-first century. I'm basically a baby, so why are you eager to sell my soul to the institution of marriage?

PAT

I beg your pardon, "sell your soul"? I never felt like that in my almost fifty years of marriage. There is much beauty in marital commitment.

ELAINE

Though there's hardly any meaning behind a marriage anymore. Just ask Arthur.

PAT

In my days, you were married for life. Till death do us part. So, you took your time to choose wisely. Nowadays, everything happens at the speed of the internets.

JULIA

Internet.

PAT

You click there, you say that, and squeak squeak. I'm horrified at what I see on television. A man and a woman meet, they don't know each other's last name, but you can bet she'll put her mouth on his genitals before the end of the night.

JULIA

Jeez, Grandma. What kind of shows are you watching?

PAT

I knew Lawrence for seven years before he asked me out on a date. It took one more year before he proposed.

JULIA

Marriage is the equivalent of binding yourself to someone and claiming them as your possession. At least, that's what marriage was until, like, yesterday. A piece of paper stripping women of any kinds of rights—to own land, to be educated, to participate in society. While I do agree that marriage has been reinvented to sell romance and love, is it even possible to give a soul to this soulless institution?

PAT

It's never been soulless! Marriage is a partnership. It means that when things get tough—when money is low, or one is ill—you don't run. You stay. You buckle down and find solutions. It's about commitment. Trust. Family. Commitment.

ELAINE

You already said commitment.

PAT

Yes, because as much as I love Arthur, I am very disappointed in the way he acted. He should have stuck to it. He should have stayed in this house with his family.

JULIA

But that's the problem, isn't it? How can you stick to a decision that you made decades ago? Things change. People change. Feelings disappear, reappear, evolve. This expectation doesn't make sense. I don't want to be anybody's possession, and I don't want a piece of paper to tie me to unhappiness. I can be committed without a piece of paper.

ELAINE

You can be unhappy too without it.

JULIA

Right. I can do that on my own as well.

PAT

Listen, I had two miscarriages. Not one, but two. While Lawrence—your grandpa—and I were in our twenties. The first time, Lawrence rocked me back and forth, telling me everything would be alright, making me feel safe in those strong arms. “We’ll have our baby,” he cooed. The second time, I was further along in my pregnancy, and losing the baby nearly cost our relationship. Lawrence was as demolished as I was. William was gone. That was his name. My husband couldn’t console me anymore because he needed the comfort too. He started working longer hours. He came home exhausted. You’ll recall that he was working in construction, and Montreal was buzzing with potential. It was the ‘60s after all. Every nation had immense potential and horizons to discover. But those years were awful for us. We were still trying, but we both feared the pain of a third miscarriage. I could see it in his eyes every time he lay in bed with me. He had faith, although a limited one. Without that piece of paper, Lawrence surely would have left me. He would have found a woman who could give him what he wanted without the suffering.

JULIA

I saw how Grandpa looked at you. He loved you.

ELAINE

Dad did love you. He always showered you with little attentions, like bringing a dessert after work, or playing the harmonica. He played a lot for you.

PAT

Looking back, I know that. But in my early twenties, when I was just married, freshly out of the countryside and in Montreal, my world seemed crushable with the tip of a finger. Imagine feeling every day like God had put obstacles in your way. Was I not Catholic enough? Not a good wife? Not a woman worthy of the title? These questions were driving me nuts!

JULIA

What happened?

PAT

I met Judith Morris.

ELAINE

Who?

PAT

A nurse at the doctor's office. She told me, "Mrs Arnault, you should take your mind off children for a moment. You're putting too much pressure on yourself right now—your husband, too—and it won't be good for your relationship, for the baby. We have an opening. Our secretary left yesterday, and we need someone to fill the position. Why don't you come work here? It's well-paid, good hours. Yesterday, somebody came in with a candle in his rear." We laughed. We always laughed. It was the smell of disinfectant, the nervous smiles in the waiting area, and JuMo—that was her nickname—that really did it. She took my mind off it. Then, I became pregnant, with Elaine. Let me tell you this: if we hadn't been married, I'm positive that your grandfather would have left me, and neither you nor your mother would have been born.

ELAINE

I didn't have that problem. Arthur proposed a few weeks after the test came back positive.

Pause.

JULIA

You never wanted to give me a sibling to torture?

ELAINE

He wanted to, but I couldn't. I love you my Jujube—

JULIA

Don't call me that.

ELAINE

(Con't)

But you ripped me up. To this day it still hurts sometimes. No head was passing through that canal a second time.

PAT

It's the intercourse that feels different.

JULIA

Ew. I don't wanna know.

Pause.

ELAINE

It was different afterwards. *(To JULIA)* I know you don't want to hear about this, but it's the truth. You think, "Labor will go according to plan. I'll do exercises. It'll be like brand new."

Then, it tears and your body becomes unfamiliar. A set of contradictions: new and used, tough and delicate.

PAT

You can't blame yourself. You know that, right? Childbirth is a miracle. When you came into the world, for example—

JULIA

Gross. Can we change the subject? Whose turn is it?

PAT

I played last.

ELAINE

It's my turn, then.

ELAINE plays.

PAT

You'd think that Julia would be less squeamish with all the sex and the violence her generation is subjected to.

Then JULIA rolls the dice, but she doesn't let it out of her hands.

JULIA

Since we're talking about marriage, I have something to say.

PAT

You're not getting married, are you? You just told us you don't have a boyfriend!

JULIA

I don't. It's not about me.

PAT

Who is it about?

JULIA

You're gonna be upset, Mom.

ELAINE

What is it?

Pause.

JULIA

Dad is getting married.

PAT

Arthur is getting married?

JULIA

He proposed at Christmas.

ELAINE

He did?

JULIA

I've been wanting to tell you, but I didn't know how. Or when.

ELAINE

Is that why your father unfriended me on Facebook?

JULIA

He did?

ELAINE

Has he been posting engagement pictures on Facebook?

JULIA

He might have.

ELAINE

So, everyone knows? Everyone knew except me? I'm the last one at the party? (*To PAT*) Did you know?

PAT

How would I've known? I'm as shocked as you are!

ELAINE
(*To JULIA*)

Did he put you up to this? Clearly, he knew that by sending you, I wouldn't kill the messenger, whereas if he were here, his head would already be on a pike. Did he send you to do his dirty work? The coward!

JULIA

I told him I would tell you.

ELAINE

Aren't you a saint.

JULIA

I didn't want his head on a pike.

ELAINE

You're always siding with your father.

JULIA

I'm not siding with anyone. I just want my parents to be civil.

