

ONE TRUE THING

by

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Based on the novel by

Anna Quindlen

**FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY**

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FADE IN:

ELLEN GULDEN, 26, smiles at the camera. A flash bulb goes off.

ELLEN (VO)

My mother always said smile for the camera.

POLICEMAN (OC)

Alright, sideways!

Ellen turns sideways. REVEAL she is

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

Her mug shot is being taken.

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - DAY

A policeman, EARL BOYD, 28, watches Ellen pace back and forth.

ELLEN

Look this is ridiculous. You are wasting your time.

EARL

The D.A. doesn't think so. See, a number of people have come forward since the autopsy results. One person said that you hated your mother, that you wanted to get rid of her so you could get back to your own life in New York.

ELLEN

Well don't you love your mother and hate her sometimes too?

EARL

(quietly)

Did you hate your mother?

ELLEN

Sure I hated my mom, especially in Junior High School when she wouldn't let me wear gogo boots.

EARL

I can't believe you're making jokes at a time like this.

ELLEN

Look, I didn't hate my mother. I loved my mother.

EARL

Did you kill her Ellen?

ELLEN

No, of course I didn't.

EARL

Can you tell me who else could have?

ELLEN

No one.

EARL

Well, unfortunately that really narrows down the choices.

Ellen paces back and forth faster now. Earl studies her.

EARL

I remember you. Back during high school, I was a lifeguard at the lake. You and your friends used to hang out down on the far end of the beach.

ELLEN

You went to Langhorne Academy?

EARL

No. South High.

A beat. The line has been clearly delineated. She's a private school girl and he's a townie.

EARL

You used to bring your homework.
(shakes his head with a laugh) I even asked you to go to the movies once.

ELLEN

(trying hard to remember)

Oh yeah, I remember you now. What'd we see?

EARL

You said no. You had a paper due.

Earl clearly doesn't like Ellen or his memory of her. He turns back to his notes.

EARL

Anyway, someone else said "Ellen would sell her own mother down the river to get ahead....Ellen Gulden is cold, remote, she eats ambition for breakfast and anyone who gets in her way for lunch." (looks at her) Yeah, I definitely remember you. (shakes his head) Charged with killing your own mother. Jesus. (beat) Oh, your father's on his way from the college.

Ellen turns to Earl. Her manner changes, more conciliatory now.

ELLEN

Look, you don't need to involve my father in this. Really. I can answer all your questions without-

EARL

He insisted on coming right over. He should be here any minute.

Ellen turns and gazes out the window at the town of Langhorne in the distance, and on a hill, near the fashionable women's college, some CHILDREN playing. DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. LANGHORNE COLLEGE - PAST

A LITTLE GIRL running across the campus, clutching a letter in her hand. It is Ellen, 8 years old. She reaches the imposing ivy covered English department, races up the stairs to

INT. LECTURE HALL - CONTINUOUS

A lecture hall filled with 750 STUDENTS laughing in great appreciation. Ellen sees her father, GEORGE GULDEN at the podium. Handsome, charismatic, a dazzler, with a larger than life quality. A kind of literary Richard Feynman.

GEORGE

James Baldwin said, "It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me the most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive or who had ever been alive." To torment, I would add joy. Thanks for taking this journey with me. Have a great summer.

KATE

Look out the window everybody. What a beautiful farm. Ellie, did you see the baby cows?

ELLEN

I'm reading mom. And baby cows are calves. And the fact they're heading to the slaughterhouse is not so cute.

KATE

Oh, Ellie. Not all of them.

In the rearview window, George winks at Ellen.

GEORGE

OK kids! "Joe Ellespere. 1900-76. Philanthropist, built the Ellespere library at Columbia University, funded the Philharmonic. Survived by 5 children, 14 grandchildren." And 3 and 1/2 columns! Kids you have a choice in this life, you can be Mr. Gilman, a born bystander or you can pursue excellence like Mr. Ellespere. Who do you want to be?

ELLEN

MR. ELLESPERE!!

GEORGE

Good! Remember, you can do anything you want to in this world. Anything.

ELLEN

Dad, I have to go to the bathroom.

GEORGE

Oh. (looks at his watch) Should we stop?

ELLEN

Uhm...I can wait till Emerson's house.

KATE

(looking at guidebook)

We've done historical markers 450, 451...460 - Emerson's house. It's 30 miles. We better stop at a gas station. It's getting late. We can skip Emerson.

GEORGE

Let's let Ellen decide. (glancing at his watch) What do you want to do sweet pea? Your wish is my command.

Ellen bites her lip. She really has to go very, very badly.

ELLEN

I can wait. No problem.

GEORGE

OK. Well it's Sunday night. Ellen, I think it's your turn for a reading. What were you memorizing?

ELLEN

"In Cabin'd ships at sea" (bites her lip) "The boundless blue on every side expanding..."

GEORGE

Walt Whitman. Mmm, unfortunate choice of material old girl.

Kate sees Ellen gritting her teeth.

KATE

George I'm warning you, you're gonna see the boundless blue if we don't stop somewhere.

But Ellen is absolutely determined to wait. She speaks loudly,

ELLEN

WITH WHISTLING WINDS AND MUSIC OF THE WAVES, THE LARGE IMPERIOUS WAVES. FLOW AND FLOW uhm...BUBBLING uhm...GURGLING, uhm...UNDULATING WAVES, LIQUID...

Ellen looks out the window. The pass a fountain, sprinklers, a dog lifts its leg. Brian sips a drink through a straw making a BIG SUCKING SOUND. Ellen can't hold on another second.

BRIAN

Watch out, the dams gonna break. Send in the lifeboats!!

ELLEN

(desperately)

Dad, I just remembered something!

(more)

ELLEN (CONTINUED)

You know how Tyco the astronomer died?
He was visiting the king and had to go
to the bathroom, but he couldn't ask to
be excused, and he waited so long, his
bladder burst and he died! It's a fact.
So maybe we should stop after all.

GEORGE

Well by all means! I should say so!

George pulls over to a cafe. Ellen gets out, races in.

INT. CAFE - JUST AFTER

Ellen comes out of the bathroom. George is at the bar. A WAITRESS
puts a Shirley Temple in front of him. He lifts Ellen onto a stool.

ELLEN

Shouldn't we go?

GEORGE

One second.

He slides the Shirley Temple over to her. Then takes a flower
out of a vase and puts it in her hair.

GEORGE

Here, a medal for your valor -
especially for putting up with me.
Listen honey, I was proud of you out
there. Do you know what you were
practicing in the car? Mind-

ELLEN

(interrupting, seriously)
Mind over matter.

GEORGE

(smiles)

That's my girl. Your mind Ellen, is
your most important asset. Never
forget that. You have been blessed
with excellent gray matter.

ELLEN

I got it from you. You know everything.

She gulps down her drink. George grins, turns to the WAITRESS.

ELLEN

"If you were to ask me what this book is about, I'd say about as much as I can take."

Ellen yawns, takes two Sudafed to wake herself up, then starts typing the next review.

ELLEN

"The film is filled with pseudo social commentary. Even if it were an inflight movie, you might consider walking out."

VOICE

You're beautiful when you're tearing someone to shreds.

Ellen whirls around in her chair. JONATHAN BELZER, stands in her door. He's handsome, sexy, law school books under his arm.

ELLEN

Jesus! How long have you been standing there?

JONATHAN

I missed you.

Jonathan crouches in front of Ellen, puts his hands on her legs. Ellen realizes she's smiling. She frowns and whirls around back to her computer, knocking Jonathan over on the way. She types.

ELLEN

"Belzer's performance, while boosted by the element of surprise, lacked real conviction."

JONATHAN

Ellen, I mean it.

Jonathan stands, rests his arms on her shoulders, massaging her.

ELLEN

I gotta get this to Tweedy first thing. He's deciding between me and Casey for Features Editor. He has to see I can do these Opinionated Guides in my sleep.

JONATHAN

(kissing her neck)

The things you can do in your sleep.

ELLEN

(rolls her eyes, types)

"Belzer was far more convincing in his widely seen performance at Columbia Law School where he so passionately practiced freedom of assembly with his constitutional law professor."

JONATHAN

Ellen I'm sorry. How can I prove it to you?! I'll do anything.

ELLEN

You could join a castrate choir for starters. Go home. I mean it.

CUT TO:

INT. ELLEN'S APARTMENT - DAWN

Cardboard boxes, stacks of books and papers. The only furniture, a futon on the floor. Jonathan rolls onto his back into view, glistening with sweat, then kisses Ellen's hand.

ELLEN

God. Sex is always so great whenever we get back together. Remember after you went to Italy? Or when you were entranced by your L-SAT instructor? Or-

JONATHAN

Shhh. (kissing her) I'm sorry. Shhh.

ELLEN

Shit, I'm late.

Ellen jumps out of bed, pours a cup of coffee from an automatic coffee machine by the bed, pulls on a black miniskirt suit. She looks for something.

ELLEN

Did you see where I put that letter from my dad? He made notes on my proposal.

JONATHAN

You don't need his notes. You are fucking brilliant. And vice versa.

She opens the refrigerator looking for the letter. It is filled with papers and files. No food. Same with the stove and

dishwasher. Ellen dumps out her purse, panicking now. Complete chaos. She pulls a crumpled paper from the pile.

ELLEN

Here it is! Shit. No it's not.

She tosses an elaborately decorated invitation - with old junior mints sticking to it - to Jonathan. She keeps searching.

ELLEN

My mom's throwing a surprise party
for my dad's birthday this weekend.

JONATHAN

(reading, in disbelief)
Come as your favorite literary
character?

ELLEN

Remember, she lives in the fifties.
Every party has a theme. (dumping out a
box) It'd be great if you came with me.

JONATHAN

I've got an interview at the DA for
my summer placement in a couple of
weeks. I gotta prepare.

ELLEN

You'll blow them away. You'll eat
them alive.

JONATHAN

I can't come. Sorry.

ELLEN

Shit. OK. I understand.

But Ellen starts breathing hard. She is having a small panic attack. Jonathan puts his arms around her.

JONATHAN

Easy sweetie. This always happens to
you when you go home. I can't
believe the image of a housewife who
wields nothing more dangerous than a
staple gun does this to you.

ELLEN

She canes chairs, she paints landscapes
on teapots. She finds good in all people.

JOHN

Don't worry. It's not catching.

EXT. MANHATTAN STREETS - MORNING

Ellen moves through the throngs of the New York work force marching, coffee containers clutched in hands to face another day. Ellen, downing her packet version, moves twice as fast.

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Ellen is working. MR. TWEEDY, her boss, pokes his head in.

TWEEDY

Gulden, don't revise other writers' articles unless I ask you to. We're a team here, remember? (beat) About your proposal to do a piece on Senator Sullivan. Forget it.

ELLEN

Wait a sec. I mean this guy was a hero, the youngest guy ever to be elected to the senate. His father was some small time drug dealer. One night, Sullivan commandeers the limo, crashes into a tree. Everyone else in the car is killed. Turns out he was drunk and high. It's Shakespearean! The sins of the father etc.

TWEEDY

Yeah, it's a great story. But not without an interview which is impossible. He's not talking. He's checking into rehab somewhere.

ELLEN

I'm going to get the interview. I promise you. I have a way in. We were friends in high school.

TWEEDY

Yeah? It would be a major coup - with a major reward Gulden. Alright then, let's see what you can do.

He goes out. Ellen's best friend, JULES, comes in, holding an overnight bag. Jules looks down, frowns. She reaches down and picks up a law book and whiskey bottle. Frowns deeper.

JULES
Had a visitor?

INT. TRAIN - LATER THAT DAY

Ellen and Jules drinking coffee, reading through ten newspapers.

JULES
I thought you said Jonathan had provided you with enough research to write a book called Women Who Love Men Who Love Themselves!

ELLEN
Jonathan and I are just continuing a great literary tradition. All the great love stories - Romeo and Juliet, La Traviata, Anna Karenina, Carmen are tales of great love and utter misery.

JULES
Yeah, either they throw each other under trains, get stabbed, or get sealed up in mausoleums.

ELLEN
Jonathan needed space.

JULES
Yeah? What was her name?

ELLEN
He's changed. He's made real progress in group therapy.

JULES
Great, when's he going to catch up in real life? (off Ellen's look) OK. OK. I just want you to be happy.

ELLEN
I am blissful. Thanks for coming with me.

A woman opens the window. The green countryside races by. Ellen frowns. Wrinkles her nose.

ELLEN
Hey, could you close that?

EXT. GULDEN BACKYARD - DAY

A large, lovely, white house. Ellen, her brother BRIAN, costumed as Hemingway, and Jules crouch behind a hedge.

BRIAN

Is this your costume? Who are you two, the Sylvia Plath twins?

ELLEN

We forgot our costumes. (off his look) I can't dress up. It's so-

BRIAN

Capricious? Wacky? Human?

ELLEN

So mom.

BRIAN

Ellen, I thought you spent your summer houseguesting on The Vineyard. You're white as a ghost.

ELLEN

I prefer the parties to the beach. Any activity that requires a lotion with a number higher than my age worries me.

JULES

The only liquid with a number that we want on our skin is Chanel Number 5.

Ellen and Jules crack up, slap hands.

BRIAN

You two have the life. You get paid to be wiseasses for a living. Whereas I, Brian Gulden, (stands up dramatically) son of George Gulden, renowned expert on American literature and the Romantics do hereby confess I just failed American Literature and the Romantics.

ELLEN

Oh no Brian. Shit. Did you tell dad?

BRIAN

Of course not. Just cause I'm failing, doesn't mean I'm a moron. (sighs) Mom would be happy with anything I did. Even if I ran off to Hilton Head and became a tennis pro.

ELLEN

Well...mom. (beat) So what's this about her going in for more tests?

BRIAN

She doesn't want to talk about it.

KATE (OC)

Yoo-hoo! Hi! Welcome home. The coast is clear. Your dad's still at the college! Jules welcome! How are my little ones?

Kate appears dressed as Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz. She is absolutely full of life. Ellen cringes.

EVERYONE

Great mom. Just great.

KATE

Look at you. Everything in the world I could possibly want standing right before me! I am such a lucky woman!

Kate hugs Brian, then Ellen. Ellen lets go quickly, as she always does, nudges Jules forward. Kate and Jules hug awkwardly.

INT. GULDEN KITCHEN - JUST AFTER

Comfort and warmth. Homemade crafts everywhere, embroidered pillows with sayings such as Life is Uncertain. Eat Dessert First. Ellen stares incredulously at a birthday cake decorated with books, a little model of the college and the streets of Langhorne.

ELLEN

Wow mom. This must have taken days.

KATE

Thanks. I do think Main Street turned out rather nicely. (beat) Well, guess who I am.

ELLEN

"There's no place like home?"

BRIAN

Jesus Ellen, can't you be nice?
There must have been a switch at the
hospital. You are not related to me.

KATE

Quiet everyone. Here he comes!

The door opens. George fumbles for the light switch.

GEORGE

Kate? Kate?

The lights go on. Everyone leaps up, Ellen yells the loudest,

EVERYONE

Surprise!

George, books under his arm, stares in complete astonishment. Then
he smiles his dazzling smile which casts a spell on the whole room.

GEORGE

Oh well this is really too much!
Look at all of you! Kate, how did
you ever pull it off?! Bravo!

Kate smiles at him in complete adoration.

HAROLD AND OTHER GUESTS

Speech! Speech!

GEORGE

Oh no, I'm quite out of breath from the
walk home. It's only in going uphill
that one realizes they are headed
downhill. (they laugh) All I have
prepared are my notes for my Poe
lecture - "Edgar Allen Poe - was
passionately fond of roe. He always
like to chew some - when writing
anything gruesome." (More laughter)
Really, thank you all so much for
coming. I'm really very moved.

George goes up to Kate, shakes his head with a smile. He kisses
her, whispers in her ear, a marriage still strong with attraction.

THE PARTY - LATER

In full swing. Animated conversation. Lots of red wine. George
sits on a couch besides some friends. A group of friends'

CHILDREN, 3 and 4 years old, run up to George,

KIDS

Hey Mr. Gulden. Do the ABC game, OK?
Please! Please!

Laughing, George allows the kids to pull him off the couch.

GEORGE

Help, I'm being ambushed! Alright! A
is for Aaah-aaah-aaah-CHOOOOO!

George does a huge, exaggerated sneeze. The kids laugh, imitate him.

KIDS

A is for Aaaaah-aaah-aaah CHOOOOO!

GEORGE

Good! (making a sour face) B is for
BLUNDERBUSS!...

KIDS

B is for blunderbuss!!

GEORGE

Marvelous! C is for Can-can Dancers!

George imitates Can-can dancers kicking up their heels, then
tumbles over to the kids' great delight. The kids imitate
George, then dissolve in giggles, tumbling down all around him.
Kate smiles over at George. He smiles back at her wearily.

GEORGE

I think I'm getting too old for this..

KID

And D! Mr. Gulden! D is for???

GEORGE

D? D is for...Dracula!

He pounces on them, pretending he has fangs, the kids scream
with laughter. Ellen pulls Jules down the hall.

INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - JUST AFTER

SOUNDS OF THE PARTY in B.G. Ellen and Jules scope the office.
Plush. Filled with books. A shelf of non-fiction books and
biographies of great writers by George Gulden. On the wall, The
National Book Award plus other prestigious literary awards, framed
degrees, photographs of George with important literary figures.

JULES

Holy shit. Has he ever done anything he hasn't gotten an award for?

ELLEN

Look over here. His own novel. No more writing about other great writers. This is his dream.

On the desk, a thick manuscript. COMEBACK INN by George Gulden.

ELLEN

He's been working on it for years. Don't worry. Melville took 10 for Moby Dick.

JULES

Hey, I wasn't worried.

ELLEN

I read his first chapter. Brilliant-

JULES

That's great El. Excuse me if I don't genuflect. So what did he say about your article? (beat) I don't believe it! You didn't ask him did you?! Come on!

BACK TO PARTY

Someone plays jazz on the piano. Brian helps Kate in the kitchen. Students circle George like he is the sun and they are planets depending on his light and warmth to exist. He listens sympathetically to a worried GRADUATE STUDENT.

GRADUATE STUDENT

I'm having a lot of trouble with it.

GEORGE

Listen, a writer called a friend and said, I've just finished writing something and it's not very good. In fact, it's terrible. And the worst part of it is, it is the very best I can do. You know who the writer was? Steinbeck. Talking about Grapes of Wrath. So hang in there. See me in office hours. Celine will set it up.

STUDENT

Thanks a lot, professor.

GEORGE

Happy to help. (smiles) We always try to please the customer.

Jules gives Ellen a little push. She goes up to George.

ELLEN

Hey dad, Happy Birthday.

GEORGE

Thank you. Unfortunately, I'm afraid with sixty staring me in the face, I have developed inflammation of the sentence structure and definite hardening of the paragraphs. (to guests) Excuse us.

George takes Ellen by the arm. They walk away.

GEORGE

It's wonderful to see you. How are you? Tell! Tell!

ELLEN

(gesturing to the party)
You knew, didn't you?

GEORGE

(smiles at her)
Don't tell your mother. I saw Ben's distinctively beat up old Saab. Oh, speaking of editors, I read your last piece. Very interesting.

Ellen looks up at him nervously. He looks at the Minnies, clustered nearby, Kate with them. One is dressed as Tinkerbell, another as Cinderella and another as Snow-white.

GEORGE

Good lord, your mother's friends, the Minnies, seem to get their literature from Disney. (nods and smiles to them, gazes around at other guests) Imagine that really were Sylvia Plath. Or Dickens. Now that would be a party, eh? I see you managed to avoid a costume.

ELLEN

Yeah. But if I had dressed up, I would of course have come as you.

GEORGE

(grins)

Very kind of you to flatter a dottering old man. Well, you would have been the only one.

ELLEN

Everyone else just lacks the requisite panache.

GEORGE

(laughs, pleased)

Oh please.

ELLEN

How's Comeback Inn going?

GEORGE

Very well.

Ellen watches him down his wine. George spies Mrs. Best heading for them. He takes Ellen's arm and leads her to the front door.

GEORGE

Uh oh, The enemy doth approach. I will protect you, fairest maiden.

ON THE FRONT PORCH - JUST AFTER

Brian hits tennis balls against the garage in the fading light. He moves with complete athletic grace. George turns to Ellen.

GEORGE

Now, about your article...

Ellen takes a long nervous drag on her cigarette. George paces back and forth a moment. He stops, turns to her.

GEORGE

Oh look here, I don't want to interfere. You're doing just fine.

ELLEN

Dad please. I really appreciate your criticism. It helps me a lot.

GEORGE

Well if you insist. Writer to writer.
(she smiles) Now this may sound banal
Ellen, but Less is More. Your prose
is overly emotional at times. It's
not your fault. The problem is your
damn editor. Nappy or Scruffy or-

ELLEN

Tweedy.

GEORGE

Tweedy. Ellen, you've got real
talent. But it's not enough. You
must reach goddamn it. When I was a
young writer publishing in the New
Yorker at age 20, I would work on a
sentence for an entire day to get it
right. Lord knows I still do. Pursue
excellence and nothing less.

ELLEN

Thanks for reading it.

Ellen has visibly diminished before our eyes. George sees she's
deflated, tries to make up for it.

GEORGE

But this piece is definitely your
best work yet Ellen! Good job. Keep
working and you will get to the New
Yorker which is more your style. And
Brian, how is Harvard?

BRIAN

We beat Yale in the tennis finals.

GEORGE

And you won your match I assume.

BRIAN

Yep.

GEORGE

Good. But I was referring to your
classes. (beat) I hope you're not
having trouble again with your courses.
If there's anything I can do-

BRIAN

No. (quickly) Everything's fine dad.

GEORGE

I'd be happy to help, talk to your professors perhaps. If you'd like me to look at your term paper or-

BRIAN

(interrupting, tense)

Dad, I said everything's fine.

GEORGE

Well good then. Good.

Kate sticks her head out the door.

KATE

I am being lectured by a History Professor about the valuable cultural contributions of The Home-maker. Who is going to rescue me?

GEORGE

That's Anna Farnsworth. She-

KATE

Yes I know. She received the Guggenheim last year which she managed to mention at least 6 times. It's time to come cut the cake and make a wish.

GEORGE

I have only one wish - great success for my children.

He finishes off Brian's wine and goes inside.

BRIAN

Oops. He said his wish out loud. Now it won't come true. Phew, the pressure's off. (beat) What's with him? He's putting it away.

ELLEN

Oh he's fine. He just hates his birthday, you know that. (beat) Don't say anything to mom though.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Stravinsky blasts on the stereo as everyone cleans up. Kate comes in, holding a box of holiday decorations. George swings her around in a waltz for a moment, then turns and winks at Ellen.

GEORGE

(teasingly)

Ah, I see the decorating season has officially begun! Our quarterback is suiting up.

KATE

George, you love it when the Minnies decorate the Christmas trees.

(smiles) You just try to pretend you're Scrooge. I know better.

George raises a glass to his family.

GEORGE

Thank you all for such a beautiful birthday. I know I can be a terrible grump on this day, and I truly appreciate your superhuman patience with me.

He turns to Kate and they kiss.

KATE

Happy Birthday and goodnight. (beat, softly) We've got to get up early for Dr. Cohn, remember.

GEORGE

(softly)

Yes, I remember.

He kisses her on the forehead. She goes out, her hand on her back. George gazes after her, then after a moment, follows her.

INT. GULDEN LIVING ROOM - LATE SATURDAY AFTERNOON

Through the window, Jules and Brian are in the backyard eating ice cream. Ellen puts down the phone, stands still a moment, frightened. She goes to the window and calls out to them.

ELLEN

It was dad. They're keeping mom overnight. To do more tests.

BRIAN

Why?

ELLEN

Dad said they won't know anything till morning. He doesn't want us to come.

They look at each other, intense worry across their faces. Jules comes inside, puts her arm around Ellen.

EXT. GULDEN HOUSE - MORNING

George comes up the walk, picks up the Sunday New York Times from the front porch. He looks worn, tired, his clothes rumpled. He absent-mindedly organizes the paper into sections. Pauses a long moment at the front door, gathering his strength.

INT. KITCHEN - JUST AFTER

Ellen, Brian and Jules sit at the breakfast table having breakfast. George comes in.

ELLEN

Dad, what is it?

GEORGE

Cancer. There were vague signs. Your mother didn't want to make a fuss. You know how she is. The doctor has decided on chemotherapy.

BRIAN

So she can get better, right? She can have the chemo and be alright.

GEORGE

Dr. Cohn says there is that chance. Some patients respond. Some don't.

Ellen stands and walks out, holding her glass of orange juice.

EXT. GULDEN PORCH - JUST AFTER

Ellen sits on the wicker chair and lights a cigarette with fumbling fingers. George comes outside and stands beside her.

ELLEN

God. Poor mom.

GEORGE

Dr. Cohn says the chemo can be very debilitating, that she needs someone with her during the day. She may not be able to cook or clean.

ELLEN

We can hire a nurse. That's what the Beldens did.

GEORGE

Ellen, I want you to move home and take care of your mother. Your mother needs you.

ELLEN

Move home? (stunned) Me?

GEORGE

Brian has Harvard. You can free-lance from here. The fact is you can bounce back, you...can handle this.

He turns, walks to the edge of the porch, his back to her.

ELLEN

Dad, you know me. I don't know how to do the first thing in that house. I'll come home every single weekend.

GEORGE

Someone needs to be with her during the day.

ELLEN

You could take a sabbatical. It's been 4 years since you took one for the novel. Maybe this could give you a chance to finish it. (beat) Dad?

What Ellen can't see is George's eyes brimming over, tears spilling down his cheeks. He struggles to regain control of his emotions, and only then, turns back. His words come out haltingly.

GEORGE

Ellen, look, I've always been able to count on you. Above everyone. Besides, I have to earn a living to pay for the medical bills, the mortgage. As you well know, the advance for my novel was spent ages ago paying for yours and Brian's educations. A sabbatical is out of the question for me right now. I've got the department to run. (beat) We need to do this together.

ELLEN

Dad, I wouldn't know how to take care of mom. I have an apartment, a job, a life. How can you expect me to just drop everything-

George gazes at her, then picks up her orange juice glass, hurls it at the wall. It shatters. He goes inside. A moment later the door opens. George throws her jacket and duffel bag on the ground.

GEORGE

You have a Harvard education but you have no heart!

He goes back inside, the door slams hard behind him. Ellen looks up after him, deeply hurt by his accusation.

INT. HALLWAY- JUST AFTER

Ellen walks to George's study. He sits at his desk, the Book Review open in front of him. Ellen stands at the door. A deep silence between them. He doesn't look up at her.

INT. TRAIN - SUNDAY AFTERNOON

Ellen and Jules rides back to the city. Ellen starts to cry. Jules pulls out a Kleenex, a couple of M and M's stuck to it.

JULES

Here. Eat'm. It'll make you feel better. (takes Ellen's hand) You OK?

Ellen shakes her head no. Through her tears Ellen tries to smile, makes a weak attempt at humor.

ELLEN

Does the word xanax mean anything to you?

JULES

All out, sorry.

ELLEN

Look, it's just my mother and I-

JULES

Your mother and you have a difficult relationship? Excuse me, but why should you be different from every daughter in the world. Has she ever told you you need to lose weight?

ELLEN

I don't need to lose weight.

JULES

There you go. The fact that you think that you have to be overweight to have your mother suggest you need to lose weight shows how clueless you are about how bad this relationship can be. It doesn't matter. She needs you.

ELLEN

It's so weird my dad would ask me to come home. Brian's the homebody. He loves to cook. I'm the wrong Gulden.

EXT. GRAND CENTRAL STATION - DAY

Ellen gets off the train. Jonathan is waiting for her. Ellen and Jules hug each other good-bye.

JULES

Hi Jonathan. Bye Jonathan.

She walks off. Ellen turns to Jonathan. Before she can speak, he sinks to his knees and holds out an I LOVE NEW YORK key ring.

JONATHAN

My friend Ben is going to Africa for 6 months. He's got the greatest loft. It's got a huge kitchen. You can set up a whole new filing system. Cohabitate with me.

Ellen stares down at him. Her eyes fill with tears.

JONATHAN

Ellen, what is it?

EXT. NEW YORK STREET - NIGHT

Jonathan and Ellen walk arm in arm.

JONATHAN

I'm really sorry about your mom. But you have every right to say no. It's completely insane and selfish for your father to ask you. What about hiring a nurse?

ELLEN

My dad doesn't want a nurse. He wants me.

JONATHAN
We'll go up every single weekend.
Together. Here. (gives her the keyring)
Think about it. El I'm sorry.

INT. MR. TWEEDY'S OFFICE - NEW YORK MAGAZINE - DAY

Ellen stands before her boss, MR. TWEEDY. He looks at her incredulous.

MR. TWEEDY
Not to be crass, but a sick mother
means three weeks off and a very nice
arrangement of flowers sent by the
staff. You're doing great here. If you
leave, there's no guarantee.

ELLEN
I'd freelance some articles. And I
would definitely finish the Sullivan
piece from up there.

MR. TWEEDY
How will you do that? Actually Casey
said he might have a way in too.

ELLEN
No way! It's my story. I can do it.

MR. TWEEDY
How about if I gave you a promotion,
more money?

ELLEN
Mr. Tweedy, do you honestly think
someone would come in here and say
their mother had cancer to get a raise?

MR. TWEEDY
(without missing a beat)
Ellen, this is New York.

INT. ELLEN'S OFFICE - LATE THAT NIGHT

Ellen stares out the window at the vast city. The phone rings. She
picks it up, then smiles, surprised.

ELLEN
Hi dad...yeah I'm really sorry too.

INT. ELLEN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Ellen packs her duffel bag with some clothes and a lot of work. Jonathan tries to study. She crawls into his lap.

JONATHAN

It's just I need you too. I never asked anyone to live with me before you know.
(beat) I'm going to really miss you.

ELLEN

Me too. This time Jonathan, when you miss me, (steadily) just get on a train and come see me, OK?

CUT TO:

INT. TRAIN - DAY

Ellen watches the New York skyline disappear. A sign on an apartment building says IF YOU LIVED HERE, YOU'D BE HOME NOW.

EXT. GULDEN HOUSE - DAY

Ellen, duffel bag in hand, stands at the front door trying to steady her breathing. She slips around the back.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Ellen comes around the corner. Stops. Kate sits at a table, a box of broken dishes in front of her. She is holding a piece in her hand, staring at it. Kate turns, looks up, surprised.

KATE

Ellie, you're home!

They hug. Ellen pulls away first, as she always does.

KATE

I was just remembering moving these dishes from Princeton. Brian was practicing juggling then. Now look, I'm fine. I just have to take it easy. The doctor who is - you'll love this - a woman, said 'No papering No stenciling No upholstering.' I asked may I needle point and sew. Yes, she said, if it doesn't include a ladder or staple gun. Are you staying the weekend?

Ellen stares at her mother. A terrible moment of awkwardness as she realizes Kate doesn't know why Ellen's there.

ELLEN

Didn't dad...I'm home for awhile mom.

KATE

What? Home? Here? (shocked) What about your work, your apartment?

ELLEN

I've taken some time off.

KATE

Oh no. No. Not to be a nursemaid to me. You'll hate me. We'll have dinner and then you'll take the first train in the morning. Or the last one tonight.

ELLEN

Mom, I'm staying until you feel better. It's the right thing.

KATE

For who? (beat) This is hard on your father. Whose idea was this?

ELLEN

Mine. His. It was both of our ideas.

KATE

This will never work. He knows you. He should have known it would never work. (sighs) Oh look at the lilies before they close. The last of the summer lilies.

ELLEN

Till next year mom.

KATE

Yes. Well time for tea and cake.

INT. ELLEN'S BEDROOM - JUST AFTER

It is painted pale pink, the windows veiled in brightly colored, flowered chintz. Flowers are painted on the lampshade. Ellen stares at the four poster canopy bed, grimaces. Then feels the floor to see how soft it is.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Kate makes dinner and melts wax for homemade candles moving

quickly around the kitchen. Ellen comes in, smiles awkwardly.

KATE

Well, this is nice, isn't it? We haven't spent any real time together in...well...hmmmm...

ELLEN

I was thinking we could do some fun things while I'm here.

KATE

Wonderful. We could go on a picnic. There's a lovely outdoor concert Sunday at the college, I have a recipe for fancy chicken salad and -

ELLEN

Actually I was thinking more of things you've always wanted to do that you've never done. (quickly) There are a million things I want to do that I've never done.

KATE

Like what?

ELLEN

God everything. Publish a novel, run a magazine. Have you ever thought about starting a decorating business? Or going on the Home Show or traveling to Istanbul or-

Ellen's frustration with her mother's life has snuck into her voice. Kate turns around, her hands on her hips.

KATE

This is the Minnies' busiest season. We have the Halloween Festival, Thanksgiving, and our Christmas trees in the square to decorate. I don't know what you're thinking.

Ellen goes to the window and stares out. She has left her open purse on the counter. Kate glances inside Ellen's purse and sees the Nyquil and Sudafed. Worried, she looks at Ellen.

KATE

I know. What about a project we can do together?

ELLEN
(surprised)
Together?

KATE
Something different...I know! How
about a book group?

ELLEN
A book group?

KATE
Why do you keep repeating everything
I say like its the most remarkable
thing you've ever heard?

ELLEN
A book group. OK. Fine. Who else
should we have?

KATE
Oh no one else, I don't think, do you?
Just the two of us.

ELLEN
No one else?

KATE
There you go again! I've always
wanted to belong to a book group.

ELLEN
You have?

KATE
I've never found one I fit into. The
faculty wives have a club, but
they're always reading something
'turrrribly relevant.'

ELLEN
OK. A book club. Great. (beat) Isn't
there anything else you've always
wanted to do that you've never done?

Kate thinks a moment, then speaks softly.

KATE
I've always wanted to turn 50.

ELLEN
Oh Mom. You will.

The phone RINGS. Kate goes to the hallway phone to answer it. Ellen stares at the spot she was just in. Her eyes fill with tears. She wipes them away quickly.

