

Narrow Daylight

by SEVAN

Developed at Live & In Color, 2019 - Artistic Director, Devanand Janki

Sam Barickman
ICM Partners
65 East 55th Street
New York, NY 10022
(P) 212.556.5743 | (M) 646-647-7037
sam.barickman@icmpartners.com

CHARACTERS:

SUSAN DAVIS - 43, white, widow dealing with the loss of her only child, Nathan, who died in the Iraq War. She is trying to repress her emotions of loss and loneliness while coming to terms with accepting Lena's arrival.

LENA AL-ZAHR - 19, Iraqi, quiet and loving, dealing with the loss of too many loved ones. She is a complete stranger in a new land and a new way of life. She is connected to Susan but unable to connect with her.

GLORIA ROGERS - 43, white, Susan's next door neighbor and long-time friend. Concerned and kooky, but a sweet lady who is all about baking and Jesus.

ANNE-MARIE ROGERS - 20, white, Gloria's daughter who could not be more removed from her mother's personality. College-student who has her own reasons to give Lena a hard time. Fun, positive, sarcastic.

NATHAN DAVIS - 19, white, a living, autonomous memory. Charming, sweet, eager, and loving. Ever the Southern gentlemen even after his time has passed. The catalyst for the fever spikes in the house.

TIME: December 2008

LOCATION: The Davis house. Panama City, FL

NOTE: // are cut offs unless otherwise noted.

NOTE: Think of the play as a Southern Gothic fever dream for all the characters. As such, transitions are fluid and fever spikes at the intersection of naturalism and magical realism. This is not a memory or a ghost play. Everyone and everything has agency, including the house.

ACT 1

SCENE 1: DECEMBER 7 - 4PM

A quaintly decorated home in Panama City, Florida. The design is Southern style meets Florida kitsch. There is a sense of silence and sadness wafting throughout. All the blinds are closed.

The focus is on the living room and an open dining area stage left of it. There is a kitchen further left with a pass-through window and saloon doors.

A staircase leads to an unseen upstairs level. There are some boxes and a large military duffle bag at the foot of the stairs.

As the lights come up, NATHAN is sitting at the dining table. Looking out: Pensive. Waiting. Hopeful.

After a few moments, an alarm clock goes off upstairs and continues beeping for some time. A muffled slam and the sounds of someone coming out of a room.

SUSAN appears at the top of the stairs and takes a moment to sloppily rub her eyes. NATHAN turns to look at her. She looks like she has been wearing the same outfit for a few days now. She makes it to the bottom of the stairs and trips on the duffle bag.

SUSAN

(rubbing her toe with her other foot)

Dammit!

NATHAN watches her - unaffected. SUSAN continues her trek into the kitchen. NATHAN looks back out as she disappears.

Some clanging - then SUSAN returns carrying some dishes and silverware.

She starts to absentmindedly set the table, not really worrying about the neatness of it. NATHAN watches.

She heads back into the kitchen and returns with a pitcher of sweet tea and glasses, placing them randomly on the table, then exits into the kitchen. NATHAN looks after her wanting to say something.

From offstage we hear a “WooHoo!” NATHAN looks over his shoulder then gets up, pushes the chair in and walks upstairs.

GLORIA steps up onto the porch and “WooHoo”s again, peering in the windows. She cracks the door open and sticks her head in.

GLORIA

(poking her head in the door)

WooHoo? Susan sweetie?

SUSAN

(from the kitchen)

In the kitchen, Gloria.

GLORIA

Am I early?

SUSAN

(from kitchen)

Nope.

GLORIA

(walking through the door)

Need any help?

SUSAN

(from the kitchen)

Nope. Just sit.

GLORIA

I don't mind.

SUSAN

(from the kitchen)

Just fine!

GLORIA mills about in the doorway looking at the somber remnants of SUSAN's emotional crisis and shakes her head. Closing the door behind her she walks around opening the blinds.

GLORIA

Oh Susan...

She goes to the table and straightens the messy place settings.

GLORIA

Susan sweetie? I'll get us some napkins alright?

GLORIA starts to move to the sideboard. Then:

SUSAN

(from kitchen)

Don't worry about it. We can use paper towels.

GLORIA makes a mortified face, takes a second to mull it over, then goes to the sideboard anyway to get some napkins, inspecting them for cleanliness.