ELAINE

He should have thought of that before he abandoned me to go chase after his blonde bimbo.

JULIA

She's a brunette.

ELAINE

Doesn't matter. That scheming son-of-a-bitch!

PAT

That's not a nice thing to say about his mother. She's a respectable woman. I played bridge with her the other day.

ELAINE

You played with his mother? Is there anyone here who's on my side?

JULIA

There are no sides!

ELAINE

Oh please. He's probably with his girlfriend—sorry, fiancée—who looks like a bikini model—

JULIA

She's actually a bit chubby.

ELAINE

—sipping champagne in a hot tub at a spa somewhere while I'm here ruminating about him. Of course there are sides. There's the side of the person who moved on, and the side of the person who's been erased. He broke my heart, Julia. When he packed his things and left overnight, he broke me. Twenty-four years he scrapped like it was burnt, leftover food. Food to feed the rats. I bet it's not painful when she has intercourse.

JULIA

Actually...

ELAINE

I don't care! I don't care about her. I don't want to know how nice and down-to-earth she is. In my head, she's the Other Woman from Malibu.

JULIA

He was unhappy.

ELAINE

Don't you think I know that? I tried, for so many years. I could see his happiness dwindling before my eyes. He wasn't taking care of himself, much less of me. When I offered to go on romantic trips, he made up excuses. I've spent enough time wondering if he married me because I was pregnant. The last few years we were together, I saw it when he looked at me. The regret. These haunting questions. "What if we didn't have had unprotected sex that night?" "What if I had left Elaine before?" "What if I had chosen differently?" Your dad loves you very much and he wouldn't trade you for anything. I know that. But me? Maybe he could have dated someone who's more carefree, adventurous, loving. Someone with less flab and more flair. Someone who wants to renovate the kitchen instead of watching reruns of *The Golden Girls*. Then suddenly, he was happy, but not because of me. He wore aftershave. He bought mints. He lied. A bitter pill to swallow, that one. *(Pause.)* You're not going to the wedding, are you?

Pause.

JULIA

He wants me to officiate at the ceremony.

Long pause. ELAINE laughs.

ELAINE

Of course, he does.

PAT

Can you do that?

JULIA

It seems pretty easy to get the certification. I can order it online.

PAT

On the internets?

JULIA

Internet, yes.

PAT

I'll be damned. Is there anything that the internet can't do?

JULIA
(To ELAINE)

I told him I would think about it, talk to you first.

ELAINE

Why? To get my blessing?

JULIA

To make sure you wouldn't disown me or something.

Pause.

ELAINE

You like her?

JULIA

She's nice.

ELAINE

Does *she* get to see you?

JULIA

She's not blind, if that's what you're asking.

ELAINE

Do you see her a lot?

JULIA

She's moving in.

ELAINE

Because since you moved out, *I've* barely seen you.

JULIA

I haven't moved out.

PAT

You don't live here anymore, kiddo.

ELAINE

Your stuff has sat, untouched, in your room for a year.

PAT

You don't even own a key!

JULIA

I still live here. I've been so busy with school and you with... I didn't leave you.

ELAINE

Call it what you want, but here's what I know: you used to spread joy here, with your contagious smile and your way of being excited about anything. I used to see your magic every day. My little girl. Even when you weren't so little anymore. When your dad walked out and you followed him, this house turned into a block of bricks. It wasn't a home anymore. I hate him for taking you away from me. Now he's turned you into his priest? That's the cherry on top!

JULIA

You make him sound like a kidnapper. Look, it was either living with you, Dad, or moving out completely. I didn't have enough money for an apartment then, so I had to choose. Dad and I just always got along. His place was closer to the university.

PAT

(To ELAINE)

I'm sure this wasn't an easy choice. No child, I bet, wants to choose between parents.

JULIA

I considered both options, if that's what you're worried about. I figured that we would talk on the phone if I didn't live with you.

ELAINE

Yet you didn't call me on Christmas or New Year's Eve, let alone on regular days.

JULIA

You're being unfair. I was in school before and now I'm busy with being a junior at work. I'll also point out that you're not calling me either.

ELAINE

This house feels empty, that's it.

JULIA

(Frustrated)

It's not my fault you can't fill it.

ELAINE

There are certain expectations that come with being a child.

JULIA

Why do parents think that we owe them the world?

ELAINE

Let me rephrase that. There are certain expectations that come with being *my* child.

JULIA

Dad followed his heart—so did I—you can't blame us for that.

PAT

She has a point.

ELAINE

I'm allowed to blame him for not following through with his commitment to me.

JULIA

You are, but what does this have to do with me? I was stuck in the middle a year ago, and I am still stuck despite my best efforts! I don't want to be sandwiched between you two. I have better things to do. Other places to be. (*JULIA gets up and gathers her things.*) It was nice seeing you, Grandma.

JULIA opens the front door. Rain is falling hard on ice. She hesitates.

ELAINE

Don't be ridiculous. Come back. It's slippery outside.

JULIA

Whatever.

JULIA shuts the door and slumps back on the couch. She's on her phone. They're quiet for a moment.

PAT

(*To ELAINE*)

It's not a big deal that he wants her to officiate at the ceremony.

ELAINE

Not a big deal?

PAT

Wouldn't you want the same?

ELAINE

Can't you see that he's using her to soothe the blow?

PAT

It's not necessarily a bad thing. A little balm with the sword.

ELAINE

More like Vaseline on a torch.

Pause.

PAT

Can we play?

ELAINE

It's up to Julia.

PAT

Julia?

JULIA

I'm just gonna hang out here until I can leave.

PAT

It will make me very happy if you'd play with us.

A pause. JULIA comes back to the table.

ELAINE

Who played last?

JULIA

It was my turn.

JULIA plays. She moves a barricade.

ELAINE
(*To JULIA*)

I don't think you should do it.

JULIA

Why not?

ELAINE

Because it means that you agree with his actions.

JULIA

What am I supposed to do? Say no?

ELAINE

I think you should turn it down.

JULIA

For your own benefit?

ELAINE

For *our* benefit.

JULIA

What does that mean?

Pause.

ELAINE

I don't know. Do you want to do it?

PAT plays.

JULIA

I don't know. Do you think I'd be good at it?

PAT

You'd be great at it. You always had a knack for public speaking.

JULIA

It seemed like a nice thing to do for him. I was flattered he asked me.

ELAINE

When did he ask you?

ELAINE plays. She eats PAT's pawn.

JULIA

New Year.

PAT

What was her reaction?