KATE (OC)
(on the phone)
Hello....Oh no I'd be happy to help!
(excited) Stenciling a crib is fun!
You'll end up doing the walls. Come
over anytime and look at my stencils.

Ellen looks in her book bag. Starting your Own Business, a video of The Home Show. She closes it. The door bursts open. It's George, holding books and papers and grinning.

GEORGE
Aha! Prodigal daughter returns!
Flowers for Kate and Philip Roth's
newest for you. We will go to The
Coachhouse to celebrate and then you
can help me grade blue books. Oh those
poor students. Ellen's red pen!

He walks away. A moment later, Stravinski BLASTS through the house. She follows him into

INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

George stands behind his desk conducting to the music.

GEORGE
In a previous life I must have been
a conductor!

ELLEN
Previous? (smiles) How about this one.

GEORGE
I'm happy you're home. Thank you.

ELLEN
Dad, it was kind of weird. It seemed
like mom didn't know I was coming.

GEORGE
Yes, well I thought it was better to
surprise her. You know how she is. She
would have redecorated your entire room.

ELLEN

Oh. (beat) What's that smell?

George opens a drawer filled with old green apples.

GEORGE

I'll confess. An old writing trick. T.S. Eliot believed his body sabotaged the attention of his mind when he was writing. So he engaged the body with a simple stimulant, apples, to free his mind. So far it's just making me hungry for pie a la mode.

Ellen smiles, puts down a stack of articles.

ELLEN

Speaking of mind over body, here is research I did about ways to help mom get well. UCLA - Healing and the Mind. About shaking things up-

GEORGE

Shaking things up? We've had quite enough of that around here. The best thing for Kate is for life to remain as normal as possible. We've got the holidays coming. I want to get through them without any great dramas. Now, what are you working on?

ELLEN

My interview with James Sullivan.

GEORGE

Senator Sullivan? (she nods) Very impressive. That's a big story.

ELLEN

Tweedy said it'll probably be the cover story.

GEORGE

Let me ask you something. Random House has asked me who I would like to write the introduction to my Collected Essays on the Great Writers. It's coming out in the spring.

ELLEN

That's great dad.

GEORGE

Oh, just ancient work from all too long ago. (he glances at Comeback Inn) Anyway, they envisioned a kind of biographical piece or interview perhaps. Now certainly feel free to say no, but well, if you had the time, how would you like to write the introduction?

ELLEN

Me? Wow, I'd love to!

GEORGE

Marvelous. I'll help you with the questions.

EXT. HALLWAY - JUST AFTER

Ellen comes out holding a huge stack of George's books, and the huge manuscript of his collected essays. The door opens. George steps out, holding some shirts.

GEORGE

Oh, the buttons broke on the collars of two of my shirts. Could you see that they're replaced? And I'd rather we had skim instead of whole milk.

ELLEN

Are you talking to me?

GEORGE

Yes. Thank you for taking care of all this.

He adds the two shirts onto her heavy load.

ELLEN

Sure. I can take care of it. Sure.

The door closes, typing begins. Ellen stands there, stunned.

VOICE

What are you doing here in the dark?

Ellen turns with a jump. Kate turns on the light.

KATE

I've run you a vanilla bath for
(more)

KATE (CONTINUED)
sweet dreams. And Ellen I...(she
struggles) I put your medicine supplies
in the cabinet.

INT. BATHROOM - THAT NIGHT

Ellen gets into the bath with a cigarette and New York Magazine.
George's book, the Sullivan notes, and Kate's treatment information
surround her on the floor. She can't relax. She gets out, opens the
medicine chest, takes a long swig of Nyquil.

BACK TO INTERROGATION - DAY

Ellen takes a sip of water. Earl studies her.

EARL
How did you feel about coming home?

ELLEN
Like I was caught in a crowded elevator
stuck between floors. On Rikers Island.
I tried not to feel a thing.

EARL
Langhorne must have seemed a world
away from New York city huh? And
how'd you feel about your mother?

ELLEN
I thought maybe I could help her get
well. I thought maybe it was the
routine of her life, the daily grind
that made her sick.

EARL
It wasn't your kind of thing. Her life.

ELLEN
If you want to know the truth, to me
she was like a member of some
strange tribe on a National
Geographic special.

Earl frowns, turns away from Ellen. Looking at his file, Earl sees
a photo of Kate, smiles.

EARL
I remember your mom. She decorated
the Christmas trees in the square.
(more)

EARL (CONTINUED)

We always go there after midnight
mass. She seemed like a nice lady.
Real sweet.

ELLEN

Yeah Earl, she was a nice lady.
Definitely nicer than me. But look,
I didn't do it! God, it's crazy that
I'm even here! There is no evidence,
no proof. No case. You're wasting
your time!

EARL

(harder now)

You're the one in the big hurry
here. I've got all the time in the
world Ellen. So why don't you get
comfortable, unless of course,
there's something you want to tell
me right now that would shorten this
whole process.

ELLEN

Yeah Earl, there is something I want
to tell you that'll do just that.
(she leans forward, he does too, a
beat, then she speaks strongly) I
didn't do it! Now can I go?

Earl leans back. He's really beginning to dislike her now.

EARL

Let's continue.

INT. GULDEN KITCHEN - MORNING - PAST

Ellen comes in sleepily, groggily, grabs a giant cup of coffee.

KATE

(singing)

Good morning to you!

ELLEN

(shielding her eyes from the light)

Instant human, just add coffee.

KATE

Ellie, all you need is a little sleep.

George eats his breakfast. Kate fixes little bottle covers out of bandannas to decorate the dishwashing liquid bottle. George stands.

GEORGE

Bye. See you gals tonight.

He kisses Kate on the lips.

KATE

Bye darling. Have a nice day.

He kisses Ellen on the top of her head.

ELLEN

Bye dad. Have a nice-

Ellen gulps. George leaves. Kate squats, the top half of her inside a cabinet looking for a lid. She emerges, clutching it triumphantly.

KATE

I should have redone this kitchen years ago.

Kate gets up, using the counter for support, lifts the stock pot onto a back burner and begins to fill it with water from a tea kettle. She experiences a flash of pain, stops, winces.

ELLEN

You OK?

KATE

A little tired. Today's the big Minnie lunch. Just the thought of all those Minnies is tiring.

Ellen gazes at Kate who though smiling, is breathing hard.

ELLEN

I can make lunch.

KATE

(staring at her incredulously)
You can make lunch?

ELLEN

Sure. I could order in Chinese. Or how about tuna sandwiches?

KATE

Ellie, we plan the Christmas trees at this lunch! It's a very important
(more)

KATE (CONTINUED)

occasion. I was planning on serving chicken paillard, zucchini soup and my heavenly chocolate cake.

ELLEN

Oh. I could do that.

KATE

You could made chicken paillard, zucchini soup and chocolate cake?

ELLEN

Why do you keep repeating everything I say like it's the most remarkable thing you've ever heard? Show me. It can't be that hard.

Kate turns, hands on hips and looks at Ellen as if sizing her up.

KATE

Hmmm. Clean out that chicken.

A big, naked chicken sits on the counter. Ellen stares at it.

KATE

Just stick your hand in and pull out the innards.

ELLEN

Jesus mom, it's so intimate. Shouldn't I at least take it to dinner and a movie first?

Kate rolls her eyes. Ellen grimaces, plunges her hand in and pulls out the innards.

ELLEN

Wow! They're wrapped in paper. Do they breed chickens to do that? Isn't science amazing? OK you tell me what to do and don't worry about a thing.

Kate takes off her apron warily and hands it to Ellen.

KATE

Alright then, the torch is passed.

Ellen winces at the bright colored apron that says Kiss the Cook.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS: MUSIC OVER:

- Ellen turns on the blender. Zucchini flies up to the ceiling and sticks. She puts the lid on.
- Ellen pounds the chicken with fervor. Kate gestures for Ellen to take it easy.
- The pristine kitchen is now a total mess. The soup is simmering, the lid beginning to shake, but Ellen doesn't notice.
- An unfrosted cake sits out. Ellen spoons icing into a pastry cloth and faces the cake. She squeezes. SPLAT! Green explodes all over the cake. She glances into the den where Kate is fast asleep on the couch. Ellen goes outside and gets green leaves and puts them on the cake.
- Ellen tries to fold a napkin into the shape of a swan. No luck. It flattens right out.
- A row of swan napkins stand at attention. Ellie is spraying the last one with hairspray. She hears a high pitched WHISTLING sound and turns. The lid on the soup shakes hard, harder, then shoots up to the ceiling like a rocket. The chicken catches on fire. Ellen grabs a swan napkin, snaps it at the fire to kill it, but the hairspray makes the flames go even higher.

ELLIE

Mom!!!! Help!

CUT TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - LUNCH TIME

Ellen peeks through the kitchen door. Kate has made a beautiful table out of Ellen's chaos. The 15 MINNIES are assembled including CLARICE, Kate's best friend. Non-stop talking. A warm, intimate feeling amongst the women.

KATE

I saw it right on Unsolved
Mysteries. This woman said a UFO
landed and took her husband away.

MRS. BEST

Yeah and the UFO was probably named
Jennifer or Sophia.

KATE

She saw something. I just think
there's a lot in this world that's
mysterious. That's unexplained. And
that's all right with me.

CLARICE

Yes, like One Calorie Tab. Why the
need for that one calorie at all?

They laugh together. Mrs. Best puts a piece of black chicken in her mouth and chews with an odd expression. Ellen turns to sneak out, but her feet crunch on spilled rice. Kate turns.

KATE

Oh there you are Ellie. (to the Minnies) Ellie made the lunch. (to Ellen) Come sit down and say hello.

ELLEN

(entering warily)
Thanks, I'd love to, but I've got to go to the library. I'm working on-

CLARICE

I know. Since Ellie made the lunch let's make her an honorary Minnie!

ELLEN

No thanks. I couldn't be a Minnie.

KATE (SIMULTANEOUS)

What a lovely idea!

Ellen looks at Kate who is beaming.

ELLEN

Thanks a lot but I have an article due. I'm just not a Minnie. I mean there's nothing Minnie about me. I don't even like Christmas. It's just a capitalistic perversion of-

Mrs. Best leans her shelf-like bosom onto the mahogany table.

MRS. BEST

Ellen could be very helpful to Kate with her Christmas tree. Sit down Ellen. Welcome to the Minnies.

Ellen sits down, gripping her backpack.

MRS. BEST

It's time to decide what our color scheme will be for our Christmas trees in the square. Lay out your ornaments.

The ladies put the ornaments out on the table. They are beautiful, elaborate. Kate's are blue and silver. JUNE'S are red and gold - An angel with long, blonde hair in a red velvet robe blows a

golden trumpet. Another ornament is made up of a chorus of 20 smaller angels floating together.

MRS. BEST

I like the silver and blue best.
Then the red and gold.

Kate sees everyone exchange looks, murmurs of agreement.

MRS. BEST

Alright then, silver and blue it is-

KATE

I love the red and gold. It's like
the sun rising and setting all at
once. It's just beautiful June.

MINNIE

That's true Kate, but yours-

KATE

Now don't you all go and get mushy on
me. I'm still here. And I plan to be
for many more Christmases. We'll do
blue and silver next Christmas.

A quiet moment on the table. Then relaxation.

CLARICE

You got a deal.

KATE

Alright, who wants cake and tea?

Kate passes out the cake. Clarice turns to Ellen.

CLARICE

I see your mother taught you
her Get Mad Chocolate Cake.

ELLEN

No. Her Heavenly Chocolate Cake.

CLARICE

No. It's her Get Mad Chocolate Cake.
Cause you beat it like hell to get out
all your frustration. She taught me
and I swear if she hadn't, my husband
and my kids wouldn't be alive today.

ELLEN
Get mad? But why would my mom-

MRS. BEST
(jumping up)
Nobody eat! Oleander! On the cake!
Ellen are you trying to poison us?!

ELLEN
Oh no! I'm so sorry! I was just
trying to decorate it and-

MRS. BEST
Poison us Ellen!

Chaos takes over! Forks clatter to the table. Chairs knock over.
Clarice spits out a big bite of cake. Minnies rush to the
bathrooms. Pandemonium!

EXT. HOUSE - JUST AFTER

Ellen runs out the door, hops in the car and tears out, brakes
squealing. Kate comes to the window and watches her drive away.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Ellen races in. She looks up at the stained glass windows
commemorating Shakespeare's heroines. Relief. She sits down.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRASS LAWN - DAY

PAN PAST A FAMILY playing Frisbee, STUDENTS playing football.
Another FAMILY playing badminton to the Gulden family - reading.

Ellen and Kate each read Pride and Prejudice, George has the New
York Times, a big picnic spread out around them. A football comes
flying, knocks George's coffee onto his Times.

GEORGE
Damn it! The book review is
drenched! And Norman Mailer was just
about to get skewered.

KATE
Oh George, here sweetie.

Kate reaches for napkins. She sits back down suddenly.

GEORGE
Are you alright?

KATE
I'm...fine. (covering) Who wants an
apple torte?

George, worried, looks at Kate, then spreads the paper out in the sun. He blows on it. Drums his fingers anxiously. Stands up.

GEORGE
Someone will have the book review. I
will bribe them with Kate's
excellent apple torte. Anybody need
me to bring anything back?

KATE
Just your handsome self.

He kisses Kate on her head, fixes the sweater tight around her, still looking worried. Then he's gone. Kate's skirt flutters up in the breeze. Quickly, she pulls it down, glances at Ellen, tucks her skirt in tight around her thighs.

Ellen picks up George's first book. And writes "George Gulden - Questions: Themes and Great Ideas." Kate studies Ellen biting her nails and washing three Sudafed down with coffee. Kate marshals her strength and speaks loudly.

KATE
I was reading this book when I met
George. I used to go over to the
Columbia library when I wasn't working
at my folks' cleaners. I was forbidden
from going to City College which is all
we could afford. Papa said, 'Not my
daughter mixing no.' George took me out
to dinner. I leaned across the table
and said I would make the perfect
faculty wife.

ELLEN
(amazed)
You asked dad to marry you?

KATE
He was so handsome and smart. I was
only a child really, 19. (beat, then
intensely) I absolutely hate what
Jane Austen does in this book.

ELLEN

(surprised at Kate's intensity)
What does she do? It's one of my favorites.

KATE

The way she makes the sister who is sweet and domestic second fiddle to the one who is smart and outspoken. Austen should have known better than to pigeonhole women like that. Women professors do it at the college too, at faculty teas..."Oh you keep house - how maaaaahvelllous"

She laughs. Ellen looks very uncomfortable. George comes back.

GEORGE

Your tarts were so well received, I nabbed Arts and Leisure too.

He sits next to Kate. Helps her lie back, her head in his lap.

GEORGE

Listen. You're going to love this Ellen. Damn Frank Rich thinks he's god...

Ellen watches as Kate continues reading Pride and Prejudice tsking and shaking her head. On Ellen looking at her mother curiously.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

KATE

Yes, the book definitely should have been told from the sweet, domestic sister's point of view. Now that would have been a good book.

Kate reads Pride and Prejudice lying on a recliner beside an IV drip. Ellen sits next to the recliner reading George's books, her James Sullivan research and Pride and Prejudice beside her.

ELLEN

You think so? I don't know mom.

KATE

That's just what your father said. He said that would have made for a very dull book. But he's dead wrong. He misses the whole point.

Ellen looks at her quizzically.

KATE

See if you divide women up that way, the sweet, goodhearted one is considered mindless and the smart one is considered heartless. You miss the most important thing. The whole point of well...of thinking with your heart.

ELLEN

(completely befuddled)
What do you mean?

KATE

You know. When you do something that doesn't make sense up here, (points to her head) but does here (points to her heart).

ELLEN

You mean act out of passion, like Nietzsche said-

KATE

No. With your whole being, your heart leading. I tried to talk to your father about it, but he doesn't like to talk shop at home, at least with me. With you he considers it part of your education. Sometimes I listen to you two and I feel like a little league player listening to the pros. It's interesting.

ELLEN

Interesting? I don't know. It's exhausting staying on top of your game with your father.

KATE

Ellen, it's a mistake to base your entire life on one man's approval.

ELLEN

(leans forward, amazed)
It's OK mom. It's the way women lived when you got married.

KATE
(surprised, a little laugh)
Ellen, I wasn't talking about me.

Ellen sits back, confused, the rug that is her mother, being tugged out from under her feet. Who is this woman?

KATE
We have a little expedition tomorrow. You want to come along?

ELLEN
An expedition?

KATE
To get yarn. We'll see some interesting things Ellen.

Ellen looks at her stack of work, Kate reading the book.

ELLEN
Well...yeah. OK mom. I mean, maybe as a work break.

INT. CAR - NEXT DAY

Ellen is in the back seat, Clarice and Kate in front.

KATE
Let's see. We take highway 7 north to 186 east, then turn down that road by that little apple stand.

ELLEN
What?! We're leaving the state to get yarn?! That's crazy. Let's go to the Woolworths down the street. It doesn't make any sense.

KATE
Perhaps not. And perhaps so.

ELLEN
Wait! Let me at least get my Sullivan research for the drive!

But Kate peels out.

INT. CAR - LATER

Kate pulls over to the side of the road in a small town.

ELLEN

Is this it? Where's the yarn?