Finding two that meet her satisfaction, she goes to sit at the table and starts folding them into the classic Bird of Paradise shape.

She proudly places one on each plate, then sits there for a moment not sure what to do next. She looks around the room again.

GLORIA

(getting up and heading to the kitchen)

Are you sure I can't help, Susan sweetie?

SUSAN

(coming out carrying a large salad bowl and a bottle of salad dressing tucked in her armpit. She notices the blinds.)

I see you've already started to. Just have a seat and stop fussing about, Gloria. I can handle a simple meal for two.

GLORIA

My that's a beautiful salad. You certainly outdid yourself.

SUSAN

Just opened a bag and chucked it into a bowl.

GLORIA

A bagged salad?

SUSAN

Yeah - amazing little buggers. Been in the bottom drawer for more than a month and still as green as the first day.

GLORIA

Oh.

SUSAN

Is that a problem?

GLORIA

Oh god, no. Just perfect. But if you needed help I could have made one from scratch for you. No trouble at all. Just a couple of more steps from opening a bag.

SUSAN

If you'd rather have freshly cut vegetables // I can go to Publix and -

GLORIA

(taking the bowl from her hands)

No no no. You don't have to do that. This is fine. I am sure it will be just as delicious.

GLORIA sets the bowl on the table and starts scooping.

SUSAN

(eyeing her)

Uh-huh. Hope you're ok with Kraft Thousand Island.

GLORIA

Bottled?

SUSAN

Yes, Gloria. Bottled. Did you want me to whip up my own dressing?

GLORIA

(continuing to serve)

Oh god, no. But you should have let me do something, Susan. I make our dressing at home all the time. I just take those little packets of powdered Italian dressing and mix it up in a bottle. Sometimes I use olive oil instead of vegetable oil. Bryan says it reminds him of his military days overseas. I don't taste the difference but he swears by it and anything to make him happy really.

GLORIA has nervously scooped more salad on SUSAN's plate than any human could consume.

SUSAN

Gloria.

GLORIA

Hm? Oh. Oh my. Oopsie.

She starts to take some off the plate and puts it methodically back into the bowl, making sure SUSAN has enough but not too much.

SUSAN

Thank you.

GLORIA

You're welcome, sweetie.

SUSAN carelessly puts dressing on her salad and passes the bottle to GLORIA who examines it, turning it over to read the ingredients.

SUSAN

(without looking up)

Gloria.

GLORIA

(quickly covering her salad in dressing)

Just glorious, sweetie. Thank you.

A few moments of eating in silence. GLORIA starts to fidget. SUSAN doesn't take her eyes off the plate.

GLORIA

I can't wait to see what you whipped up for us next. I know! Your famous pot luck meatloaf! Right?

SUSAN

This is it.

GLORIA

Excuse me?

SUSAN

This is it. The salad. This is lunch.

GLORIA

Sweetie, this is just lettuce. Not that I'm not grateful. Lettuce will nourish my soul just fine. But if you were too tired to make // anything I could have -

SUSAN

I wasn't tired. I just don't have anything in the fridge.

GLORIA

Oh, come on.

SUSAN

Really.

GLORIA

I don't believe you.

SUSAN

Suit yourself.

After a second, GLORIA gets up and goes into the kitchen. A few more seconds. Then:

GLORIA

(from the kitchen)

Oh my God.

SUSAN

Told you.

GLORIA

(from the kitchen)

Where is all the food the neighbors brought over after - I mean I brought over three casseroles: the tuna, the noodle, the spam. Where is all that food? It should have lasted for at least a month.

SUSAN

It's all gone.

GLORIA

(sticking her head through the pass
through window)

You ate it all?

SUSAN

God no. I threw most of it out. Half the people on this block can't boil water properly and the other half buy whatever is on sale at Kash 'n Karry. Besides, I don't need to eat other people's pity.

GLORIA

Oh. Well. What have you been eating?

SUSAN

Stuff.

GLORIA

Stuff? Stuff?

(Coming back into the room.)

Why haven't you gone grocery shopping?

SUSAN

I don't see much point to it.

GLORIA

A point?

SUSAN

I just pick at whatever canned good is not past its sell-by date and scrape the fur off everything else. If I get desperate I order a pizza.