JULIA

Rebecca? She suggested it, actually.

JULIA plays.

PAT

Why don't we make it interesting?

ELAINE

Make what interesting?

PAT

Elaine, you don't want Julia to officiate, correct?

ELAINE

Correct.

PAT

Julia, you want to officiate, correct?

JULIA

Correct.

PAT

You are both stubborn when you're together, so why don't you let this game dictates the decision?

JULIA

How?

PAT

If Julia wins, Julia officiates. If Elaine wins, Julia doesn't.

ELAINE

If you win?

PAT

I choose what happens!

ELAINE

That seems juvenile.

PAT

We make things interesting all the time at the residence. That's why my friend Lucille got blue hair.

JULIA

I'm okay with it.

ELAINE

Okay.

PAT

Great! Let the best one win.

PAT plays. She moves a barricade.

ELAINE

How did your dad propose?

JULIA

Do you really wanna know?

ELAINE

Was it... romantic?

ELAINE plays. She eats JULIA's pawn.

JULIA

It was thoughtful. She's a manager in a clothing store, so he printed a bunch of "Will you marry me?" shirts and placed them everywhere in the store. He found an excuse to bring her there, and that's it. He asked. She said yes.

ELAINE

How's the ring?

JULIA plays. She eats ELAINE's pawn.

JULIA

I don't know. Glittering?

ELAINE

Arthur proposed to me with a small ring. He said he was saving for this house and once we'd bought it, he'd save for another ring. A bigger one. He never gave it to me. How did she say yes? Was she crying? Jumping in his arms? Speechless?

PAT

Should you be asking these questions?

JULIA

I don't know, Mom. I wasn't there.

ELAINE

When they came home then, were you there?

PAT plays. She moves a barricade.

JULIA

I was watching television.

ELAINE

How was he?

JULIA

Relieved that she didn't turn down his proposal. (*ELAINE makes a face like she wants more details.*) I don't know what else to tell you. He was freshly shaved, wearing a tie.

ELAINE

How did they celebrate?

JULIA

Mom...

ELAINE

Answer me. How did they celebrate?

JULIA

I don't know. With champagne.

ELAINE

And?

PAT

The picture is clear enough.

JULIA

What else do you want me to tell you?

ELAINE

Was he... smiling?

Pause.

JULIA

Yes.

ELAINE

A lot?

JULIA

Like someone who just got engaged.

PAT

(To ELAINE)

Will you stop with those questions? They'll bring you nothing but pain.

ELAINE

He was so happy when we got engaged. Like kid-on-his-birthday happy. Ecstatic. I thought, “Here’s a great man, and I’m making this great man happy. I must be special. I must have all the luck in the world.” I wasn’t wrong, but something did go wrong.

ELAINE plays.

PAT

Nothing went wrong. It is not your fault Arthur left. Look at me. You must stop blaming yourself for his choices. You can only blame yourself for yours. If there’s one thing I’ve learned in my life is that human beings are weak. Put them in a locked room with the things they desire or fear the most, and do you know what happens? I’ll tell you what happens: they surrender. It is much harder to resist than to succumb to our desires.

JULIA

Adam and Eve. That’s how our biblical story starts, with Eve defying the word of God and eating the forbidden fruit.

JULIA plays. She moves a barricade.

PAT

It’s a flaw in our conception.

JULIA

When you think about it, religious scriptures are almost all about human weakness. “Thou shalt not murder. Thou shalt not steal.”

ELAINE

Thou shalt not commit adultery.

PAT

It goes beyond the Ten Commandments. Humankind cannot resist temptation.

JULIA
(*Triumphant*)

What's more tempting than a piece of paper telling you that you can't fuck someone other than your wife or husband?

PAT

So what if Arthur bit the fruit?

ELAINE

It was my fall too.

PAT plays. She eats ELAINE's pawn.

PAT

It doesn't have to be. You think I let your father's death wreck me? I felt a hole the size of the Milky Way in my life, in my chest. I cried, I grieved. But if you think I spent my days flailing in bed while watching soap operas, you're dead wrong.

ELAINE

How can you say that? You've never remarried or even had a boyfriend.

PAT

I had one great love in my life and that single ring proved it. I don't need another one to show I've moved on. I'm satisfied with myself. I'm at peace. (*Solemn.*) At peace, yes.

There is a sudden power outage. JULIA shrieks when it happens. The game is interrupted.

ELAINE

It's just the power. It'll probably come back soon. (*A few seconds.*) I'll go get the candles. Do not play.

ELAINE disappears. Her shadow moves around the house to gather some candles and matches (Damn those matches, where are they?). Her movements are accompanied by sounds, like her walking into a door, and the opening and closing of drawers. The next conversation between PAT and JULIA occurs in the dark, slowly changing towards partial light.

PAT

I meant to ask you... are you not interested in those men next door because you are... well, because they are... men?

JULIA

Oh no, that's not why. Wait, did you think I was gay?

PAT

I've read an article talking about inclusion and diversity, and I thought for a moment that I didn't apply the advice very well. I should have asked you if you had a partner instead.

JULIA

That's very thoughtful, but sadly no. I'm interested in the hairy-chested of our kind.

PAT

Sadly?

JULIA

I've always thought my love life would be simpler if only I was interested in women.

Romantically, I mean, because I find women generally appealing. I've never been in love with a woman, but I "married" my best friend in third grade, and that is the most honest relationship I've ever had. We still call each other every Thursday night. My girlfriends, they just get me. We can talk forever about everything and nothing. We like the same things—clothes, movies, celebrities. They also carry tampons when I forget, so they're saving my life, like, every month. I

love them. I'm probably not the first one to make the assumption that gay relationships are somehow easier, though. I know for a fact that most of us think so, when it's not the case. There's the coming out to factor in, which can go in so many ways, but it's also, like, such a basic assumption, you know? Because truth is, a relationship is a relationship. There are schedules to make, family members to satisfy, rooms to clean, and then there are desires to fulfill, personal spaces to create, boundaries to set. I mean, I watched my friend fight with her girlfriend about laundry and it wasn't pretty.

PAT

You know lesbians?

JULIA

I know lesbians, bisexuals, pansexuals, trans, gays. Name it.

PAT

How are they?

JULIA

My queer friends?

PAT

Yes.

JULIA

I like them. They form a community and I'm jealous not to be a part of it. But I get it. They have to, don't they? They have to stick together for survival. It seems nice to belong, though.

PAT

Are they... happy?

The stage is now partially lit. ELAINE comes back with candles, matches, and flashlights. They light up more candles.