EXT. SCHOOL - JUST AFTER

Kate, holding a shopping bag, leads Ellen down a path in the woods.

KATE

Ellen, remember years ago, you were about 15, someone stole all the Christmas trees in the square?

CLARICE

Lo and behold, we found them all - right here.

12 evergreens are planted behind a school playground with no greenery

CLARICE

My back has never been the same since.

KATE

Look how big they're getting. Oh doesn't the soil smell good? (stops by a tree) Put your hand on this tree Ellen. What do you feel?

ELLEN

The distinct possibility that ants are going to crawl on me.

KATE

No Ellie, it's warm. The honey bees go in there when it gets cold. They fly around to keep each other warm. I can smell the honey. Can you?

Ellen tries to feel and smell the honey bees in the tree, whirring with life. But she can't. She shakes her head no.

ELLEN

So where's the yarn?

KATE

This is on the way to the yarn.

Kate and Clarice reach into the bag and pull out candy and toys.

DISSOLVE TO:

The trees decorated with candy and toys. The SCHOOLBELL rings.

KATE

Run! Hide Ellie!

They duck behind some bushes and watch the KIDS come out for recess. The kids see the tree and run to it screaming, happy. Kate and Clarice sneak away. Kate whispers to Ellen.

KATE

Duck down. Don't let them see you.

EXT. HUNTINGTON COSTUMES - JUST AFTER

A small factory. The car pulls up. An Indian woman, NARI dressed in a sari comes to the door. She sees Kate and throws her arms around her. Kate reaches into her shopping bag and gives Nari a pillow with a Hindu goddess embroidered on it.

INT. HUNTINGTON COSTUME FACTORY - CONTINUOUS

A huge INDIAN FAMILY greets Kate, thrilled to see her.

KATE

Nameste. Ste en tali?

Ellen stares at Kate, shocked, then gazes at the wild costumes.

ELLEN

Where's the yarn?

KATE

This is on the way to the yarn. They've had a contract with Ringlings' circus for years and years. That's how Nari's been able to bring her family over from India.

NARI

It's good you came soon as you did. Pradeep was throwing this out.

She opens a door. Next to an incredible assortment of sparkling costumes is a big pile of brightly colored feathers.

KATE

Feathers? Oh we can make golden wings for the angels! Let's pick out the gold ones. Oh, what a find!

Kate, Clarice and Ellen start picking out the gold feathers, putting them in plastic bags. Ellen, sneezing, tries to keep them off her clothes, but is getting covered. A child opens a door. A huge gust of wind blows in and the feathers take flight.

ELLEN

Hey! Shut that door! Shit!

Ellen grabs her bag, desperately trying to catch the feathers swirling around her. Kate, laughing, Clarice and Nari try too. The feathers settle down. Without a second thought, Nari throws herself into the huge pile of feathers, then Kate, then Clarice.

KATE

C'mon Ellen!

Ellen sneezes, still trying to pick out all the gold feathers.

KATE

Oh Ellie, don't worry about making a fool of yourself! You're allowed.

ELLEN

I think I'm allergic.

KATE

Then stop thinking.

Kate, smiling, grabs Ellen and pulls her in.

INT. KATE'S CAR - LATER

Ellen, Kate and Clarice are covered with feathers, laughing. They drive away. Nari waves.

CLARICE

Your mother's tastes are pretty exotic. You should see where she gets her Styrofoam from. I mean do you like alligator farms?

ELLEN

How did you find that place?

CLARICE

Once, one of the Minnies got so mad at something, she made a triple layer mad cake and still didn't feel better and went for a long drive.

ELLEN
Who? Mrs. Best, I bet.

Clarice and Kate exchange a look, but don't answer.

KATE
OK, we're here.

ELLEN
Where?

KATE
The yarn. Remember?

They pull into a parking lot. Ellen looks up in disbelief. They -
are in a Woolworth's parking lot!

INT. CAR - LATER

Driving home. Kate and Clarice sing vehemently to "Don't Rain on My Parade" by Barbara Streisand. Ellen sits in the back.

KATE AND CLARICE
I want to live and live now! Get what I
want, I know how. High on the target and
wham. C'mon Ellie, you know the words
don't you? One shot one gunshot and
Baam. Nicky Ornstein, here I aaaaam!

ELLEN
(hesitates, then sings out)
I'll march my bands out. I'll beat
my drum.

KATE, ELLEN AND CLARICE
And if it pans out...Don't bring
around a cloud to rain on my
paraaaaade!!!

They laugh a long moment. Then Ellen's smile disappears.

ELLEN
Oh shit! Fuck me! I was supposed to
meet dad. 4 o'clock cocktails to go
over my questions with him.

Kate puts the pedal to the metal. They fly down the road.

INT. FACULTY LOUNGE - LATER

Ellen races in. No sign of George.

EXT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT - DAY

Ellen races up to George's office, knocks. No answer.

EXT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - DUSK

Ellen sits on a bench just around the corner from George's office, plucking off feathers. Two STUDENTS knock on George's door.

STUDENT 1

Not here. So, who's he doing now?

STUDENT 2

Well, Celine's his new TA. Or should I say t and a. Must be her. (beat) I'd do him.

STUDENT 1

Not me. He grades too hard. Can you imagine? 'Sorry my dear. You've got talent, but you must reach damn it!

STUDENT 2

You know he's been having an affair for years with some New York writer.

Ellen is dying. She crouches down.

STUDENT 1

Yeah. He's always carrying that magazine around with him. What is it? Oh yeah. New York Magazine.

ELLEN

(to herself, but still worried)
Oh, thank god!

INT. ELLEN'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Ellen looks at clock. It's midnight. The phone rings. Ellen picks it up. Hears her mother answer.

KATE

Hello.

HAROLD

It's Harold. Sorry to call so late.

INT. DARK ROOM - SAME TIME

George's friend Harold is on the phone. It's hard to see where he is. MUSIC plays in the background. George is across the room. He seems to be sitting at some kind of podium.

HAROLD

I'm here with George.

BACK TO ELLEN

Listening in to the phone call.

KATE

I was expecting you. (beat, sharply)
Ellie, is that you? I've got it.

Ellen hangs up the phone, confused.

INT. ELLEN'S BEDROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ellen hears a car drive up. She looks out the window. George and Harold get out of a car. Kate comes out, takes George's arm and they disappear inside. Ellen goes to her door, listens. She hears MURMURS. WHISPERS. And a big Shhhh.

Ellen paces a moment, then drinks down a huge swig of Nyquil. Then another. She picks up the phone, dials.

ELLEN

Jonathan, that book should've been
called You Should Never Go Home Again
Unless You're Out of Your Fucking
Mind. Something weird's going on
around here. (hangs up, dials) Jules
it's me. I mean I think it's me...

INT. ELLEN'S ROOM - MORNING - SEVERAL WEEKS LATER

Ellen sits in front of her computer, downs a packet of coffee, talking on the phone.

ELLEN

So when you worked with James
Sullivan, would you describe him as
driven? Would you use the word
voracious? OK. (types in voracious)
How about his drug use back then?

Ellen hears a voice calling her.

GEORGE (OC)
Ellen! Ellen!

ELLEN
Thanks a lot for your time. I have
to go. We'll finish up later. You've
been so helpful.

INT. KATE AND GEORGE'S BEDROOM - JUST AFTER

Ellen runs in. Kate lies in bed, eyes closed, George sits beside
her, desperately trying to comfort her, but seeming very helpless.

GEORGE
She's in horrible pain. She says
it's her back. (to Kate) All will be
well, shh, shh, shh.

KATE
A heating pad.

GEORGE
She's been up most of the night. I
couldn't find a heating pad, but she
insisted I shouldn't wake you.

KATE
Let Ellen sleep. She needs to sleep.

Ellen helps George pull Kate upright. Her nightgown slips off
her shoulders, twists around her thighs. Ellen sees Kate's
bruised legs, her collarbone standing out, the body she's
hidden. Ellen freezes. She turns to George. He is absolutely
unable to look at her. After a moment, hoarse,

GEORGE
Ellen.

Ellen grabs a heating pad from a dresser. They lay Kate down on
it. Her eyes are closed.

KATE
George, you have a nine o'clock.

Ellen turns to George, but he doesn't speak. His face is white.

ELLEN
Dad you go on. I can handle it.

GEORGE

Thank you. I'll cancel the
reservations Kate.

He stands up, then he's gone.

INT. KITCHEN - JUST AFTER

DR. COHN, a handsome woman, writes a prescription. Ellen moves
frenetically around the kitchen making tea and cake.

ELLEN

Is the chemo working?

DR. COHN

It's too early to tell. But Ellen,
she didn't throw her back out.

ELLEN

I know that. I'm not stupid.

DR. COHN

I know that, but as you may have
realized, intelligence is not what's
needed here. Empathy is. Your mother
seems to be in a great deal of pain.
It's hard to tell how much because
she is an uncomplaining patient.
I've given you morphine pills. I
want to send a nurse.

ELLEN

No nurse. I can handle this.

DR. COHN

I insist. Your mother needs someone
she can be open with about her pain.

ELLEN

She can be open with me.

DR. COHN

Can she? Has she told you she's
terrified to go to sleep because
she's afraid she'll never wake up?
Has she told you she imagines
sometimes how the rest of you will
go on with your lives and forget
her? Has she told you that?

Ellen shakes her head no.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Ellen, folding clothes, studies Kate carefully as she works in the backyard on the mosaic table. Ellen gazes at her face, trying to somehow divine what's hidden below. The doorbell RINGS. Ellen opens the door to see TERESA, a slender, dark nurse sent by Dr. Cohn.

TERESA

Ms. Gulden. I am Teresa Guerrero. I will be helping you and your mother.

ELLEN

I'm not so sure about this.

TERESA

I understand.

INT. KITCHEN - JUST AFTER

Kate now sits at the table drinking tea. Teresa gives Ellen a folder of pamphlets.

TERESA

You may want to read these. Dr. Cohn thinks you should have them, particularly the more technical ones.

Teresa listens to Kate's heart with a stethoscope.

KATE

Still beating?

TERESA

Loud and clear. What can I do for you? Would you like help bathing or dressing?

KATE

I am having a terrible time getting in and out of the bathtub.

ELLEN

Mom, you didn't tell me that.

KATE

Oh Ellie, there are so many things to worry about.

TERESA

Let's go upstairs. I can show you
(more)

TERESA (CONTINUED)
some ways to get in and out of the
tub. And I can help irrigate your
catheter.

KATE
Will it hurt?

TERESA
(taking Kate's hand)
Compared to what I imagine you are
used to, not very much.

Kate's head drops and her tears fall on their joined hands.

TERESA
It is important you not hurt.

They go upstairs. Ellen can hear them laughing. Ellen opens the
folder. On top are some pharmaceutical pamphlets about morphine.
Underneath is the Dying Person's Bill of Rights. Ellen reads it.

ELLEN
"I have the right to be cared for by
sensitive, knowledgeable people who
will try to understand my needs and
will be able to gain some satisfaction
in helping me face my death."

Ellen closes the folder and pushes it away. Hot tears run down
her face. Ellen puts her head down on the table and cries.
Finally she looks up. Teresa stands there. It feels like she's
been standing there a long time. Ellen wipes her eyes.

ELLEN
This is why I told Dr. Cohn we didn't
need a nurse. It's too upsetting. I
can't afford to fall apart.

TERESA
Falling apart is curling up into a
fetal position and staying in bed for
a week. You're just expressing your
pain.

ELLEN
That's very poetic but it doesn't
make me feel any better.

TERESA

I refuse to believe that keeping
your grief bottled up makes you feel
better than crying.

ELLEN

(pushing away the folder)

I don't need this. She's doing great.

INT. LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Kate lies on the couch. Ellen is making Christmas decorations.
George comes in the door.

GEORGE

Alright Kate, I've got a surprise.
Close your eyes and keep them
closed. Ellen, you too.

Ellen and Kate put their hands over their eyes.

GEORGE

Alright, I'll lead you. No peeking!

He leads them into the dining room. Seats them.

KATE

Now George? Now can I look?

Suddenly, glorious MUSIC fills the room. Kate and Ellen open their
eyes. Their mouths fall open at what they see. A STRING QUARTET
plays. The table is set with silver platters, a feast. A white
coated WAITER serves them. It is so wonderful. So excessive. So
George. George shouts over the music.

GEORGE

If you can't go to The Coachhouse,
The Coachhouse comes to you. And
after dinner I've rented your
favorite movie. To Kill a
Mockingbird. One of the few books
Hollywood has not massacred.

KATE

Oh George, it's wonderful!

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

To Kill a Mockingbird plays on the TV. George looks over at Kate.
She is fast asleep on the couch. Ellen sits on the floor making
Christmas decorations.

ELLEN

I gave her a pill. She's out.

He leans forward and strokes Kate's hair gently.

GEORGE

She's looking better.

ELLEN

Right now she is. This morning she looked like a bruised peach.

GEORGE

Don't ever say that again. She's doing fine. We have to be strong for her.

ELLEN

I'm trying.

GEORGE

You just have to try harder. (finishes his wine, stands up) Well essays to grade. (as he goes out) Oh I will have evening tutorials several times a week over the next month.

He walks out without looking back at her. Ellen stares after him.

INT. GEORGE'S STUDY - JUST AFTER

George organizes his papers, then fixes his biographies on the shelf so that they are perfectly even. He sits down at the desk, his unfinished novel in front of him. He picks up a pen, opens the drawer and inhales the smell of apples. Suddenly, he puts his head in his hands, sobbing.

INT. ELLEN'S ROOM - DAY

Ellen is on the phone talking to Sullivan's rehab.

ELLEN

I'm an old friend of Mr. Sullivan's. His sister, (checks her notes) Laura, told me he was checked in. When will he be released?

Ellen looks up. Kate stands at the doorway dressed in an elaborate Cinderella costume. Ellen signals to her mother just a minute. Kate straightens up Ellen's papers while Ellen talks.

ELLEN

Look, I know it's private. I'm just trying to be a friend here. Which I'm sure he needs.

KATE

Is a friend of yours in trouble?

ELLEN

Hold on. (to Kate) No. It's just a work thing.

KATE

Oh. I thought you said friend. Well, ready to go?

Ellen looks at Kate holding a second Halloween costume.

ELLEN

Uh, you know Mom, I'm kind of in the middle of something here.

KATE

It's alright. You don't have to come if you don't want to.

ELLEN

(back on the phone)

Mr. Lewis, can I call you back later?

EXT. LANGHORNE SOCIAL CLUB - THAT NIGHT

CLOSE ON Ellen's face. She is shaking her head.

ELLEN

This is what the Moonies do. They take away your shoes, your clothes, your identity. This is classic cult behavior. Are you sure the Minnies aren't an offshoot of the Moonies?

REVEAL ELLEN dressed as a witch. Kate is dressed as Cinderella. They are in a fortune telling booth at the Halloween Festival.

KATE

At least you're wearing your favorite color. (calls out) Next goblin.

A LITTLE GIRL comes in dressed as Sleeping Beauty.

KATE

Are you ready to hear your fortune?

GIRL

When I grow up and am a congresswoman,
will I meet Prince Charming?

ELLEN

Sure, you'll find him the self-help
section in a book called the Cinderella
Complex.

KATE

Ellen! (to girl) The most important
thing is don't grow up to be
something. Grow up to be someone. And
when you find the man you think is
Prince Charming, remember, the only
time you can change a man is when he's
in diapers.

The little girl starts to giggle. Ellen joins in.

EXT. MINNIES' HALLOWEEN FESTIVAL - JUST AFTER

Elaborate. Minnies running all sorts of booths. Clarice sits on a
trapeze at the Dunk the Goblin booth. She waves hello. A little
boy throws a ball. BULLSEYE. Down she goes.

KATE

Let's go in the scary house.

ELLEN

Mom, its for kids.

KATE

Well we could relieve Clarice instead.

INT. SCARY HOUSE - JUST AFTER

Ellen and Kate walk by a coffin with a group of ghouls posed
around it. The cadaver bursts out of the coffin straight at them
and grabs Ellen. Ellen screams.

KATE

Oh it's just Mrs. Best. Here, take my
arm. (covering) I'm a little tired.

Ellen grips Kate's arm, then screams as the ghosts chase them.

EXT. FERRISWHEEL - JUST AFTER

Ellen and Kate are at the top eating caramel apples. Exuberant. They look down at the sights below.

ELLEN

Look how tiny the college looks.

KATE

Like a little decoration on a cake.

Ellen smiles, but glances at her watch.

ELLEN

I better get back mom. I gotta make that call.

EXT. LANGHORNE - THAT NIGHT

Ellen and Kate walk home from the festival wearing their costumes, kicking through the fall leaves. You can tell the Minnies' houses from the elaborate decorations.

ELLEN

They go all out, those Minnies.

KATE

Oh yes. Very creative women. More is more.

ELLEN

What?

KATE

Your father always says Less is More. I don't see it that way at all. More is more. Hey, let's go trick or treating. Here. The Best's house.

The lawn is covered with Halloween decorations. They ring the doorbell. No one answers. Kate grins playfully.

KATE

They're not home from the festival yet. (beat) OK, time for a trick.

Kate turns a Halloween decoration on the lawn upside-down.