GLORIA

A pizza?

SUSAN

Gloria, enough with the accusatory questions.

GLORIA

I'm not accusing anything, Susan sweetie. I'm just worried about you. I mean, I don't ever remember a time when that fridge wasn't brimming with cheese, cold cuts, steaks and soda.

SUSAN

(taking a moment)

No one left around to eat any of it.

GLORIA

Oh, Susan. I didn't mean to-

SUSAN

(getting up to clear the table)

Thanks for coming over.

GLORIA

Oh no no, Susan. This won't do. Now you sit.

SUSAN

(hanging in the kitchen doorway)

Gloria, really, it's fine.

GLORIA

(getting up to get her)

It most certainly is not. Now you give me that salad bowl. You took the time to open the bags and we're going to enjoy it. We haven't even touched the tea. So you sit right back down. We'll have no more talk of food. Just two ladies chatting the afternoon away. Ok?

SUSAN reluctantly goes to sit down. GLORIA follows suit. She scoops a little more salad onto SUSAN's plate. She pours tea into both glasses.

GLORIA

(holding up her glass)

A toast to Susan Davis and her winter salad.

SUSAN lazily picks up the glass and lets GLORIA clink hers to it. They both take a drink, SUSAN downing half the glass.

GLORIA

(choking after one sip)

Oh my, Susan. I think you forgot the sugar.

SUSAN

Ran out.

GLORIA

Well, I could have brought some over silly. I can go get some-
(off SUSAN's look)

Right never mind I didn't bring up food forget I said anything.

She hesitantly takes another sip of the sugarless tea. Feebly smiling at SUSAN after. A few more moments of awkward silence.

GLORIA

Did you see they finally opened the Super Target?

SUSAN

Did they?

GLORIA

Oh yes! I'm surprised you haven't seen it on your way out.

SUSAN

Haven't left the house since the funeral.

GLORIA

But that was more than two wee-well it's huge. We can shop for clothes, groceries, and lady razors all in one shot. Our own little heaven in Panama City.

SUSAN

It's just a Target, Gloria.

GLORIA

A SUPER target.

SUSAN

(with feigned astonishment)

Sleepy little Panama City is moving on up!

GLORIA

All we need now is one of those Starbucks.

SUSAN

You don't drink coffee. Gives you the trots.

GLORIA

I know, but I love those frap- frappa- frappawhatchamacallits. Especially that mocha chip one? Takes me right back to when we were kids stealing chocolate chip ice cream from your daddy's freezer in the garage.

SUSAN

Mint chocolate // chip.

GLORIA

MINT chocolate chip, that's right. God, I remember how Anne-Marie and Nathan would sneak into that thing and - Oh darn it all, Gloria.

SUSAN

How's Anne-Marie?

GLORIA

She's. . .alright - I suppose. Wanted to come say hi, but I thought it should just be us two girls for now.

SUSAN

She hasn't gone back to school?

GLORIA

Well - she decided to stay here a bit longer. Wanted some time for herself. She spends most of the day watching that Obama speak - think she's got a little crush on the new president.

SUSAN

You tell Anne-Marie I said to get her butt back in school before she falls too far behind.

GLORIA

Says she can make up the work. Or maybe she'll find herself a good husband. Give me some grandkids. Fingers are itching to do some knitting.

SUSAN

That's a waste of a degree. Look at Harriet's kids. The boys are helping their father at the garage and the girls ran off. I think that young one is working the poles over at Tan Fannies. There is nothing here for her - Super Target or not.

GLORIA

I don't know about that. We're still here.

SUSAN

Where are we going to go? We're a couple of old girls led out to pasture to live out the rest of our days getting fat.

GLORIA

I'll have you know I'm the same size I was on my wedding day.

SUSAN

Oh come on, Gloria.

GLORIA

What "come on"?

SUSAN

Fine then. I'll be the only one sitting here getting fat.

GLORIA

What you need to do is get out. Clear your mind.

SUSAN

There's nothing out there for me.

GLORIA

You make it sound like you're dead already.

SUSAN

I might as well be.

GLORIA

Susan! Don't you dare talk like that.

SUSAN

(matter-of-factly)

Why not? Let's see: My husband dies two years ago - not even 50 and he just falls over at the office. And 9 months ago my son leaves me to fight in some godforsaken war that takes his life.