ELAINE

What are you talking about?

JULIA

My queer friends.

ELAINE

How come?

JULIA

Grandma asked me if I was gay.

Pause.

ELAINE

Are you?

JULIA

No.

ELAINE

I wouldn't mind. Whoever you are attracted to doesn't define who you are to me.

JULIA

That might be the nicest thing you've said to me this year, and I'm not even gay.

PAT

Remember when I mentioned my old friend Judith Morris?

JULIA

Yes.

PAT

I think she was a lesbian.

ELAINE

Why?

PAT

This might be a long story.

JULIA

(Looks around)

I think we have time.

PAT

If there's one thing you should know about Judith is that she was a woman unlike any other. She had this... inner force to reckon with. Frank Jr.—the milkman—damn near lost his arm when he tried to squeeze her butt once. Ah, that still makes me smile. Men were always a bit intimidated by her. My husband compared her to a tornado, when in reality, when you knew her, she was its eye. She appeared in my life when I kept hearing this overpowering voice in my head, "You are barren, Pat. Barren!" and she silenced it. The Louise to my Thelma.

ELAINE

She doesn't sound like the kind of woman you usually like. Your friends are all quiet and composed. Except the one with blue hair.

PAT

Yet we got along well. We had such a blast at work! The best part was closing the office. We had a small radio, and we'd play Dee Dee Sharp's "Mashed Potato Time" while cleaning.

JULIA

Mashed potato?

PAT

It was a dance. Very popular. Judith had to write patient notes and prepare the examination tools for the next day, and I had to organize the folders and spruce the place up a bit. We'd dance to the song together. We even had some synchronized moves, beyond the mashed potato dance. One time, we organized a charity event for women's equality, and we women wore male attire—Judith's idea! I wore a fedora and a suit, like her. There was nothing I wouldn't have done for her, and she for me. And then, that night she... kissed me.

ELAINE
(*Uncomfortable*)

She kissed you?

PAT

She got carried away with the suits and misread the situation. That's what she told me. It was...unexpected. I had never thought of her as a lesbian despite being practically glued to her hips for about two years. It's crazy the things we don't know—or don't want to know—about the people in front of us, isn't it?

ELAINE

I can relate to that.

JULIA

What happened?

PAT

I was shocked, but I acted like it was all fine. After all, it was still the 60s and there was a *lot* of love in the peace and love era. I went with it.

ELAINE

I would have been freaked out.

JULIA

Why?

ELAINE

If she were my friend and knew I was married, I would have been stunned to say the least.

PAT

Oh, I was. Unfortunately, we didn't have a lot of time together after that. Within the next week, I found out I was pregnant and my husband was promoted, so we packed our things and left within a few days. I never quite got the chance to talk to her about that night. After that, Judith and I wrote to each other once a week, discussing my new house, the city, her job, but after a while, it became impossible to sustain this kind of communication, and her letters stopped altogether.

JULIA

Couldn't you have discussed that moment in your letters?

PAT

She lived with her mother, who had a bad habit of reading everything marked personal. A bit of a gossip, that one. Judith apologized for the kiss in one of her letters, saying that it was because of the booze.

ELAINE

Was it?

PAT

I think so.

ELAINE

But you let it happen?

PAT

Only briefly. I was drunk as well! She was my best friend, so it seemed almost natural to be this close. I always wanted to extend my time with her. Nothing out of the ordinary. Just dinners and talking until the morning hours. Following her on one of her crazy excursions would have been a dream come true.

ELAINE

What happened to her?

PAT

We lost touch. She died a few years ago, in 2017, I believe. I came across her obituary by chance. I visited her grave once. It was well kept.

JULIA

It must have been hard to learn that. Do you know more about her life?

PAT

Her obituary mentioned names that I didn't recognize, and her gravestone had the word "wife" engraved on it. I don't know more than that. I imagine she had a life filled with love. I often thought about her, wondering who she had become and what her life was like. I always thought about our time together with fondness. For years—and by years, I mean decades—she haunted my dreams: our young selves, dancing, laughing, walking in the streets at night like we owned the world. For some reason, I always tried to impress her in those dreams. As though her opinion of me mattered to my identity. I wanted—no, craved—her approval. The dreams felt like being tucked in a warm childhood memory. As safe as one can be. I'd try to fall asleep again, to extend

my time with her. She'd smile and say, "Patricia, isn't it a silly thing to be friends?" (*Pause.*)

Look at me rambling. I'm sharing more than I ought to!

JULIA

I get it.

PAT

"Isn't it a silly thing to be friends?" I couldn't think about what that kiss meant when I was with Lawrence. It would have been wrong to think about my emotions or attraction.

ELAINE

Attraction?

The lights come back.

ELAINE

Ah, great! Now I won't have to worry about heat.

JULIA blows the candles.

PAT

I swept it out of my mind and put it in the bin. You see, it was always about loyalty to me. I've always been loyal to my husband, and that meant loving him.

JULIA

I don't think it was about loyalty.

ELAINE

Am I understanding correctly what I think you're saying?

PAT

I've been lying. It's not flu season at the residence.

ELAINE

It's not?

PAT

I just needed to get away for a few weeks, to clear my mind.

ELAINE

About what?

PAT

I have this new neighbour, Odette. I've been mustering the courage to tell you about her. She's very nice and smart. She has good taste, more refined than most of us. We get along quite well. Too well, perhaps. We laugh a lot together. (*She hesitates.*) You know the questions I put in the bin years ago? They're back on my mind, because of her.

ELAINE

I don't understand. Why did you need to get away?

PAT

I didn't know what to do.

ELAINE

About what?

PAT

Odette.

JULIA

Grandma! That's wonderful.

PAT

Is it?

JULIA

Of course. You like someone.

ELAINE

Are you telling me that my mother likes women?

PAT

I don't know if I do is what I'm saying.

ELAINE

I have to process this.

PAT

You and me both.

ELAINE exits to the kitchen.

JULIA

Tell me more about Odette.

PAT

She's fantastic! She's foreign, French actually, though from German descent. She speaks excellent English. She tells me stories about her life. All the travels she did, the people she met—her husband was a senator—and the *soirées* she went to. It makes me crave French cuisine every time.

JULIA

She seems very cosmopolitan.

PAT

You wouldn't know this looking at her. She's very down to earth.

ELAINE comes back with two drinks. She gives one to PAT.

JULIA

Does Odette have family?

PAT

Two sons, who each had a son. Her grandsons are about your age. They're polite men. Well groomed.

ELAINE

You've met them?

PAT

A few times. They often visit her on weekends.