ELLEN

Hey Mom. More is more.

They look at each other, then Kate runs onto the lawn and starts to turn upside-down every single Halloween decoration on the lawn. Ellen laughs in amazement, then joins her. A car drives by. Kate grabs Ellen's hand and they run off laughing. They collapse on a lawn cracking up. They get up and walk on down the street.

KATE

I love walking in Langhorne. Look at that leaf just pirouetting to the sidewalk. Oh, it's a beautiful night. Ellen, do you know that Langhorne hums. Have you ever heard it?

ELLEN

No mom. Can't say that I have.

KATE

No Ellie really. Listen. It's the sound of all the air conditioners in the summer and heaters in the winter and something more. Close your eyes.

Kate watches Ellen close her eyes, trying hard. After a moment, Ellen opens her eyes. Nothing.

ELLEN

I think I almost heard something.

KATE

(softly)

I wonder if one of these nights, you could try falling asleep when you're sleepy and then wake up when you're rested. Wouldn't that be nice? You're home now. Take a break honey.

A GROUP of trick-or-treaters race by them. Kate smiles.

KATE

I have a brilliant idea. Go bring your dad home and we'll all give out candy. I insist. No more work tonight! I proclaim Halloween a national holiday.

Ellen looks at Kate smiling in anticipation.

INT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT HALL - JUST AFTER

Ellen knocks on George's office door. No answer.

INT. LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

Ellen looks in. Empty.

INT. DEPARTMENT HALLWAY - NIGHT

Ellen passes STUDENTS, some dressed up in costume. A couple comes around the corner. It's George and CELINE, his pretty, young teaching assistant. His arm is around her shoulder. They are laughing intimately. Ellen ducks into a classroom, waits till they pass. Ellen follows George and Celine, staying 20 feet behind them.

EXT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT - NIGHT

George and Celine get in George's car.

INT. ELLEN'S CAR - JUST AFTER

Ellen gets into her car and follows them. They stop at a stoplight. She sees Celine lean over and kiss George. He kisses her back. The light turns green. George drives through the intersection. But Ellen is frozen. Cars are honking. Her head is on the steering wheel.

INT. GULDEN HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Ellen comes in, her witch costume crumpled in one arm. Kate watches Unsolved Mysteries on TV, chats on the phone. Ellen heads quickly out of the kitchen. But Kate hangs up.

KATE

You missed all the trick-or-treaters!
They were so cute. Remember when Brian
went as a dice and fell over and you
didn't help him up because you were
laughing too hard at his legs wiggling
like a bug. Oh I shouldn't laugh.
(beat) Did you find your father?

Ellen can't meet her mother's eye.

ELLEN

The secretary said he had a late
class.

KATE

Too bad. (beat) Are you OK, Ellen?

ELLEN

Yeah mom. Just great.

Kate changes the channel on the TV. South Pacific's on.

KATE

I just love this movie.

SONG ON TV

"I'm stuck like a dope with a thing
called hope and I can't get it out
of my heart."

Ellen slips out.

INT. BEDROOM - JUST AFTER

Ellen stares at a page titled George Gulden interview: Themes and Great ideas. Questions. She puts it down, dials the phone.

ELLEN

Mr. Lewis please...Oh. When will he
be back? (hangs up) Shit.

INT. ELLEN'S ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Ellen lies in bed wide awake. The phone rings. She picks it up.

KATE

Hello? Oh hello Harold.

Ellen hangs up the phone, stares out the window, trying to understand what's happening, shakes her head with bewilderment, then takes a long swig of Nyquil. But she's wide awake.

BACK TO INTERROGATION

Ellen's face is closed. She looks exhausted now.

ELLEN

My mom and I went to chemo and read books. That's all we did. No great mysteries. Just taking care of her.

EARL

Are you telling me everything?

ELLEN

Oh, well I did leave out the part about the diamonds and rubies I was hoping to inherit and my liaison with the butler. He was in on it too. Is that what you mean?

EARL

Ellen, these charges are really serious.

ELLEN

I know that. I take these charges very seriously. I loved my mother.

EARL

Yeah? From what you're telling me, it sounds like basically you just wanted to get back to your own life.

ELLEN

Look, my relationship with my mother is private. I'm sorry it's not more exciting. We watched ER. It was our favorite. We could really relate. (sighs) It's real simple. I was fucking overwhelmed alright. I was just trying to get through it one day at a time. Like an alcoholic.

She puts her head on the table. He watches her a moment..

EARL

You just want this to be over huh?

ELLEN

Yeah. I do.

EARL

(very quietly)

Is that how you felt about your mother?

ELLEN

(looks up, exploding)

Yes, that's how I felt sometimes, alright?! But who wouldn't!? You tell me that! Who wouldn't?

He looks at her, satisfied now he's finally getting somewhere.

EARL

Christ, lot's of people Ellen. For instance, I sure wouldn't.

INT. GEORGE AND KATE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT - PAST

Kate lies in bed. George tries to feed her soup, but dribbles some on her chin. He cleans it off awkwardly, unused to this role. Sets the soup on the bedside table.

GEORGE

It's snowing a little. You want to come to the window and see?

KATE

Yes. Oh, but I'm so tired.

George gazes into Kate's pale face.

GEORGE

Shall I bring you some then?

KATE

That would be wonderful. I'd love to feel the snow.

GEORGE

(forcing a big smile)

Then you shall!

George goes to the balcony, steps out. A light snow is falling. He holds out his hands. Snowflakes fall into his hands, but on contact, they melt. He pulls off his sweater, desperately trying to catch the flakes. But still, they melt instantly.

He goes back in, sees Kate is feeding herself now. The melted snow on George's face looks like tears. Helplessly, he reaches for a book.

GEORGE

I'll read to you. (reads) Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate. Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May, And summer's lease hath all too short a date...

PULL BACK TO THE HALLWAY where Ellen listens, trying to understand.

EXT. GULDEN BACKYARD - DAY

Don't Rain on My Parade BLASTS. Ellen works on the mosaic table. Pieces of broken plates are spread out on pieces of newspaper. She glues a piece in. The portable phone rings. She answers.

ELLEN

Hello...Mr. Tweedy. Hi...(covers her ear to block out the music) This morning's paper?

She pushes the pieces of broken dish aside to reveal newspaper spread out on the table and reads: James Sullivan to speak at Harvard Club.

ELLEN

Shit. Don't worry about a thing.
I'll be there...No. Don't send Casey! I'm on the next train.

INT. TRAIN STATION - DAY

Ellen races in. The train is pulling out of the station. She races after it, but is too late.

INT. BUS STATION - DAY

A bus pulls in. Ellen tries to push past the passengers, then opens the emergency door and jumps out. A clock reads 3 p.m.

INT. HARVARD CLUB - DAY

Ellen runs in. It's empty. She's too late.

INT. TWEEDY'S OFFICE - NEW YORK MAGAZINE - JUST AFTER

Tweedy looks pissed. CASEY stands next to him.

TWEEDY

I was counting on you. You fucked up big time! Casey talked to Sullivan's secretary. Apparently Sullivan's getting on a plane tonight at 9 PM. He's going to Europe for 3 months.

ELLEN

I'll go to Kennedy, talk to him there.

TWEEDY

That's my girl. (beat) Well, what are you waiting for?

ELLEN

I just remembered. The last train to Langhorne is at 9:30. I'll miss it. There's a bus at midnight but it doesn't get in till morning.

GEORGE
I have no idea.

KATE
You all want me dead so you can get
on with your lives! I know it!

GEORGE
Kate, shhh, shhh. It's all just a
bad dream. It's just a nightmare.

Kate opens her eyes. Sees George, then Ellen.

KATE
Oh, just a nightmare. Oh thank god.

She falls asleep.

GEORGE
Are hallucinations a side effect of
the medication?

ELLEN
I don't know. But I'd rather have
her hallucinating comfortably than
suffering from the pain.

GEORGE
I'm not suggesting she should
suffer. I'm suggesting that we
shouldn't administer medication
without knowing all its side
effects. Jesus, it's like there's
another person inside there.

ELLEN
(harshly)
Yeah, I don't know about that.

She stands up, walks out. George looks after her.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Ellen is preparing Thanksgiving food. Teresa is with her.

TERESA
Some people think they're hallucinations
and others think they are the truth the
person is afraid to say.

ELLEN

I don't get it. Storms and babies.

TERESA

I think all this, the illness, the chaos, is the storm and you and your brother are the babies. She's worried how you'll weather the storm.

ELLEN

How old are you?

TERESA

23.

ELLEN

(admiringly)

God, you're so good at this.

TERESA

(smiles)

I'll be back Monday, unless you need me sooner.

ELLEN

My mother likes you a lot. I do too. Thanks for everything. (beat) Well at least take one of these Get Mad pumpkin pies. I went a little wild.

TERESA

Thank you.

Fifteen pies are cooling. Teresa takes one, goes out the back door. Ellen picks up a tray with tea and goes to the hallway.

INT. KATE'S BEDROOM UPSTAIRS - CONTINUOUS

Ellen comes into Kate's room. Brian sits cross-legged next to Kate in an ottoman, a book in his lap, reading aloud. He slides the book beneath the ruffled skirt of the chair.

ELLEN

What have you got there Brian? Tropic of Cancer? Peyton Place? Story of O?

KATE

Much worse. (beat) It's OK. You can show her.

Brian holds it up. A gothic novel with a cover illustration of a woman in petticoats being pressed to a man wearing only jodhpurs.

KATE

Your father will call the police.

BRIAN

The thought police. They would all be wearing tweed jackets and they would deprogram you by making you read the Oxford English Dictionary.

KATE

Oh honey. (giggling) Don't make fun of the OED.

BRIAN

Yeah. Not in front of my sister.

ELLEN

They take you in a room and put headphones on you and make you listen to Orson Welles read Silas Marner.

BRIAN

Whoah! Ellen's making fun of the OED! Am I dreaming? (holds up book) Maybe I should read from this tonight. Actually I have a good one. A kids story from the turkey's POV.

ELLEN

No readings tonight. We're gonna talk and watch home movies. And it's a buffet. So you can sit anywhere.

BRIAN

What? Wait a second. You have to entertain whatever important visiting poet dad has rescued from a lonely Thanksgiving. It's a tradition. And mom and I make jokes while the readings are going on.

ELLEN

Not this year. Everybody hates the readings, right? And there's no poet coming, dad promised. Just us. A small, intimate family gathering and Jonathan.

KATE

Oh Ellie, I don't know. Your father's not great at changes. Maybe no buffet. He likes his place at the head of the table.

George comes in, stares in mock horror at the book.

GEORGE

Good god, I think I'm having a coronary. Whose is that?

KATE AND ELLEN

It's mine.

Kate and Ellen turn to each other and burst into laughter.

GEORGE

Well it's certainly not Ellen's. I doubt it's Kate's. Brian, luckily you've got a chance for redemption with your reading tonight.

ELLEN

(steadily)

No readings dad. Remember?

GEORGE

Oh. I forgot to tell you. The most wonderful thing! Robert Most, poet laureate, is coming to our Thanksgiving. So I think we can make an exception. Isn't that wonderful?

He goes out. Ellen follows him.

INT. HALLWAY - JUST AFTER

Ellen follows George. Just below the surface, she is simmering.

ELLEN

Isn't it more important to catch up with Brian than spend all night listening to some poet talk about made up people?

GEORGE

Well of course it is. But your mother loves his work. He won the
(more)

GEORGE (CONTINUED)
Pulitzer after all. And he had no
place to go. We couldn't just leave
him stranded could we?

ELLEN
(intensely)
Dad, you promised.

GEORGE
I can't very well disinvite him now,
can I? It is Thanksgiving after
all. And we could use a little
holiday cheer, a little festivity.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Ellen is beating spoonbread batter with intense fervor. The room
is filled with Thanksgiving food. Ellen folds the napkins into
swans with finesse. She hears steps and turns around. It's
Jonathan. Ellen throws her arms around him. She is wearing a red
and white checked apron that says KISS THE COOK.

JONATHAN
Boy it's been a long time. Thanks
for asking me.

She kisses him hard, getting flour on his sweater.

JONATHAN
Oh hell.

ELLEN
Love you too.

She kisses him again. Jonathan looks her up and down.

JONATHAN
You smell like butter.

He doesn't sound happy about it. He tries to wipe off the flour.

ELLEN
I have to be alone with you.
Right after dinner, OK? Date?

JONATHAN
Date. My dad and Marion are 300
miles away. We've got the house to
ourselves. God, I missed you.

They kiss again. Jonathan is getting a full coat of flour.

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ELLEN

Oh shit. I have to check my turkey.

JONATHAN

(surprised, wary)

Whose turkey?

INT. DINING ROOM - JUST AFTER

All the RELATIVES hover around the table which is set for a buffet. George is organizing them to reset the table.

LATER

Everyone sits at the table. Ellen brings out the turkey and puts it down in front of George at the head of the table where he holds court, entertaining a couple of teenage cousins.

GEORGE

A writer just finished writing something. He called a friend and said, I've just finished something and it's really not very good. In fact it is terrible. And the worst part of it is, it is the very best I can do. Steinbeck. Grapes of Wrath.

Ellen drops the carving knives in front of him with a clatter. Brian and Kate at the other end, laugh at a private joke. Ellen looks at them enviously, then sits next to ROBERT MOST.

ROBERT MOST

Your father tells me you write literary reviews from time to time.

ELLEN

Yes I do.

ROBERT MOST

How interesting. Like father like daughter. Tell me, have you had opportunity to review any of my work?

Kate clinks her glass to get everyone's attention.

KATE

I want to say grace.

It's obviously a first for this family. Everyone take hands.

GEORGE

Well then, as Keats said so well-

KATE

I want to say my own grace.

Looks from all around. George smiles at the family.

GEORGE

Please, go ahead Kate.

KATE

Thank you for the world so sweet,
thank you for the food we eat. Thank
you for the birds that sing, thank
you, God for everything. And thank you
Ellen for such a beautiful dinner.

Everyone looks at Ellen surprised - and thankful. A warm moment.

BRIAN

Here's to Betty Crocker.

George clinks a fork against his glass, stands up ceremoniously,
and smiles his dazzling smile,

GEORGE

Well tonight is a night to go down
in Gulden history! It is our great,
great honor to have Robert Most with
us. A man who's work means so much
to me and who encouraged me all too
long ago with Comeback Inn. He has
agreed to give us a reading and for
that I give great thanks!

ROBERT MOST

I'm happy to oblige George, but
you'll have to remind me, what in
the hell is the Comeback Inn? Sounds
like I encouraged you to invest in a
roadside motel.

GEORGE

(his smile freezing on his face)
My novel Robert, my novel.

ROBERT

Oh of course. Sorry. That was way
back when we were young, filled with
(more)

ROBERT (CONTINUED)

piss and vinegar. As Thurber said, with sixty staring me in the face, I have developed inflammation of the sentence structure and definite hardening of the paragraphs.

INT. DEN - LATER

The guests are gone. Ellen, Jonathan, Brian and Kate are getting ready to watch home movies. George reads the New York Times.

ELLEN

Hold onto your seats. We're going to journey back to those wonder years.

BRIAN

More like ancient history. I don't think we've ever seen these.

Ellen turns on the projector. On screen, a two year old girl plays with a doll. Someone tries to take the doll away. She holds on to it, bursts out crying.

ELLEN

Who's that wimpette? Some cousin?

KATE

No. It's you.

ELLEN

No way. That's not me. I was a book worm. I never played with dolls.

KATE

When you were little, you did.

ELLEN

No mom. That can't be me. I incinerated my Barbie, remember?

KATE

You were trying to give her a nice tan. You had planned an entire vacation for her to the coast of Turkey. You were on the phone to some travel agent when she burned.

ELLEN

I can't believe that! I liked dolls!

BRIAN
(stares at the screen)
Hey, wait a second - that's me -
eating strawberries

GEORGE
Impossible. You're allergic to them.
Like me. It must be something else.

ELLEN
No dad, You hate strawberries. You're
the one! Brian, maybe you love
strawberries! You saw your father
hated them and mixed him up with you!!

BRIAN
Hey Ellen, chill alright. (beat,
mouths to her) You OK?

INT. ELLEN'S ROOM - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ellen and Jonathan come in. He closes the door. Ellen slides a
chair in front of it. Jonathan pulls off her dress, starts
caressing her.

JONATHAN
Thank you Ellen for this excellent
dessert. Which I like much better
than the dinner.

ELLEN
(stops, pulls back)
Why? Was my turkey overdone? Was my
gravy too thin?

JONATHAN
(staring at her)
You're kidding, right?

ELLEN
(quickly covering)
Yeah, of course I am.

Relieved, he pulls her to him. On her face we see she wasn't
joking, and just maybe she is still wondering about her gravy.
But as Jonathan's hands move, she begins to forget.

INT. LANGHORNE BAR - LATER THAT NIGHT

Ellen, drink in hand, heading for drunk, dances wildly with
Jonathan. Brian is at a table nearby.

JONATHAN

The money's for shit, but the contacts are great. And the living arrangements will be superb.

ELLEN

I can't leave here.

JONATHAN

But by June Ellen - Oh Jesus, I didn't mean that the way it sounded.