GLORIA

You have me.

SUSAN

Sure.

And bagged salads. **GLORIA**

And tea with no sugar. **SUSAN**

I could get used to it! **GLORIA**

No, you couldn't. **SUSAN**

Yes, I could. Watch. **GLORIA**

GLORIA downs the rest of the glass then proudly sits there with a smile which slowly becomes a grimace.

Oh sweet Jesus that is so vile. **GLORIA**

Laughter.

GLORIA
I mean that is so un-Christian. Jesus, Susan sweetie, you need to get some sugar in this house immediately 'cause I'm pretty sure you're breaking some commandment.

Laughter.

SUSAN
Oh, Gloria. I needed that. I'm sorry I haven't called you sooner. Just needed some time to myself.

GLORIA
Hush. I'm just glad you're alive. I mean I knew you were - saw the lights going on and off in the house at night. But I don't think we've ever gone more than a week without talking on the phone or sharing a meal. I was ready to call the cops if I knocked on this door one more time and you didn't answer.

SUSAN
Look - I need to tell you something. It's why I asked you over.

GLORIA
Anything, Susan. Anything.

SUSAN goes to and opens a closet door, pulling out a "FOR SALE" sign. She positions it in front of her and looks at GLORIA who looks at her smiling. Then down at the sign. Then back to SUSAN. She's confused.

GLORIA
A little help sweetie.

I'm moving. **SUSAN**

Moving? **GLORIA**

Selling the house. **SUSAN**

Selling? **GLORIA**

For someplace smaller. **SUSAN**

Smaller? **GLORIA**

You're doing it again. It's too much room for one person. **SUSAN**

Where are you going? **GLORIA**

Someplace new. **SUSAN**

But why? You've lived in this neighborhood practically all your life. **GLORIA**

Too many things in this house set me off. And who needs all the expenses. And this space. I need a fresh start. **SUSAN**

SUSAN opens the front door and walks out.

What - now? **GLORIA**

SUSAN
(placing the sign in the lawn)
I didn't want to put this out until I told you first.

GLORIA

Well let's talk about it at least.

SUSAN
(re-entering)
I've already made up my mind. Called a realtor for help.

GLORIA
Well - I just - I mean - I can't even - Susan!

SUSAN

Please don't overreact, Gloria. My mind's already made up and it ain't gonna change.

GLORIA tries to stifle herself. She just shakes her head and crosses her arms and just looks around the house. Her eyes land on the boxes and the duffle bag.

GLORIA

Oh my god - you are serious - you've started packing and everything. Oh God.

SUSAN

Gloria -

GLORIA

Oh god oh god.

SUSAN

They're Nathan's.

GLORIA

Oh.

SUSAN

Some neatly dressed man dropped it off the day before the funeral.

GLORIA

Sweet Jesus.

SUSAN

Can't bring myself to search through any of it. Maybe I'll drive them over to the Goodwill.

GLORIA

But why?

SUSAN

When Jeffrey died a co-worker brought me a file box with all the contents of his desk. Twenty-five years of working late nights, and my husband was reduced to a bunch of odds and ends. If I look through any of that stuff then Nathan's life just becomes whatever random collection of things are thrown together in there.

GLORIA

I don't understand how you can just throw them away.

SUSAN

That's right you don't. You haven't lost anything.

GLORIA

I didn't mean anything-

SUSAN

Maybe you should just go. Go back home to your husband and daughter and just be glad you still have someone to cook for.

GLORIA
That's not fair, Susan. I'm just trying to help.

SUSAN
I told you, I'm doing just-

DOORBELL.

SUSAN and GLORIA exchange a look.

GLORIA
Do you want me to get that?

SUSAN
I can handle answering the door, Gloria.

No one moves.

DOORBELL.

GLORIA
Are you -

SUSAN
Just give me a minute, OK?

No one moves.

KNOCKING.

SUSAN
Answer the door, Gloria.

SUSAN grabs plates and heads into the kitchen.

GLORIA
(taking a deep breath)
Hello! How may - oh!

GLORIA opens the door to find LENA standing there, wearing plain American jeans and a blouse, with a scarf casually placed over her head. She is clutching a purse; two suitcases are by her feet.

The two look at each other for a moment.

GLORIA
Susan sweetie?