ELAINE

What do they do?

PAT

One is an elementary school teacher, and the other one is a pilot.

ELAINE

Are they single?

JULIA

Really?

ELAINE

I didn't say anything.

JULIA

Grandma, don't let her set me up, please.

PAT

I think you would get along well with both, though the teacher is already taken.

ELAINE
(To JULIA)

I didn't say anything!

JULIA

Urgh.

ELAINE

I wasn't thinking about that.

JULIA

I bet.

ELAINE

I was thinking that my mom's a lesbian.

PAT

I never said I was.

ELAINE

It's what you meant, though. Isn't it?

PAT

You're putting words in my mouth, now.

JULIA

It did seem like that's what you were implying.

PAT

I am not what you say I am. I am what *I* say I am, and right now, I'm saying that I may have to rethink my situation with Judith now that I'm acquainted with Odette. It's not that complicated.

ELAINE

So, what? You regret being with Dad now?

PAT

Not at all.

Pause.

ELAINE

Were you miserable all these years? In this house?

PAT

I loved this house.

ELAINE

You can still regret the life you've had.

PAT

I don't regret anything. I loved Lawrence, you know that.

ELAINE

Do I?

PAT

Don't be ridiculous. This doesn't change anything.

ELAINE

Maybe it does. Dreaming about someone else, someplace else, that's fantasy.

JULIA

They're just dreams. They don't mean anything. I'm sure you dreamt about the neighbour or

Tom Cruise while being with Dad.

ELAINE

Maybe they were pointing to her truth.

PAT

What truth would that be?

ELAINE

That your desires lay elsewhere. With a...woman.

PAT laughs.

JULIA

Okay, Freud.

ELAINE

Don't laugh. I've always looked at you and Dad as my role models for relationships.

JULIA

I second that.

ELAINE

But if there's a part of you that wasn't fully committed to Dad, my childhood was a lie.

PAT

You're being dramatic.

JULIA

I don't think it was a lie. She was happy then with Grandpa, and now she's happy with her...Odette. She can like vanilla *and* chocolate cake. Peaches and bananas, or hotdogs and...

ELAINE

Oysters?

PAT

This food talk is making me hungry.

JULIA

Point is, it's not a binary; it's a spectrum. You get the gist.

ELAINE

I'm just saying that, hypothetically speaking, if Mom *is* a lesbian, doesn't that make my parents' happiness a lie?

JULIA

Though a lie only if she's a lesbian. If she's, say, pansexual, your memories would be preserved. This is what you're saying, right? That a single word is threatening your childhood?

PAT

I'm not gonna put a label on myself to make you comfortable.

JULIA

I don't consider *my* parents' happiness to be a lie.

ELAINE

Maybe you should.

JULIA

What?

PAT

It's a completely different situation.

ELAINE

Arthur was with me, and Arthur was simultaneously somewhere else. I don't know where his heart was. Was the happiness even real?

PAT

The good memories remain good, Elaine.

ELAINE

Then why does it feel like the more I visit these memories, the more my grasp on them slips?

JULIA

I've heard somewhere that every time you play a memory in your head, it changes a bit. If you've replayed an interaction a thousand times, it ends up being utterly warped. Cool, huh?

PAT

My memories are unwavering.

ELAINE

Are they?

PAT

The past is the past. The future is the future.

ELAINE

You're the one who brought up Judith and Odette!

JULIA

Grandma's only trying to understand.

ELAINE

So am I! Was it only Judith? Were there other women?

PAT

None at all!

ELAINE

Would you have been happier with Judith?

PAT laughs.

PAT

Judith?

ELAINE

Judith.

PAT's laugh dwindles.

PAT

No, that's ridiculous.

JULIA
(*To ELAINE*)

I'm hungry. Can you just believe Grandma and let this go?

ELAINE

I can't. If Mom would have been happier with a woman, doesn't that put her in Arthur's shoes, and Dad in my shoes?

PAT

I am nothing like Arthur! I was—have always been—committed to your father. Never did I cheat on him. Never did I leave him. Not when we were young and poor, and not when he was on his death bed.

JULIA

There was that kiss, with Judith.

PAT

It wasn't cheating! It didn't mean anything. She kissed *me*. (*Pause.*) She kissed me.

ELAINE

Did father know?

PAT

He wouldn't have understood.

ELAINE

Understood what?

PAT

The depth of my friendship with Judith.

Pause. ELAINE gulps her drink.

ELAINE

I don't recognize you.

PAT scoffs.

PAT

You said to Julia that her attraction doesn't define her. This rule doesn't apply to me?

ELAINE

Not because of Judith or Odette, but because of your actions. The hypocrisy! You've been telling me to move on, and I thought it was because you wanted me to be happy. Now, I see. You want him to be happy. It's just an inconvenience that I'm heartbroken. You relate to my ex-husband.

PAT

Is that what you think?

ELAINE

Yes.

PAT

In that case, Julia, take me home.

JULIA

Now?

PAT

Yes, now. (*PAT gets up, helped by JULIA.*) Your mother thinks the entire world is full of cheaters, complicit in adultery. We should all be burned at the stakes. Aren't we a jolly group of fallen angels? I am nothing like Arthur. The past is the past, and I *know* how happy I was with your father. Believe what you will. Burn me, if you wish, if that makes you feel better, if that makes you feel blameless. But I do remember what happened in 2001. Should we talk about it?

JULIA

What happened in 2001?

PAT

I'm going home. Ask your mother when you come back.

JULIA

I want to know now.

ELAINE

Not now.

PAT and JULIA walk towards the front door. JULIA opens the door to see how bad it is outside.

It's very bad. PAT puts her coat on.

JULIA

Wait, Grandma, you never said why you wanted to get away from your residence in the first place.

PAT

It doesn't matter.

Pause.

ELAINE

It does.

PAT
(*To ELAINE*)

Are you sorry?

ELAINE

Probably.

PAT

Fine.

PAT is ready to leave.

ELAINE

I am. I am sorry.

JULIA

I think we should stay.

PAT
(*To ELAINE*)

How can I believe you?

ELAINE

I'll bake one lava cake for your birthday. (*Pause.*) Two lava cakes.

Pause.

PAT

It does look rather slippery outside. Wouldn't want to break a hip, now would I?

ELAINE

I don't want you to be in an accident and be glued to your bed for a month, like I was.

JULIA helps PAT to remove her coat. A beat. PAT sighs.

PAT

Odette has been spending time with Harold.

JULIA

Your neighbour with the toupee?