ELLEN

Jonathan, I'm not going to look for an apartment on the assumption I can get rid of my mother in time to spend the summer in bed with you.

JONATHAN

I didn't mean it that way. It came out wrong. I'm sorry. C'mon, let's try and get along, alright?

The song ends. They sit down with Brian. A woman across the room, JENNIFER, smiles at Jonathan. He smiles back at her. Ellen observes this, downs her drink and waves the waitress over.

ELLEN

We need another round. (beat) Dad just kills me. He didn't say a word to me about dinner. And he goes off to his study. As though we were servants there to serve him. Don't you just love the holidays?!(to the waitress) Hey! We need another round!

JONATHAN

The hell you do.

ELLEN

This is what it's been like from day one! He is literally never there. I literally do everything!

BRIAN

The entire bar doesn't have to share this with us.

JONATHAN

Ellen, everyone deals with bad stuff in their own way.

BRIAN
Take it easy, Jon.

JONATHAN
This is none of your business. She's
a big girl. She can make her own
decisions.

BRIAN
Hell, she's not as big as everyone
thinks.

ELLEN
You know I can't go anywhere Jonathan!
Look I am tired. I am very tired. It
is very tiring being my mother.

JONATHAN
Ellen, you have lost it. You are not
your mother. You have never been
your mother. There is no one in the
world more different from your mother
than you are.

ELLEN
And that Jonathan, is the stupidest
thing you've ever said.

Ellen marches away. Brian runs after her. Jonathan turns back to
the bar. Through the window, he sees Jennifer's inviting smile. He
goes for it.

INT. LANGHORNE FACULTY CLUB - DAY

Plush, conservatively elegant, decorated for the holidays. Ellen
sits across from George in a booth. COLLEAGUES pass by the table
and nod their hellos. George nods hello back, smiles. George turns
to Ellen and his smile disappears.

GEORGE
I had several agendas when I asked
you here today. One of which
certainly is to find out why I was
met with such hostility at
Thanksgiving. I know this is not the
best situation for any of us, but-

ELLEN
Dad, I'm under a lot of pressure
here. I don't need anymore from you.

GEORGE

I am trying Ellen. I thought the interview would be something for the two of us to do together, but you haven't really seemed to be interested. So let's drop it.

Ellen opens up her backpack, pulls out several typed pages.

ELLEN

Actually dad, I did the questions. Let's go over them now.

GEORGE

Never mind.

ELLEN

No, come on dad. I really want to go over them with you.

GEORGE

(sips his scotch a moment)
Well alright then.

She looks at the paper. She takes a deep breath.

ELLEN

OK. Here we go. Dad, how come mom waited so long? How come she didn't go to a doctor sooner?

GEORGE

Your mother is a grown woman. She makes her own decisions. Let's go back to your questions.

ELLEN

Question 2. Wasn't it that you didn't want your world disrupted? That you needed her around to keep everything running smoothly. Just like now you need me around because she can't do it all? Question 3. Do you have any idea what it takes for mom to make your life run effortlessly? It makes Sisyphus's job look like a piece of cake!

GEORGE

What in bloody hell? Have you lost your mind?

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ELLEN

Maybe!

GEORGE

Keep your voice down. This is completely inappropriate.

ELLEN

No. Fuck that! I am the one who is behaving appropriately here. Everything has changed in our house! But you don't know about it because you're behaving as though life goes on as usual. Life as we know it is over. Done! Finished!

GEORGE

Ellen, I have responsibilities, the college, my novel-

ELLEN

Fuck fiction! This is real life here! Less is not more Dad. More is more! You've taken sabbaticals for the great American novel. Why not one for mom? She needs you! Question 12. How come it was always more important to you to hear what an important writer had to say than Brian or me? Question 13. What other tricks do you use to get your writing juices flowing? Question 14. Is having an affair one of your little tricks?

George stares at her, his eyes ice. He stands up and walks out. Ellen goes after him.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DUSK - JUST AFTER

George marches along, Ellen right behind him.

ELLEN

Question fifteen-

GEORGE

(whirling around)

It was a mistake asking you to come home. I was wrong about your capabilities. I will hire a full
(more)

GEORGE (CONTINUED)

time nurse. You may stay for the holidays and then you will return to the city. And that's final. We will tell your mother after the holidays.

He grabs Ellen's questions out of her hands and throws them to the ground. They blow down the path in the wind. He turns, walks away.

INT. ELLEN'S BEDROOM - THAT NIGHT

Ellen is on the phone with Jonathan.

ELLEN

Jonathan hey, I'm glad I caught you. I got some news. It looks like I'm coming back. Right after the holidays.

JONATHAN

Is your mom okay?

ELLEN

Yeah. When you come to your folks at Christmas, maybe I can get a ride back with you.

JONATHAN

That'd be great except...I'm not coming up for Christmas. I'm gonna catch up on my work here.

ELLEN

Get a jump on next semester. Gotcha.

JONATHAN

I thought about what you said. And-

ELLEN

Listen about the fight. You were right. I was tired and-

JONATHAN

And I found a summer sublet. And a room-mate.

ELLEN

Oh. Is it nice?

JONATHAN

Yeah. My professor's brownstone.

ELLEN
Well what about New Years' Eve?

90

JONATHAN
Ellen, we need a little space. I need
a little space. The break'll be good
for us. Let's talk after New Years.

EXT. LANGHORNE MAIN STREET - DAY

The final rush of Christmas shopping. Kate and Ellen walk along,
greeted by everyone Kate knows. A long line of KIDS stand
waiting to tell SANTA their Christmas wishes.

ELLEN
I have this crazy impulse. It
doesn't make any sense but-

KATE
Now you want to! I tried to get you to
go to Santa for years and then when
you were eleven, you got in line, got
to the front, pulled off his beard and
yelled, Fraud! Your dad was so proud.
Go on, I'll watch.

Kate sits down on a bench. Ellen grabs a candy cane off Santa's
tree and gives it to her. Ellen gets in line with the children who
give her weird looks. Ellen shrugs and smiles at her mother. Ellen
reaches Santa.

SANTA
Ellen Gulden, I know what you want.
A new computer, Leslie Stahl's job.

ELLEN
I don't need anything for me. Well I
guess it is for me. But it's for her-

She turns back to Kate who licks her candy cane. She smiles at
Ellen, puts the candy cane in her mouth again. She takes it out.
Then freezes. Blood is on the candy cane. A cry escapes from
her. Kate slumps on the bench. Ellen races to her.

ELLEN
Mom! Mom!!!!

INT. HOSPITAL - JUST AFTER

Ellen is on the pay phone.

ELLEN
Come on! Answer the phone dad!

She hangs it up and races out.

INT. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Ellen runs up the stairs to George's door. She raises her hand to knock and hears WOMAN'S LAUGHTER. Ellen's hand freezes.

FLASHBACK

Ellen, 8 years old, running up the stairs, excited, holding a prize for a poetry contest. She runs to George's door, raises her hand to knock. Freezes as she hears MOANS, the rhythmic THUMP of old springs from a couch, her father's voice.

GEORGE

God Liza, god. Jesus Christ...

Ellen stands there, listening. She sticks the prize by the door, knocks and races away down the stairs.

EXT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - BACK TO PRESENT

Ellen bangs hard on the door. George opens it pulling on his jacket. Celine stands behind George.

ELLEN

Mom needs you. We need you!

INT. HOSPITAL - LATER

Ellen and George sit together. Dr. Cohn is beside them.

DR. COHN

She's OK for the moment. Resting.

Ellen let's out a sigh of relief.

DR. COHN

But the cancer has progressed much more quickly than we expected. We have decided to stop the chemotherapy.

ELLEN

What? I'm not ready to give up here.

DR. COHN

Ellen, I'm sorry. I'm afraid there is nothing we can do. You need to give
(more)

DR. COHN (CONTINUED)
her the morphine pills every eight
hours to help her through this next
part. Don't let her chew them or mash
them up. The management of her pain is
the most important thing now. (beat) I
need to ask you something. When the
time comes, I need your permission to
perform an autopsy.

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ELLEN
Why? The cause is pretty damn clear.

DOCTOR
Not for Kate, Ellen. For you. To see
where the cancer started. We believe
it started in her liver. But the scan
shows it may be her ovaries as well.
Ellen, this is so you'll know what
tests to take, what to look for.

GEORGE
Of course. Go ahead. (beat) How are
her spirits?

DR. COHN
She was giving stencil advice on the
phone. I find your wife amazing.

Dr. Cohn leaves. George stands and walks down the hall.

ELLEN
I can't believe it. That's it? End
of sentence? End of discussion?

GEORGE
What more is there to say?

EXT. GULDEN PORCH - DUSK

The streets are filled with FAMILIES heading to the town square.
Kate comes to the door, sees Ellen holding a wheelchair, Brian
beside her. The spokes of the wheels are threaded with red and
green ribbon like the decorations of a child's bike.

ELLEN
I decorated the wheels like you used
to do when we were kids.

Ellen wheels the chair across the porch and down the stairs..

KATE

Go down backwards. It's just like
that damn double stroller with you
and Brian.

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George comes out and helps Kate down the stairs and into the chair.
Kate sees Ellen is wearing a bright Christmas sweater. No more
black. Kate smiles. Kate wears a red and green reindeer sweater.

BRIAN

You look beautiful mom.

GEORGE

No coat?

KATE

I don't need a coat. I'm layered.
Besides I want to show off my sweater.

George pushes the wheelchair and Ellen and Brian walks behind.
The moon touches the handles of the wheelchair.

KATE

It's a beautiful night. Oh, I love
Christmas.

Brian looks at Ellen, puts his arm around her.

AT THE GREEN - JUST AFTER

The road around the green is packed with A HUGE CROWD. The MAYOR
stands at a podium. The CHOIR stands ready in their red robes, the
Minnies nearby. Mrs. Best turns to Kate, then hides her surprise
at the wheelchair.

MRS. BEST

Oh Kate...you look just lovely. I
just love that sweater.

CLARICE

Oh sweetie.

KATE

Now don't go and get mushy on me.

Clarice reaches down and hugs Kate. Kate hugs her back.

The Minnies stand in a semicircle around Kate's chair in front of
the 12 huge fir trees. Kate struggles to her feet, supported by
the women. The Mayor reads each Minnies' name and the crowd
applauds. Ellen stands with her father and Brian. Nearby are
Teresa, Dr. Cohn., Nari and her kids.

Kate Gulden and Ellen Gulden.

CLARICE

We see you Ellen! You can't hide.

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George looks at Ellen. She looks at him, then joins the Minnies gathered around Kate. Brian smiles.

MAYOR

And now for the moment we've all been waiting for. Happy Holidays Langhorne!

The trees come alive with light. Kate and Ellen's tree is exquisite, sequins twinkling. Angels with golden feathered wings. The crowd burst into APPLAUSE and the CHOIR sings Silent Night.

EXT. STREET - JUST AFTER

The Gulden family walks home.

GEORGE

The Gulden tree was the most beautiful one.

KATE

I know. Oh I love Christmas.

GEORGE

And Easter. All those eggs to be painted.

Kate gazes at the moonlight glinting off the arms of her wheelchair.

KATE

No George. Easter was never my holiday. To hell with Easter.

Ellen turns and looks at Kate. The Christmas lights DISSOLVE INTO:

A FLUTTERING, BUZZING NEON light on the ceiling. WE ARE

BACK TO INTERROGATION - DAY

Earl opens his folder of notes.

EARL

Let me read something to you. "A fifteen year old dog lies on an examining table. A vet steps forward
(more)

EARL (CONTINUED)

to put the animal out of his misery. It seems outrageous that those humans suffering just as much as animals, who say that they are tired of life and want to end it, are kept alive by extraordinary means."

ELLEN

Where'd you get that article?

EARL

From New York Magazine. You wrote it 2 years ago. I've been reading your stuff. Your reviews. They're pretty intense. Boy, nothing's worth your time. "Even if it were an inflight movie, you might consider walking out." "If you were to ask me what it is about, I'd say about as much as I can take." Had you taken as much as you could take?

ELLEN

Earl, look goddamn it, you've always seen me as a certain kind of person. Driven, impatient, a bitch. And now you've got it all worked out. Tough chick. Mother in the way. Got rid of her. Well you are wrong! And you're asking me the wrong questions! You should be asking me did I love her? Was I strong enough? Cause what you're talking about is an act of love! She was suffering God damn it!

Tears suddenly pour down Ellen's cheeks. She breaks down sobbing, her shoulders shaking. Earl stares at her. He fumbles for kleenex, moved by Ellen's grief, passes it to her, a glimmer of new understanding on his face.

CUT TO:

INT. GULDEN KITCHEN - DAY - PAST

Teresa comes in. Ellen is with Brian. Ellen turns to her.

ELLEN

I'm ready to look at that folder.

Teresa gives it to her. Ellen reads the Dying Persons Bill of Rights.

ELLEN
How much time do we have?

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TERESA
I don't know. I think its best to take
advantage of the time you have instead
of worrying how much there is.

INT. GULDEN HOUSE - THAT NIGHT

Ellen reads a note left on the dining room table from her father
that says "catching up at the college." She calls to Brian,

ELLEN
Come on. Mom wants to go see the
Christmas lights.

INT. CAR - JUST AFTER

Kate, Ellen and Brian bundle into the car. Brian is driving. Kate
has a blanket wrapped around her.

KATE
OK, take Highway 16 north to 111.

BRIAN
Whoa, wait a second, we're taking the
interstate to see Christmas lights?
It's freezing out. What about the
lights in town? That pizza place
always goes all out, Right Ellen?

ELLEN
Drive, she said. (smiles) You'll
see, this'll be great.

They drive off singing silly Christmas songs.

EXT. OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE - LATER THAT NIGHT

Brian pulls over to the side of the road. He grabs a map from the
glove compartment.

BRIAN
Are we on Hwy. 111 or did I miss it?

Ellen glances at Kate. Her eyes are closed.

ELLEN
Shhh. Mom's asleep. (beat) She had
to take a pill before we left.

BRIAN
Well so much for the lights. I guess
we're lost.

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ELLEN
Yeah. I'd say so. Damn.

A quiet moment. Ellen gazes out the window, then suddenly her face fills with wonder.

ELLEN
Hey Brian, maybe we're not lost. I
think this is what mom meant. Look,
look at the lights.

He looks out the window. Way out here on the dark country road, the stars go on forever. Below, the stars are reflected in a frozen lake. It is like the car is floating in the cosmos. It is absolutely magical. Brian and Ellen stare out a long moment.

Then Ellen feels something. She turns to see Kate has woken up, and is watching Brian and Ellen with a sleepy smile.

KATE
Oh, good, you found it.

Ellen turns to Kate, wraps the blanket tighter around her.

EXT. GULDEN STREET - DAY

Christmas decorations everywhere. Kids are on sleds. Ellen and Brian, wearing Santa hats, are on the hill in front of the house. Kate, all bundled up, is in her wheelchair.

BRIAN
Come on baby! Bring it on home!

Ellen, at the top of the gentle hill, lets Kate go and, screaming with laughter, Kate flies down the hill to Brian who catches her. A taxi drives up. Jules gets out, stares.

JULES
Am I high or what?

ELLEN
You're not human if you can't make a
fool of yourself. Thanks for coming.

JULES
Sure honey. (hugs her) I got you the
ticket back to New York.

Ellen and Jules walk along. In the windows of several houses, they can see New Years Eve parties going on.

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JULES

You didn't say anything to your mom?

ELLEN

How could I? She's never known about my dad's little flings. I always told myself it didn't happen. Brian and I never even talked about it. It's like we decided a long time ago if we didn't talk about it, maybe it would go away. Like a rabbit standing still thinking no one can see it.

They arrive at the square filled with the Christmas trees.

ELLEN

Here it is. Here's our tree.

Jules gazes up at the tree, grins in amazement.

JULES

It's really beautiful Ellen.

ELLEN

Thanks. As my mom says, with a tree this size, the key is to be gaudy. (beat) I really blew it with Jonathan. I just don't think he can deal with the idea of someone losing their mother. You know his mother left his dad and him when he was just a baby.

JULES

You think your mom's the one who finds good in all people. Let me tell you, you got her beat by a long shot.

ELLEN

You don't know Jonathan like I do. We belong together. He feels like family. (beat) I was pretty rough on him. (Ellen sees a pay phone) You know what? I'm going to leave a New Year's message on his machine.

She goes to the phone. Punches in numbers. Looks very surprised.

ELLEN

Oh. Hi. Is Jonathan there?...No that's OK. (hangs up, turns to Jules, stricken) Some girl answered. She said he was at the door paying the Chinese food delivery guy! Chinese food at home on New Year's Eve. Shit. Shit. Shit!

Ellen tries to get control. Punches in numbers again.

JULES

Ellen, wait a second.

ELLEN

Just let him answer. Let him answer. (panicking) Shit, they put the machine on! (to the phone, forced upbeat) Hey Jonathan, it's me. Jules and I are at this great party. I'm just calling to say Happy New Year. Listen, I'm sorry I've been so impossible. Dump that subplot of yours and we'll find a place. When I get back, everything'll be back to normal. That's my New Year's Resolution.

She hangs up, turns to Jules.

JULES

Oh sweetie, I'm sorry.