SUSAN
(from the kitchen)
Who is it?

GLORIA

A nun? No, that can't be right. Can it? I'm not sure. You'd better come out here.

SUSAN

(coming out of the kitchen)

What are you talking about - Oh!

GLORIA

Yes, that's what I said.

SUSAN

Can I help you?

LENA

...

GLORIA

Maybe she's taken a vow of silence.

SUSAN

Don't be stupid, Gloria. When's the last time you saw a convent around here?

(to LENA)

Are you lost? Do you need help?

LENA

(to SUSAN)

I am Lena.

SUSAN

Do I know you?

LENA hands her an envelope.

SUSAN

What's this?

SUSAN takes the letter and walks away, ripping the envelope and starting to read.

GLORIA

A nun - I mean how silly of me. I mean - you don't look like none of the folks here to start. I mean - not that there's anything wrong with that. You get my meaning?

SUSAN

Oh god...

GLORIA

Everything alright?

SUSAN

Let her in.

GLORIA

Come on in, darling.

GLORIA doesn't wait for her and moves right to SUSAN. LENA stands there looking around the house from the doorway, eventually making her way in.

NATHAN descends the stairs.

LENA removes the scarf as she sees and goes to a wall of family photos. She stands in front of and stares at NATHAN's graduation photo.

GLORIA

What is it Susan?

SUSAN doesn't say anything. She hands GLORIA the letter.

GLORIA

"Dear Mama-" Oh my god, Susan. This is -

SUSAN

Read.

NATHAN joins in with GLORIA and starts talking to SUSAN.

As LENA hears the letter she reaches up and touches the photo of NATHAN.

GLORIA/NATHAN

(NATHAN should begin at / and fully take over by //)

I really hope you're not reading this letter because if you / are it means I went and did something stupid. Which means // I am so sorry, mama. The last thing I wanted was to leave you alone. But if you are reading this, then it's been given to you by someone very special. Her name is Lena. I met her here, mama. Can you imagine? A thousand miles away and your silly boy fell in love with a girl instead of fighting a war. And I really do love her, mama. I wanted to be there with her, but, stupid things and all, I can't. I know I should have told you sooner. I should have told you myself. I hope you can forgive me - and her. Your silly son up and married her.

GLORIA

Oh sweet Jesus on a cross.

SUSAN

Go on.

NATHAN

I wish I could tell you everything in this letter, but they barely give us time to drop our trousers to-

GLORIA

I'll just skip that part-

NATHAN

I know you always dreamed of a church wedding with a fancy cake and those paper bells, but so much has happened here. So much I needed. While I still hope you're not reading this letter, I hope it did get to you because it means she got out. I know you'll love her as much as I do. I love you. I always will. Don't be sad. OK? Your son, Nathan.

GLORIA

Oh god...

A tense moment. Then:

SUSAN

Lena?

LENA

(turning to face her)

Hello.

The world falls into a lazy haze. A fever spike in which SUSAN ushers LENA up the stairs, following her.

GLORIA watches the two of them in utter confusion. NATHAN approaches her reaching out. She faces out holding the letter to her chest. He does the same copying her. They both take in a deep breath and slowly exhale.

NATHAN heads into the kitchen as SUSAN descends the stairs. GLORIA begins to a pace a path, getting faster. As SUSAN passes GLORIA she takes the letter back from her and goes to sit. Then:

SCENE 2: A FEW MOMENTS LATER

GLORIA is now frantically pacing. SUSAN is shell-shocked but in a high state of annoyance, clutching the letter and glancing at it once in a while. NATHAN is gone.

GLORIA

I mean I can't believe this. Can you believe this, Susan? I can't. I mean this is unbelievable. Isn't this Susan? I mean this has to be a joke. This is a joke. Is this a joke? I can't believe you can just sit there calmly. This is just so shocking. I mean it's shocking. Isn't this shocking? Susan? Shocking? Isn't it? Huh?

SUSAN

Will you please calm down and sit? You're quickly turnin this headache into a migraine.

GLORIA

Sit? I can't sit. Who could sit? I mean that letter. That girl - my but she is pretty. But that girl. Imagine I thought she was a nun. She's one of those Muslims. Right? Her head was covered. Wait, she took it off. So is she a Muslim? Can they do that? Just take it off? What did you say to her? Did she say anything to you? What is she still doing up there?