PAT

He doesn't wear the toupee anymore. They've been on walks together. The long, winding kind, and she seemed—I don't know—gleeful after their meetings. At first, I was happy to see them bonding. (*PAT and JULIA sit at the table.*) They are two important people in my life, so to have them be friends was only beneficial to me. But now, I have this... hunch that she'll choose him over me. It makes me feel awful. Only a few months ago I was at peace with the idea of finishing my life as a widow. I was ready to die, alone and satisfied, but now... now I can't bear the thought of dying, much less alone.

JULIA

Why do you think she'll choose him?

PAT

Who wants to complicate life at our age? He's a much simpler option.

JULIA
(*To PAT*)

Can't you just go on as it is?

PAT

We might want simple, but we don't want lonely. All my friends get their hair up in a bun when they hear that a new bachelor is moving in.

ELAINE

Why didn't you date Harold?

JULIA glares at her mother.

PAT

He's very dear to me, but he's a bit awkward. Especially with the ladies. Bit of a goof.

JULIA

If Odette is as worldly as you described her, I don't see why she would fall for him. He sounds basic.

ELAINE

She has a point.

PAT

I'm not that special either.

JULIA

That's not true!

PAT

You're only trying to get on my good side because of those two missed phone calls.

JULIA

Not completely.

PAT

When I was young, I could give Lawrence a family. I could be a mother, a wife, or a secretary. I had something to give to the world, to the people in my life. What do I have to give now? Bridge and a cane?

ELAINE

You're being harsh on yourself. You're a wonderful conversationalist.

JULIA

Getting back in the dating pool is always scary. No matter the age.

PAT

What are you saying? You have the face of an angel! So smart and talented. If I were you, I wouldn't hesitate a second to get out there.

JULIA

Yeah, well, dating sucks.

ELAINE

Who broke your heart?

JULIA

Like, a thousand people on Tinder. I don't get it. Half the nation is on this dating app, yet I can't seem to find a decent romantic partner. I literally have access to everybody's profile. Imagine walking in the streets and seeing who everybody is instantly. These carefully crafted profiles, just popping up. It's a dream come true! On paper, at least. In truth, everybody's fishing, waiting to catch the bigger trout. I don't know why I'm on Tinder. Dating apps and social media make me miserable most of the time, yet it's like, everybody does it and there are success stories. I just

want somebody with decent values with whom I have chemistry. But of course, to find chemistry, you have to first attend a few awkward dates and exchange a thousand messages.

ELAINE

Men aren't found on a phone. You have to look up.

JULIA

It doesn't matter. I've given up.

ELAINE

You're too young to give up.

JULIA

So are you. (*Pause.*) I'm twenty-three years old. I have a bachelor's degree. I have a good paying job. I live in Canada. It should be good, right? It should be amazing. But I'm also twenty-three years old, I have no partner, no place of my own, no dreams. I've barely seen the world—Cuba's resorts and the United States mostly.

ELAINE

If you look at what you don't have, you'll be miserable all your life.

PAT

Agreed.

JULIA

Adulthood is not what I expected.

PAT

When I was young, I thought I'd work on the family farm with my husband and bear seven children. I certainly didn't expect the Odettes of this world to move me.

ELAINE
(To JULIA)

You're barely an adult.

JULIA

Excuse me?

ELAINE

One day you'll start paying taxes. *That's* adulthood.

JULIA
(*Ignoring her mom's comment*)

I just expected a path.

ELAINE

You have a path. You work in insurance.

JULIA

That's your path.

ELAINE

Like mother, like daughter.

JULIA

I don't want your path.

ELAINE

What would be so wrong with following in my footsteps?

JULIA
(*Sarcastic*)

You seem very happy.

ELAINE

I'd be happier if I wasn't spending my days in this big house, alone.

PAT

Are we back to this argument?

ELAINE

Would you prefer we go back to talking about your precious Odette?

JULIA

I would.

ELAINE

I don't see what's so awful about my life.

JULIA

You're kidding? All you ever talk about is how miserable you are. I don't wanna be like that.

ELAINE

You think I do?

JULIA

I don't know.

ELAINE

Nobody makes a decision thinking they'll end up miserable. That'd be counterintuitive. You think people would act out of love if they knew the outcome? I thought I had avoided heartbreak entirely by marrying Arthur. My perfect man. I was wrong, but it doesn't mean I wouldn't make the same choices I did.

JULIA

That's stupid.

ELAINE

You wouldn't be here if I had thought differently.

JULIA

I wouldn't know what I was missing if I had never been born. I don't owe you anything.

ELAINE

Don't owe me anything!

PAT

What your mom is saying is that you must do things that you want—that feel right in the moment. I don't mean being a hedonist, for God's sake, no. Thoughtful choices. But thoughtful choices often have surprising consequences in the end. What's something that gave you joy lately?

JULIA

To be honest, Dad asking me to officiate at his wedding made me pretty excited.

ELAINE

She said thoughtful choices.

PAT

I still believe you'd be good at it. You could even make a career out of it. You don't have to work in insurance if you don't like it. If you could do anything, what would you do?

JULIA

Anything?

PAT

There must be one thing.

JULIA

It might sound stupid, but I've seen these videos of people cleaning litter on beaches. I've always thought that it must be nice to physically do something that helps the world. Like, I'm just sitting

at my desk all day, dealing with insurance claims. How's that helpful? Sometimes I think that my studies have prevented me from finding out who I am and what I want. I'm a cog in a machine I don't like.

ELAINE

Cleaning beaches?

PAT

Beach cleaning sounds like a lovely project, for a month or so.

ELAINE

I didn't pay for your education so that you can clean beaches and become a hippie.

PAT

There's nothing wrong with her seeking new thrills.

ELAINE

When that's clearly a waste of mental capacities and money, yes, it is.

PAT

(*To JULIA*)

Don't listen to your mother. Listen to what your seventy-nine-year-old grandmother has to say.

She knows what she's talking about.

ELAINE

Her own mother doesn't?

PAT

You know what they say: mothers know best, after grandmothers. Grandmother, here, thinks that Julia should make good *and* bad decisions. That's how she'll forge her path. (*To JULIA*) You should officiate at the wedding and clean beaches.

ELAINE

But—

PAT

No.

JULIA

Is Odette a good or a bad decision?

Pause.

PAT

Odette is no decision.

JULIA

You're going to stand there like a marble statue while Harold steals the person who makes you happy?

PAT

(Hesitates)

We have this tradition at the residence. It's a bit old-fashioned compared to your technological devices, but I find it chivalrous. We have events planned every month, and men have taken this opportunity to express their romantic feelings by bringing a single rose to their love interest.