INT. GULDEN LIVING ROOM - THAT NIGHT

Brian and Jules sit on the couch watching the Times Square New Years festivities on TV. Ellen paces back and forth, still shaken. George comes in, puts out champagne glasses.

GEORGE

Everybody ready? (calls to next room) Kate darling, it's almost time for the big moment.

He goes to the next room. Ellen turns to Jules.

ELLEN

Another great Gulden tradition. Our New Year's resolutions. No dwelling on the negative. Just what incredibly important things we will accomplish next year.

JULES

Gee, I was going to quit eating
Haagen-Dazs after 11 PM. That won't
quite do it, will it?

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BRIAN

(to Ellen)

Dad asked me to take a leave of
absence and come home. What's going
on?

ELLEN

Did you tell him about being put on
academic probation?

BRIAN

Of course not. This way I won't have
to tell him.

George comes back in with the champagne. Ellen turns to him.

ELLEN

I've got a great idea. Let's break
tradition. Let's all say what we
fucked up on last year. Name a
couple of failures.

GEORGE

Gee that sounds like fun. No thanks.

ELLEN

(to Jules)

I used the f word. Failure's not
allowed in the Gulden family. Right
dad?

George looks at her, then simply pours the champagne.

BRIAN

I'm with dad. Later on the
confessional.

ELLEN

Why Brian? You didn't do
anything wrong.

GEORGE

What are you talking about?

Brian glares at Ellen. Ellen stands.

ELLEN

I'll start. Last year, I, Ellen Gulden, ruined someone's article and tried to get them fired. I blew the Sullivan interview, I got fired from my job and I fucked up my relationship. Happy New Year!

101

GEORGE

You what?!

BRIAN

(stands up suddenly)

I, Brian Gulden, failed my English class last semester. I'm on academic probation. They threw me off the tennis team till I improve my grades. Happy New Year! I want to move to Hilton Head and be a tennis pro.

GEORGE

Well then you can't take a semester off and come home. We'll hire you a tutor, I'll help, we'll-

Kate wheels herself in. George stops talking.

KATE

What's going on?

GEORGE

We're just getting ready to make our New Years Resolutions.

But Brian steps up.

BRIAN

Mom, I want to be a tennis pro. This is the time to do it. If I wait till after Harvard, I'll be too old.

Kate looks from George's red face to Brian. She smiles at Brian.

KATE

Then you should do it. Good god, you only live once. Now what's this about coming home? Ellie, where are you going?

Ellen steps up, looks from Kate to George.

I'm not going anywhere mom. So come on, let's finish up. We're admitting things we fucked up on last year.

102

KATE

Getting things off our chests. OK. I'll go next. (takes a deep breath) Oh dear. This is hard. Here goes. I should have gone to the doctor sooner. I shouldn't have put it off. There. Oh I feel so much better.

JULES

I dated a guy who dumped a friend of mine. And I ate a lot of Haagen-Dazs after 11.

All eyes are on George. On TV, the countdown to New Years starts.

KATE

It's alright George. You don't have to if you don't want to.

He sits next to Kate. Then speaks haltingly, struggling.

GEORGE

I...well...there's so much. I...I (glances at Ellen) I worked far too much.

Ellen turns away, it is not nearly enough. On TV, the crowds go wild SCREAMING HAPPY NEW YEAR.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Kate moves about in the wheelchair as if in a hurry. She bangs into the wall. Ellen hurries to keep up. Two copies of Anna Karenina sit on the table.

KATE

And you must whip the cream just until it becomes smooth. No more. Ellen you're not listening! There's so much we have to cover.

ELLEN

I'm trying. It's a lot to take in all at once! Slow down!

KATE

No time to. OK whip the cream.

Ellen whips the cream. Kate looks at a long list.

KATE

Did I ever tell you how to get bumper stickers off bumpers? Mayonnaise. (checks something off) After the cheese cake, we'll do side dishes. OK now what else?

ELLEN

I'd really like your opinion on Anna Karenina. I read it once for a class and the professor said the fatal flaw of the book was that it was written by a man and that Anna would have left her husband for her lover but that she would never have left her son behind, and that if a woman had written the book she would have known that.

KATE

No more whipping. That's enough. Now drain the cherries. The crust should be ready. (beat) I haven't been reading Anna Karenina. Ellen, I can't read it anymore. My eyesight's going, like an old lady.

Ellen stares at her, scared. Kate's wheelchair bangs into the counter. She drops the piecrust. The dish breaks.

KATE

I hate this goddamn chair! I'd like to roll it down the street into Mrs. Best's house! She pet me like a cat, did you see that?! The crust is ruined. Damn. Get me another dish.

Ellen sweeps up the pieces, gets her another pie dish.

ELLEN

At least these days you can go anywhere in a wheelchair. There's handicapped access everywhere.

KATE

(whirling around)

I am not handicapped! And don't you forget it! I'm not weak! Just woozy!

Kate takes the plate and throws it to the ground. It breaks into pieces. Kate picks up a dish, then drops it on the ground.

104

ELLEN

Stop it! What are you doing?

KATE

I am not an invalid!!

ELLEN

Stop it! You love these dishes!

Kate picks up two at once and hurls them to the ground.

KATE

Don't tell me what to do Ellen! This is still my house!! And I am still the mother in this relationship!!!

She picks up another plate. Ellen reaches, tries to pull out of her hand. It goes flying. Breaks to pieces.

ELLEN

Stop it! I want you to still be the mother too goddamn it! I didn't have you before and now - Fuck.

Ellen turns away. Runs into the livingroom. Kate wheels after her. Ellen stands at the window, then she turns suddenly, reaches down and hugs Kate. It's the first time Ellen's ever hugged first.

EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

Ellen glues pieces of the broken dishes onto the mosaic table.

KATE (OC)

Ellen!

INT. HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Ellen runs up the stairs into the bedroom. It is empty. The bathroom door is closed.

KATE (OC)

You have to come in.

INT. BATHROOM - JUST AFTER

Ellen comes in. Her mother lays in the tub, her arm across her eyes. She can't face Ellen.

KATE

I can't get out.

105

Without thinking, Ellen reaches around Kate's chest, pulls her onto a bench and towels off her ravaged body, her skin which is a faint shroud for the skeleton as Kate weeps. Ellen hooks her hands under Kate's arms and pulls her into standing position.

INT. BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellen helps Kate into the bedroom and helps dress her. Ellen sees that a scarf hangs over the mirror.

KATE

Ellen you are good at this, taking care of me. I'm not good at this dying business. Every day another thing I can't do. Why can't I just die and be done with it? Why?

Ellen gazes at Kate, then finishes dressing her.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The living room is in complete disarray as DELIVERYMEN deliver a hospital bed. The furniture is pushed against a wall. Ellen is down on her hands and knees scrubbing a big scratch on the floor with steel wool. The men leave.

Ellen helps Kate get into bed. Kate turns and faces the window.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Clarice and the Minnies rearrange the furniture and decorate the room.

DISSOLVE TO:

Highbars on the side of the bed. Kate thrashes and cries in her sleep. Ellen watches silently, tears running down her face like she's bleeding tears.

DISSOLVE TO:

Ellen comes in holding a plate of tea and toast. George is wedged in bed with Kate. Ellen looks at them and then leaves. She goes into the kitchen and eats the cinnamon toast alone.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Ellen makes a triple layer Get Mad chocolate cake. It is snowing hard outside. The phone rings. Ellen answers it.

106
GEORGE (OC)

The security people have closed off both the footbridges. I can't get home. I'll sleep somewhere.

ELLEN

In your office?

GEORGE (OC)

I don't know. Several people in the department have pullout couches. If you try me here and there's no answer, that's what I've done.

ELLEN

Yeah. OK.

She hangs up, beating the cake with renewed vigor. Kate calls to her,

KATE (OC)

Who's that?

ELLEN

That was your husband. He can't seem to find a way home.

KATE (OC)

It's a bad storm.

ELLEN

Not that bad.

Kate speaks with surprising strength.

KATE (OC)

Put down that spatula and come in here right now!

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ellen comes in. Kate struggles to sit up, her voice raspy.

KATE

What's happened between you and your father? You have been so angry at him. If you're going to be angry at anyone, be angry at me.

ELLEN

I have my own differences with dad that have nothing to do with you. It's not something we should discuss.

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KATE

Yes we should. Especially now. You and your father will need each other and I hope he and Brian can have more of a relationship if I'm not there to get in the way. But you and George already have such a bond. You're so much alike.

ELLEN

Please don't say that.

KATE

Why? Because he's not perfect? Because he's not the man you thought he once was?

ELLEN

Mama, I can't talk to you about this. I can't.

Kate struggles to turn to Ellen, her hands like pale claws on the railing, her legs scissoring away the white sheets.

KATE

Ellen, listen to me. I will say this only once. There is nothing you know about your father that I don't know.

Ellen stares into Kate's eyes and then Kate gives a little nod and lays back. Ellen is stunned.

KATE

And understand better. You make concessions when you're married a long time. You say to yourself when you're young, love is the most important thing in the world and there's only one kind. But time goes by and you've slept together a thousand nights and smelled like spit-up when babies are sick and seen your body droop. And some nights you say to yourself, I won't put up with another minute.

Kate pauses, marshaling her strength.

KATE

And the next morning you wake up and the children have their hair all brushed and the birds are eating out of the feeder and you look at your husband and he's not the person you used to think he was, but he's your life, your history. If you take him out, it's like cutting his face out of all the pictures, there's a big hole and it's ugly. It's more than love, it's more important than love. Think of Anna.

108

ELLEN

Anna?

KATE

In the book. Anna Karenina. Leaving didn't bring her happiness.

She gestures to the pile of paperbacks, Pride and Prejudice, Great Expectations, Anna Karenina.

ELLEN

But you didn't finish reading it.

KATE

I'd read it before. I'd read them all before. I just wanted a chance to read them again. I wanted a chance to read them with you.

Ellen leans over the rail of the bed, takes Kate's hand, slides down the rail, and puts her head on the sheets and cries and cries. Kate strokes her hair.

KATE

Two times I left. The first time I found Nari. The second time, it was night. I just drove and drove, stared up at all the stars till the sun came up. (beat) But I came home.

ELLEN

Why?

KATE

Because George and I love each other.
(more)

KATE (CONTINUED)

Your father doesn't know how to share his life with anyone. He's the most alone person I've ever met.

109

A long moment between the two of them.

KATE

It's hard to understand unless you're in it. But I wanted to say it. Because I won't be able to say it when I need to. When you're locking the door at night all because of some foolishness about romance, how things are supposed to be. You can be hard and you can be judgmental and with those two things alone, you can make a mess of life the likes of which you won't believe.

Kate and Ellen look into each others eyes.

KATE

I think of a thousand things I could teach you in the next ten years and I think of how everything important you learned from your father and not me, and it hurts my heart to know how little I've gotten done.

ELLEN

No, Mom.

KATE

Yes Ellie, it's true. I feel sad. I feel sad that I won't be able to plan your wedding. Don't have a flower girl or a ring bearer, they always misbehave and distract from the bride and don't have too many people.

ELLEN

I don't know if I'll ever get married.

KATE

Don't say things like that. Think about what I just told you.

ELLEN

Alright. What else?

Kate's eyelids begin to droop.

I'm afraid that when I fall asleep
I'll never wake up. If I knew you
would be happy I could close my eyes
now and rest. It's so much easier.

110

ELLEN

I know it is. I wish you could.

KATE

No not that. The being happy. It's
so much easier to learn to love what
you have instead of always yearning
for what you're missing or what you
imagine you're missing. It's so much
more peaceful.

She falls asleep. The room is dark now, filled with shadows, but
Ellen doesn't turn on the lights. She sits staring at her
mother, seeing her with new eyes.

DISSOLVE TO:

Kate is asleep. Ellen is beside her: Kate opens her eyes.

KATE

What time is it?

ELLEN

It's 11:30.

KATE

Did Harold call?

ELLEN

No.

KATE

Ellie, I need you to do something
for me. I need you to go get your
father and bring him home. I never
wanted you to see him like this.

EXT. LANGHORNE - NIGHT

Ellen drives past the college down Main Street and across the
tracks, to the edge of Langhorne. She stops in front of a bar and
stares at the sign. The COMEBACK INN.

INT. COMEBACK INN - NIGHT

Recognizable from Harold's phone calls, but clearer now. It is a

raucous bar. Smoky. A woman sings country music badly on stage. In the corner a poker game. Pool. In the far corner, a figure slumped on a chair, his head on the bar counter. It is George. He lifts up his head, stares at a fight on TV.

GEORGE

Goddamn second rate, almost-ran. Get outa the ring ya bastard. (stares into the distance, talks to himself) Nothing worse than a second rate, almost ran, natural born bystander. Jimmy, gimme another. (he pulls out a book of poetry by Robert Most) Now this guy, he's something. (beat, to bartender) Hey Jerry, drinks for everyone! On me!

George looks at his reflection in the mirror. Self-hatred. A failure. He puts his head down on the counter. Ellen comes up.

GEORGE

Kate. Oh Kate, I'm sorry.

He looks up. He is completely drunk. He tries to focus.

GEORGE

Whose'at?

He sees Ellen and his eyes swim with shame. He gets to his feet. He falls to the ground. Ellen helps him up. Harold walks in, comes up to them. Ellen turns to him.

ELLEN

I'll take care of this.

INT. CAR - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Ellen helps George in the car. They drive through the dark streets in silence.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Ellen opens the door. George comes in and sees Kate in bed. She opens her arms to him. He goes into them and crawls into the bed with her. Ellen goes out.

INT. GEORGE'S OFFICE - JUST AFTER

Ellen goes to George's desk. Comeback Inn sits out. Ellen hesitates, then flips through it. About 75 yellowed pages sitting on top of 200 blank pages. The last pages are dated 1985. He hasn't written a word in years. DISSOLVE FROM EMPTY PAGES TO:

Earl's pages of notes. Ellen's eyes are red. All of Earl's kleenex is gone. He's pacing now, glancing at her as she wipes her eyes. He toughens his exterior, speaks almost defensively

EARL

Look, the way I see it, Kevorkian is a nut case with a god complex. It is wrong to take someone's life into your own hands. It's murder, pure and simple. No matter what.

ELLEN

Earl, let me ask you something. Your parents are alive, healthy?

EARL

Yeah. They are.

ELLEN

Than you have no idea what you're talking about. Just wait...Then we'll see how you'd really feel.

He sits down across from her.

EARL

Did your mother ever ask you to end her life?

ELLEN

No, of course not. She loved life. Long before she was sick, she could get so happy over a flower she'd never seen. Or the geese flying back from the south in the spring. That was her gift.

EARL

(sighing deeply)

OK, let's say I believe you. Let's say you didn't do it cause you couldn't take it anymore. Let's say you did it cause you cared for her. It's still taking someone else's life. It's still murder.

ELLEN

I never said that. I told you, I didn't do it!

EARL

But you wanted to right? She was suffering, in pain. You couldn't bear watching her go through that. C'mon Ellen, didn't you want to?

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ELLEN

(in a whisper)

Yes. More than anything.

INT. HOUSE - DUSK - PAST

Kate lies in bed. Teresa changes the sheets. Ellen comes in with a vase of flowers.

ELLEN

Look mom, I went to see the daffodils. You were right. They're absolutely sashaying on the green.

KATE

Lovely. Thank you.

TERESA

Mrs. Gulden, I think I should catheterize you.

KATE

Oh no. I don't need it.

TERESA

I think you do.

KATE

No. No.

TERESA

Then I think perhaps you should wear protective pants.

KATE

Oh, this is too much.

TERESA

I know it's upsetting, but it will be easier for you and Ellen.

Kate squeezes her eyes shut, squeezing tears out. Teresa turns to Ellen, puts her hand on her shoulder, and is gone. Ellen sits down by Kate. Outside the sun is setting. Kate gazes up at her.

KATE
I need a pill Ellen. Please.

114

ELLEN
I just gave you one an hour ago.
Can't you wait?

KATE
I need another. Is it morning yet?

ELLEN
No not yet.

Ellen goes to get the pills. She gives Kate the pill. She gulps down one, coughs, her whole body moving with the effort.

KATE
Help me Ellen. I don't want to live like this anymore. I can't. Please. You must know what to do. Please.

ELLEN
It'll be better in the morning.

KATE
No! It will not. This is not living.

She grabs hold of Ellen's hand that holds the pills.

KATE
Please. Help me. (eyelids drooping closed) You're so smart. You'll know what to do. (her eyes close) Please.

Ellen sits in the chair staring out at the falling snow. Terrified.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. LIVINGROOM - DAY

Teresa feeds Kate. The doorbell rings. Ellen goes to it. Ellen comes back in with some Minnies. Clarice steps up to the bed.

CLARICE
We made this for you.

She hands Kate a beautiful quilt decorated with embroidered Christmas trees. Clarice wraps it around Kate. Kate smiles at them. Clarice takes Kate in her arms and holds her tight.

KATE
It's beautiful. It will keep me warm
always.

115

Kate falls in and out of consciousness. Her breathing is hoarse.

MRS. BEST
Oh Ellen, I'm so sorry. This must be
so hard for you.

ELLEN
It's OK. It will all be over soon.

Ellen's and Kate's eyes meet in a moment of understanding.

INT. HOUSE - LATER THAT DAY

Ellen picks up the morphine vial. She walks through the house.
Looks at everything Kate has created. Ellen sits down by Kate,
strokes her forehead. Her eyes flicker open.

ELLEN
Mama, are you sure?

Kate nods yes.

INT. KITCHEN - JUST AFTER

Ellen comes in, opens some pudding. She opens a new vial of pills
and pours them into her hand. This is the hardest moment of her
life. She holds the pills over the pudding, her hand shaking,
struggling to muster up the strength. She breaks down in tears,
puts the vial of pills back down.

BACK TO INTERROGATION

Ellen's knuckles are white.

EARL
Did you know what constituted an
overdose of your mother's morphine
tablets?

ELLEN
Yes. I knew that if you crushed or
broke the tablets, they'd become
even more toxic than they were.

EARL
Do you recall what your mother's
last meal was?

ELLEN

I don't remember. I hadn't had any sleep for several days. It was probably soup, applesauce or pudding.

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EARL

You would have fed her?

ELLEN

Sometimes, she fed herself. It didn't go very well.

EARL

Your mother was completely helpless?

ELLEN

Yes she was.

DETECTIVE

And you said she was alone with no one else the night she died?

ELLEN

That's right.

EARL

Where was your father?

ELLEN

At the college. He didn't come home until very late that night. He came home long after she was asleep.

INT. GULDEN LIVING ROOM - DAY - PAST

The sun shines in the window. The door opens and George comes in. Kate's eyes flutter open and closed.

ELLEN

You're home early.

GEORGE

My class was canceled. Has she eaten?

ELLEN

Not much. Some pudding.

GEORGE

(gently stroking Kate's hair)
My poor Kate.

KATE
George.

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GEORGE
Yes dear.

Kate turns to Ellen slowly as if it requires great effort.

KATE
Go take a rest Ellen.

Ellen goes into the kitchen. She can hear their voices murmuring.

EXT. BACKYARD - JUST AFTER

Ellen goes out to the work shed. A small area of the mosaic table is unfinished. She sits in front of it, looks at the house.

Through the window, Ellen sees George stand up from Kate's bed and go to the kitchen where his actions are not visible. Then after a few moments, he is back, holding a bowl of pudding in trembling hands. He feeds Kate with a spoon. She looks like a baby bird and he like someone feeding a baby. Kate stares up at George with a blazing light of love in her face. He stares down at her then takes the half eaten pudding back to the kitchen.

Ellen, shaking, picks up a piece of broken plate. Finds a place for it. Then another. She takes the last piece and puts it in.

INT. HOUSE - JUST AFTER

Ellen comes in. George, on the staircase, turns to her.

GEORGE
No one should have to live like that. No one.

ELLEN
That's what she said.

GEORGE
Yes, I know. She's right. (fiercely)
She shouldn't have to live like that anymore. She shouldn't!

ELLEN
I'll stay up with her for awhile.

George turns away. He can't look at Ellen.

GEORGE
That's not necessary.

ELLEN
I can't sleep anyway.

118

GEORGE
Ellen, let her be.

Ellen watches him go up the stairs.

INT. BATHROOM - JUST AFTER

Ellen looks in the mirror. The bath is running behind her. She opens the cabinet, takes out the Sudafed and throws it away. She takes the Nygil and pours it down the drain.

She pours the vanilla bath oil in the tub like it's holy water. She gets in the bath. Closes her eyes, falls asleep.

INT. LIVINGROOM - LATER

Ellen goes into the room. Kate lies there, eyes closed, breathing more peacefully now. Ellen sits down and holds Kate's hand, breathing in and out in tandem with her. Ellen whispers.

ELLEN
Mom? I finished the table.

Kate's eyes slowly flicker open. She looks at Ellen. A long moment. She speaks softly.

KATE
I love you Ellen.

ELLEN
I love you too mama.

Kate smiles the old smile so warm and full, like the moon laid on its side. It is in her eyes too and her whole face, her whole soul shining out at Ellen.

KATE
I've always known it.

A long, quiet moment. Kate's eyes close. Ellen breathes in unison with her. In. Out. In. Out. Kate's hands lie palms up on the sheet as though in some gesture of entreaty. Kate breathes in. A shudder shakes her body. Ellen stares at her, terrified.

ELLEN
Mama? (a long beat) Don't go.
Please don't go.

Ellen holds tight to her mother's hand. Kate breathes out. Kate takes another long inhalation of breath. Ellen does too. Ellen

Holds her breath, waiting, waiting. She exhales. But no breath comes from her mother. Finally Ellen lays her head on the foot of the bed, still holding tight to her mother's hand.

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INT. LIVING ROOM - DAWN

The sun is rising. George comes in. Ellen still holds Kate's hand. Ellen places Kate's hand gently on the sheet.

GEORGE

How is she?

ELLEN

(softly)

She's dead.

George stands there, his face white with anguish. He is shivering. A broken sound, a groan, comes up from his chest.

ELLEN

I'll make the coffee.

Ellen goes into the kitchen. She can hear George whispering to Kate, then talking louder in pain. His anguished sobs.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERROGATION - DAY

Earl gazes at Ellen.

EARL

And that is the exact order of events. Mother asleep, father came home late at night, went to sleep, you took a bath?

ELLEN

(stonefaced)

Yes, that's exactly what happened.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY - PAST

Ellen, George, Brian and Teresa stand beside the grave, the townspeople of Langhorne behind them. Jonathan, Jules, Dr. Cohn, the Minnies, Nari, her family. The guests head for the reception.

INT. CLARICE'S HOUSE - JUST AFTER

The funeral luncheon. George, gray faced, clutches a mug of coffee. Jonathan stands with him, trying to help. Ellen stands with Brian, Jules and some Minnies. Dr. Cohn takes George's hand,

if his soul has flown too. Jonathan comes up to Ellen.

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JONATHAN

I'll see you back in the city.

ELLEN

I'll be there soon. Thanks for coming.

They kiss good-bye. Then she and Jules hug each other a long time. Jules goes. Ellen finishes a glass of wine and picks up another. Dr. Cohn turns to her.

DR. COHN

Would you walk me out to my car?

EXT. CLARICE'S HOUSE - JUST AFTER

Ellen and Dr. Cohn walk together.

ELLEN

So do you go to all your patients' funerals?

DR. COHN

Only the ones I particularly like. Ellen, I have to tell you something. The pathologist found something wrong during the autopsy.

ELLEN

News flash, Doctor. I thought there was something wrong with my mother.

DR. COHN

Listen. Don't be flip. I mean they found that the cause of your mother's death was an overdose of morphine.

ELLEN

She took morphine all the time. Who cares how she died? She should've been put out of her misery weeks ago.

DR. COHN

Ellen, you should watch what you say. We had to tell the district attorney, Mr. Best, about the autopsy. Apparently you made some comment to his wife that it would all be over soon. He thinks he's put two and two together.

ELLEN

Oh great. Did you tell my father?

DR. COHN

I tried. (beat) Look, someone administered a fatal overdose of morphine to your mother and the DA is determined to find out who did it. Don't you want to know who did it too?

On Ellen nodding her head.

INT. GULDEN KITCHEN - JUST AFTER

On the counter, the brand new bottle of morphine pills. Empty. Ellen picks it up, throws it in the trash. She turns and looks at a framed photograph on the wall. George stands smiling, confident, strong. Ellen on one side of him, holding onto his left arm, and Kate on the other, holding onto his right

BACK TO INTERROGATION

EARL

Do you have any idea why we found an empty vial of morphine in the trash?

ELLEN

No, I don't.

EARL

And did you give your mother a fatal overdose of morphine?

ELLEN

No, I didn't.

Earl leans forward, looks right in her eyes, shakes his head.

EARL

Ellen, I just don't get it. If you believe in what you've said, you gotta see, it's real hard for me to come to any other conclusion.

ELLEN

Look, in theory I meant those things. But when it's real, it's totally different. This was not an intellectual exercise! (softly) I guess my mother would say I was thinking with my heart.

But when your mother died, your father was asleep, and you didn't go upstairs and wake him. You sat with your mother 'til morning. Where's the heart in that? Why didn't you go tell your father?

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Ellen gazes at him. She's exhausted. Tears fall down her cheeks.

ELLEN

I didn't want to let go of her hand. (a beat) I loved my mother, but I didn't know how much until she was gone.

EARL

What happened that night?

ELLEN

I don't know. I'm just glad she's out of her pain. Jesus, if you'd seen her at the end, so helpless, if you'd understood what she once was, if she had asked you to help her, you would've wanted to give her the morphine yourself.

EARL

Ellen, I thought you said she didn't ask you.

ELLEN

(hesitates a beat)

Yeah, that's right. Look, I'm tired. I don't know anymore. She asked for a lot of things. Tea, sandwiches, morphine, towels. (a beat) Yeah, I remember now. She never asked me.

But he has caught her in a lie. Earl gazes at her, then leans forward, snaps off the tape recorder, opens the door, signals to someone. George appears.

EARL

You can take Ellen home now. I'll need her back here at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

Ellen goes out. Earl stares after her, thinking, his face grim.

EXT. CEMETERY - JUST AFTER

George stands staring at Kate's grave, enormous grief on his face.

reads Katherine B. Gulden 1947-1996. Ellen pulls out a trowel.

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ELLEN
C'mon Brian help me.

Brian shakes his head, wanders away. He can't do it. Ellen offers the trowel to George.

GEORGE
I...I don't know how.

ELLEN
I'll show you dad.

But George just stands there. Ellen kneels down, takes a breath.

ELLEN
I swear you can smell the lilacs and hollyhocks under the soil, waiting.

GEORGE
Your mother used to say that too.
(beat) Ellen, I want to say something.

ELLEN
Dad, it's not necessary.

GEORGE
No. This must not be left unsaid. I want to say thank you. I want you to know, I admire your courage. It took enormous heart.

ELLEN
You mean for going through that investigation? Hey, it's nothing compared to what you went through.

GEORGE
Not the investigation. For what you did for your mother. I wish I'd done it myself.

A long moment, then Ellen whirls around and stares at him.

ELLEN
What? What did you say?

GEORGE
I wish I'd done it myself. But I...I couldn't.

Oh my god. Dad...

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GEORGE

What?

ELLEN

(standing up slowly as it sinks in)
I...I didn't do it!

GEORGE

What do you mean?

ELLEN

I thought you did it. This whole
time. I thought it was you!

She stares at him. George stares back at Ellen, incredulous.

GEORGE

Me? No. It was you. I thought it was
you. That's why I left the
questioning. I was afraid if they
asked me about you, I would say the
wrong thing. But then, how...

A long moment. Then Ellen turns and stares at the grave.

GEORGE

No, no. That's impossible. She was
too helpless. She was...

Overcome, he turns away. Brian stands with them now, his face
white. Ellen shakes her head with understanding, amazement.

ELLEN

I'm such an idiot. I thought cause
she asked for my help, she couldn't
help herself. I thought she was too
weak. (beat) Maybe that was her last
domestic act in her pretty kitchen.
I can see it. You were asleep. I was
in the bath. She made it to the
kitchen. Mom thought, as surely as I
made this little world with my own
two hands, with the turpentine, the
paint, the yarn, the floor wax the
flowers the kindness the fear the
love, so I will leave it. And we
thought she was helpless. (looks at
George) Jesus, how could you or I do
it dad? It was too real life.

GEORGE
Why didn't you say anything to me?

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Ellen turns to him. Then it just pours out of her.

ELLEN

Because I was covering for you. I thought you knew that. I thought you could do what I couldn't! I thought you deserved my protection! (beat) Shit dad, I've always been covering for you. You were my hero. I wanted to believe you did it.

She turns away just a moment, then back. Tears fall down her face.

ELLEN

See, I was always afraid that you would be the one to leave us if I couldn't make up for everything mom couldn't do, everything she didn't know. Mom told me once she knew everything I knew. And you know what? She knew so much more. I made a laundry list of all the things she'd never done and turned it into her. And they were no more her than your books and lectures are you.

Ellen turns from George, sinks to her knees and begins to dig shallow troughs. Brian kneels down next to Ellen. Together they start to plant the bulbs. George stares at them, severely shaken.

GEORGE

I had no idea. The pills. I never imagined...

A long moment. The family stands there in the harsh silence.

George struggles a moment, then it pours out of him.

GEORGE

I loved, love your mother. She could do anything - run the house, our lives, you kids, make anything with her hands. (shakes his head in wonder) But I...I didn't see...I...God...(he struggles with his realization, tears pour down his cheeks) I always made Kate into what I needed her to be. My muse, my beautiful wife. My one true thing.

remorse, he squeezes his eyes shut, shakes his head as tears stream down his face.

Suddenly he steps forward and kneels down in the dirt beside Ellen, tears still falling down his face. Ellen stares at him in surprise. He puts his hands in the soil. Takes a deep breath. He picks up a trowel. He digs a small hole, then stops, uncertain what to do next. He stares at the bulb. His words come out broken.

GEORGE

Now what?

Ellen turns to him, gazes at him a long moment through her tears.

ELLEN

Let me show you dad.

Brian kneels down, the three of them together in the falling light.

AT HOME - THAT NIGHT

The doorbell rings. Ellen looks out the window. It's Detective Earl Boyd. Ellen goes to the door. Takes a deep breath, opens it.

EARL

Sorry to disturb you at home.

ELLEN

It's alright.

EARL

I've got some news for you. I made my report. And I'm here to inform you that due to insufficient evidence no charges are going to be filed against you. (He smiles. Ellen stares at him, amazed) But there's something I want to say. Off the record?

ELLEN

Sure. Of course.

EARL

I'm sorry you had to go through with the questioning. (beat) I...well I understand why you did it. I didn't at first.

ELLEN

You understand why I did what?

EARL

Stopped your mother's suffering.
Truth is, I'm glad there wasn't
enough evidence. (beat) You were
right. I had you all wrong. You've
got a great heart.

ELLEN

Earl, I'd like to say something too.

Ellen stares at Earl, trying to figure out how to word what she's
going to say.

ELLEN

Look, are you hungry? I've got some cake
inside. Made it myself. You have a little
time? You and me, we need to talk.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Ellen's bags are packed. She's on the phone.

ELLEN

Hey Jules, I'm inviting everyone
over...I'm cooking. I am making a
feast. Teresa's coming. I'm
celebrating my new job...I don't
know what it is yet, but it'll be
good. I can't wait to see you too.

She goes to the kitchen, packs up her things.

JONATHAN

Hey beautiful.

She whirls around. Jonathan stands there.

ELLEN

Jesus, you scared me to death.

JONATHAN

I thought you might want a ride back
to the city.

ELLEN

Yeah. Great. Thanks.

JONATHAN

God I missed you. Life will finally
return to normal. Of course, we
always do have a good time when we
get back together huh?

ELLEN

It's our finest tradition. (a beat)
About things getting back to normal?
Jonathan, the truth is, it's never
gonna be back to normal. And the
thing is, I wouldn't want it to be.

JONATHAN

(backtracking)

Well of course I don't mean normal.
I mean you learned a lot of great
things from your mom. Like I can't
wait to try your cooking.

Ellen looks at Jonathan then turns away, takes a breath. She turns
back to him.

ELLEN

Look, I love my mother. And I am the
last living member of the Gulden
Girls Book and Cook Club. (beat)
But Jonathan, I'm not going to do
everything her way.

JONATHAN

I don't understand what you're
talking about. You're not making any
sense.

Ellen reaches into her purse. And pulls out the I Love New York
key ring. She hands it to him.

ELLEN

Thanks anyway. I don't need a ride.

EXT. GULDEN HOUSE - JUST AFTER

Ellen comes out, closes the door firmly behind her. She walks down
the street towards the train station, carrying her suitcase and
bags of food. She passes the college, looks at it.

She goes up a big hill. It ain't easy to carry all this. She
stops, puts everything down to try and catch her breath. She turns
back to Langhorne. A long beat. Then a surprised smile spreads
over her face.

A hum fills the air.

ELLEN

(whisper)

Mom, I hear it.

She picks up the heavy bags and makes her way.

EXT. TRAIN STATION - JUST AFTER

Ellen reaches the train station. A jeep pulls up. HONKS. Ellen turns. It's Brian. He smiles at her.

BRIAN

Hey tough guy. You want a ride?

She grins, gets in. They drive off.

BRIAN

I need a place to crash.

ELLEN

No problem. Click your heels three times and say there's no place like home.

BRIAN

Where will we end up?

ELLEN

I don't know.

They reach the top of a hill, Ellen looks back over her shoulder at Langhorne until it disappears. She faces forward, the wind blowing in her hair, then puts a tape in the player, smiles at Brian. On the tape, Barbra Streisand sings. Brian turns to Ellen, stares at her like she's crazy.

BRIAN

You've got to be kidding.

ELLEN

(singing along)

"Don't tell me not to live. Just sit and shudder" - C'mon Brian, It's OK to make a fool of yourself -

"Life's candy and the sun's a ball of butter...Don't bring around a cloud to rain on my parade..."

Brian stares at her. Then he joins in, singing along. Ellen grins at him, sings out loud. She cranks the music loud. They fly down the highway.

FADE OUT