JULIA

Aw, that's cute. Like *The Bachelor*. I like that.

PAT

(Con't)

I suppose I have been imagining what it would be like to participate in this tradition.

ELAINE

(Shocked)

In front of everybody?

PAT

Sweet Jesus, never.

JULIA

Why not?

PAT

These feelings are too private. I could never! This one time, two men brought a flower for the same person. She was the talk of the week. Can you imagine if Harold bought her a flower too?

JULIA

You just need a little courage.

PAT

Julia, I am old. I am an old person living with other old people. These feelings, they're not. They're the stuff of young adult novels. Some days I recognize them from my first date with my husband. But they don't belong in my world.

ELAINE

Feelings don't have ages.

JULIA

Do you know how Odette feels?

PAT

I haven't a clue. However, in one of our afternoon conversations, she did say that she enjoyed my company and couldn't have imagined finding a better partner to spend her time with.

JULIA

I think you should just go for it.

PAT

Go for it?

JULIA

Yeah, tell her how you feel.

PAT

What if she doesn't reciprocate?

JULIA

At least you would have tried.

PAT

At the cost of our friendship.

ELAINE

I'm not sure what it is you needed a break from, but it seems to me like the way you feel is already costing you your friendship.

PAT

I thought that a short pause might wake me up from this nonsense, that I would break free from these questions looping in my head. I thought being in this house would bring me clarity and comfort.

ELAINE

And?

PAT

All I've gotten so far are accusations of adultery and a half-finished game of Barricades.

ELAINE

I was forgetting the game.

PAT

Whose turn was it?

ELAINE

I think it might have been yours. Or Julia's?

JULIA

Didn't you play last?

ELAINE

I might have.

PAT

Why don't you go ahead, Julia?

JULIA plays. She eats PAT's pawn.

PAT plays. She moves a barricade.

ELAINE plays. She eats PAT's pawn.

PAT

Will you stop eating my pawns?

ELAINE

The game is called Barricades, not Let The Others Win. We should eat soon.

JULIA

This game is harder than I remembered.

ELAINE

It's very easy to block and eat each other forever.

PAT

Could we get something from the deli?

JULIA

I've been dreaming about their meat sandwich for, like, two nights in a row. I'm not kidding.

JULIA plays. She moves a barricade.

ELAINE

I've made a casserole.

PAT plays. She eats JULIA's pawn.

JULIA
(*Chanting*)

Deli, deli, deli!

ELAINE

What about the casserole?

PAT

We'll eat it tomorrow. We have a special guest today.

ELAINE

Fine.

JULIA

Yes!

ELAINE plays.

PAT plays. She moves a barricade.

JULIA plays.

ELAINE
(*To PAT*)

I think I've been harsher on you than I intended to be. I don't have anything against you liking women or questioning whether you like women.

JULIA

No, you do.

ELAINE

To a certain degree, yes. Like I said, I need to process this information. It's not about you. It's about—

PAT

Arthur.

ELAINE nods.

JULIA

What happened in 2001?

ELAINE gets up and walks around.

ELAINE

You shouldn't know this.

JULIA

Come on.

Pause.

ELAINE

The year before my car accident, I discovered that your dad had cheated on me. It was a one-time thing. Or so I thought.

JULIA

With whom?

ELAINE

It doesn't matter.

JULIA

Who did he cheat on you with?

ELAINE

A co-worker. Someone from Europe who was consulting on this bridge project.

JULIA

How did you find out?

ELAINE

We always find out. He told me.

PAT

I've always hated him for that.

ELAINE

That's not true, you liked him.

PAT

Not when he hurt you.

JULIA
(*To PAT*)

You knew?

ELAINE

It was a weird time. You were what, five? We were exhausted from work and everything. He had this... opportunity to suspend real life, and he took it.

JULIA

That's not my dad.

ELAINE

That was my husband. I forgave him for what happened. Until he did it again.

JULIA

How?

ELAINE

It stung, but he promised me it had only happened once and would only happen once. He begged me to stay with him. You must understand. I was thirty-four years old, and we'd had you five years ago. I—we—had a family to consider. In a different situation, I probably would have spit on him and left. But we were a thing, the three of us.

PAT

He's the one who sabotaged his relationship with his family.

ELAINE

The decision fell to me, and I chose what I thought would be best for us.

JULIA
(*Frustrated*)

You've got to be fucking kidding me.

ELAINE

Language.

JULIA

This entire time, you've been blaming Dad and me for your unhappiness, when in fact you brought it on yourself.

ELAINE

Here you go. Always siding with him.

JULIA

I can't be the only one to see this. It sucks what he did. There's no denying. But you stayed with him, knowing full well that he could do it again. Is that what you call a thoughtful choice?

ELAINE

I'm not responsible for his actions. I couldn't know whether he would do it again. All I had was his word. He's not a bad person. He's just...

PAT

Weak.

ELAINE

I was gonna say human. Would you have preferred divorced parents?

JULIA

That doesn't make it right.

ELAINE

Now that I know how it ends, you're right. It feels a bit like I nailed my own coffin back then.

PAT

You couldn't have known.

ELAINE

You did.

JULIA eyes her grandma.

PAT

(To JULIA)

Your mom asked me for advice. As much as I liked Arthur, I told her to leave him. A man who cheats cannot have a woman's trust, and without trust, there is no relationship.

ELAINE

(To PAT)

You think I brought it on myself too, don't you?

PAT

Actions have consequences.

ELAINE

I was going to break up, but then I saw him playing with Julia, in this room. This same room where I grew up to two loving parents sharing a life together. *(To JULIA)* You were this tall *(She gestures to her hip)*, beaming as you watched your dad make funny faces. I couldn't go through with it.

PAT

You made a choice.

ELAINE

I made a choice.

JULIA

I don't want to play anymore. I don't care who wins.

JULIA exits to the kitchen.

PAT

Are you happy?

ELAINE

Yes. *(Pause.)* No. I didn't want her to look at her father the way I look at him.

PAT

You've done a poor job of that. All she's heard from you for a while is how bad a person her father is.

JULIA

(From the kitchen)

Mom! You have gelato. Can I move back?

ELAINE

She wants to move back.

PAT

Because she's hurt.

ELAINE

I know, I know. We truly need our mothers all our lives, don't we?

PAT

I don't know about mothers, but you definitely need me.

JULIA enters with a bowl of gelato.

ELAINE

Julia, your father is not a bad person.

JULIA

I don't want to talk about this anymore.

ELAINE

Listen to me. He's not a bad person.

JULIA

He's not a good person either.

ELAINE

Nobody is!

JULIA

Have you ever hurt a person you were supposed to love, not once but twice?

ELAINE

Probably.

JULIA

I don't think so.

ELAINE

I think you should officiate at the wedding.

JULIA

Now that I don't want to do it, you give me your blessing? How not-at-all hypocritical.

PAT

Sarcasm is a bad defence mechanism.

JULIA

I don't care. It's mine.

ELAINE

Be nice to your grandma. I think you should do it. You said the proposal excited you.

JULIA

Briefly.

ELAINE

Do it.

JULIA

I don't want to.

ELAINE

It's not a choice. It's an order.

JULIA

An order? I'm not twelve anymore. You can't order me.

ELAINE

Oh, yes, I can.

JULIA

You can't.

ELAINE

I'm still your mother.

JULIA

You can't push your agenda on me.

ELAINE

I sure can.

JULIA

You wanna know why I went with Dad? Because *he* was letting me breathe.

ELAINE

I let you breathe alright. Stop being dramatic.

JULIA

I remember being sixteen and having a curfew at nine on weekends. I remember you drilling maths in my head so that I would go into insurance like you. I felt like a plant in a shooter glass.

ELAINE

I only wanted the best for you. I still do. You can go beach cleaning, if that's what you wanna do.

JULIA

I don't want your blessing.

PAT

Ladies, ladies. Why don't we settle the question with a game of Barricades? If Elaine wins, Julia officiates. If Julia wins, nobody officiates.

JULIA

If you win?

PAT

I decide for you.

JULIA

Fine.

ELAINE

Okay.

JULIA goes back to the table. The lights shift. Time has passed. About an hour.

ELAINE

I didn't remember the game being this long.

JULIA

It feels like playing Monopoly. I almost made it to the top, twice!

ELAINE

I wasn't going to let you win.

PAT

I'm almost there. (*JULIA plays. She eats PAT's pawn.*) Seriously?

PAT plays. She moves a barricade.

ELAINE plays. She eats one of JULIA's pawns.

JULIA plays. She moves a barricade.

ELAINE

Not another barricade!

PAT plays.

ELAINE plays. She moves a barricade.

JULIA plays.

PAT plays. She eats ELAINE's pawn.

ELAINE

I'm still close to winning.

ELAINE plays.

JULIA plays. She moves a barricade.

JULIA

I'm right behind you.

PAT plays. She eats one of JULIA's pawns.

JULIA

Argh!

ELAINE plays.

ELAINE

I only need a one to win, next.

JULIA

Grandma, we can't let her win.

JULIA plays.

PAT plays.

ELAINE rolls the dice, expectantly. It's not a one. She moves another pawn.

JULIA plays.

JULIA

Right behind you again.

PAT plays. She eats ELAINE's pawn.

ELAINE

No!

PAT

Sorry, my dear.

ELAINE plays.

JULIA

Ah! I win now, for sure. If I roll a one, I eat Grandma's pawn. If I roll a two, I win.

JULIA plays. She rolls a four, so she moves another pawn.

PAT plays. She rolls a six and moves another pawn.

ELAINE plays.

JULIA plays. She rolls a two! She wins.

ELAINE

You won. Congratulations.

Pause.

PAT

Are you not going to officiate at your father's wedding?

JULIA

No.

ELAINE

Is that true?

Pause.

JULIA

Maybe.

ELAINE

You have the right to feel the way you do about him, but know that I berated him, more than enough. As his wife. You're his child, and it was a long time ago.

JULIA

It's funny. I came here because I felt the urge to talk to you about Dad's wedding. Like, I had this burden that only your approval would lift. Now I realize, I never needed your blessing. Not for that. It was guilt.

ELAINE

Guilt?

JULIA

I just want you to be happy.

ELAINE

I will be.

JULIA

I can set you up with Ben. I hear he's a fantastic sex toy entrepreneur.

ELAINE

Very funny.

JULIA

I do still want to officiate. Even though the game—

PAT

Don't let a silly game dictate your actions.

JULIA

You suggested it.

PAT

Because sometimes the only way to know is when a choice is imposed on us. You shouldn't officiate at the wedding just because you won, but because your heart's telling you something.

You must follow your heart.

JULIA

So should you.

PAT squeezes JULIA's hand.

ELAINE

I think it has become increasingly clear.

PAT

What has?

ELAINE

I must move on.

PAT

Surely you knew that?

ELAINE

I've been so bitter about Arthur that I would have not only accepted, but—more importantly—endorsed my daughter's choice to miss her father's wedding. A choice dictated by a game at that. That's unacceptable. I just didn't know how to move on, until now.

JULIA

How?

ELAINE

I need to sell this house.

A shared silence.

PAT

Don't be silly. You'll find your happiness here again someday.

ELAINE

How can I? We are not the people who lived in this house anymore. I am not the mother of a young, happy family. *(To JULIA)* You're not a child anymore. *(To PAT)* You're not a wife. We must move on.

PAT

It's just a space.

ELAINE

It's a barricade. *(They all look at the house in silence, touching it as if they're absorbing the memories.)* The past is the past, and the future is the future, right? Somehow, here, they both get confused. I would offer it to you, Julia, the same way my parents offered it to me but—

JULIA

No, thanks.

ELAINE

Thought so. *(To PAT)* Is this okay with you?

Pause.

PAT

What I built with my husband is more than a life in a house. It's a family. Don't get me wrong, this house will always feel like home. It occupies a special place in my heart. It's where you both grew up. If it doesn't feel like your home anymore, then who am I to say it is? Strangely, it doesn't feel like mine either.

ELAINE
(To JULIA)

Would you be okay with it?

JULIA

I don't have a key. *(Pause.)* Mom?

ELAINE

Yes?

JULIA

Will you give me a spare key once you move in to your new place? Even if I officiate at Dad's wedding?

ELAINE

Absolutely. *(Pause.)* Let's get some food.

JULIA

I can drive.

ELAINE

Mom, you should stay here. Julia and I can go, if Julia drives *slowly* and *safely*. (To PAT) The usual?

JULIA and ELAINE put on their coats and boots.

PAT

The usual.

JULIA

We should get cake from that bakery too.

PAT

I think cake is in order. Don't drop it!

JULIA

Not on my watch.

JULIA and ELAINE exit. PAT stands in the middle of the room. She looks around, touching the wall. She feels a wave of nostalgia. She smiles.

PAT

We did good, Lawrence. We did good.

The lights dim.

THE END