SUSAN

Gloria! Please pause long enough for me answer one of those questions.

GLORIA

You're right, you're right. I'm sorry.

GLORIA pulls out one of the dining table chairs and sits down trying her best not to fidget nervously, but failing miserably.

GLORIA

What did you say to her?

SUSAN

What was I going to say, Gloria? I am not even sure if she can speak English.

GLORIA

Well, she did say "hello." Although God knows that doesn't mean anything. Mr. Lee at China Garden always says "hello" to me, but whenever I ask him about his family or try to talk about the weather he just asks me if I want an egg roll. What are you going to do?

SUSAN

I don't even know where to begin to process all of this - whatever this this is!

GLORIA

(going to sit next to SUSAN on the couch and rub her arms)

I know, Susan sweetie, I know. I don't even know what I would do. I mean this is - this is just - well, this just is.

SUSAN

Thank you so much, Gloria.

GLORIA

I'm trying!

SUSAN

I don't understand what that boy was thinking! He married this girl. Married!

GLORIA

I can't even imagine what she must be feeling.

SUSAN

(getting up to pace)

Why did she come here. Surely she's got some family she can live with doesn't she?

LENA starts to slowly descend the stairs.

GLORIA

She's Nathan's wife. Your daughter-in-law.

SUSAN

What is that even supposed to mean right now?!

GLORIA

(seeing LENA)

Hiiiiii Lena.

GLORIA leaps from the couch to meet LENA at the base of the stairs.

GLORIA

(speaking slowly and deliberately)

How are you doing, darling?

SUSAN

She's not slow.

LENA moves to the photos again. Running her hands over various photos of NATHAN.

GLORIA

She must miss him something terrible. Do - you - miss - him - darling?

SUSAN

Maybe you should leave us alone for a while.

GLORIA

Of course. You're right, Susan sweetie. You need me though, you just pick up that phone and I'll be here in a dash. Bye - bye - Lena.

LENA turns to find GLORIA furiously waving goodbye. She softly waves back.

LENA

Goodbye.

GLORIA

(quickly sighing)

What a beautiful voice.

SUSAN

Goodbye, Gloria.

GLORIA

Right. Sorry. Goodbye.

GLORIA hesitates for a quick moment then leaves, lingering a little by one of the windows to see what is about to transpire before SUSAN turns to see her and waves her away.

SUSAN takes a moment to watch LENA before moving closer to the end of the couch.

SUSAN

I hope the room is OK. Haven't had a reason to air it out. Guess now I have an excuse to do the laundry so I can get some clean sheets on there for you - not that the ones on there now are dirty - no one's been on them.

(under her breath)

I hope you can understand what I'm saying.

LENA

I understand.

SUSAN

Oh - you do speak English.

LENA

Enough.

SUSAN

Better than none. Would you like to sit?

*They sit on opposite ends of the couch. Silence.
Then:*

SUSAN

Was your trip here alright?

LENA

Yes, thank you.

SUSAN

No turbulence I hope.

LENA

Only a little.

SUSAN

You couldn't get me on a plane without a glass of wine in me. Jeffrey - my husband - used to beg me to go on these vacations. Pleaded really. He used to get Nathan to come in and say, "Please, mama. Let's run away for a while. Please?" And I would look at his little sad eyes and -

SUSAN can't continue. LENA moves in a little closer and places her hand on top of SUSAN's.

LENA

You have a lovely home.

SUSAN

It's seen better days. I'm afraid I don't get up to much cleaning anymore.

LENA

It's very warm.

SUSAN

I can open a window if you like.

LENA

(her hand on her heart)

I meant warmth from here.

SUSAN

Thank you.

LENA

I can feel the love in here.

SUSAN

Maybe once upon a time.

Awkward silence.

SUSAN

Lena is a very pretty name. Like Lena Horne. Know her? I always thought it was an American name. Something new every day. Does it mean anything in, well, over there?

LENA

Bright. Like light. And you? Susan?

SUSAN

Um - you know, I'm not sure. I never stopped to think about that.

LENA

It is also pretty.

SUSAN

Just plain ol' Susan. What about your last name?

LENA

Davis?

SUSAN

Right.

LENA

It was Al-Zahr. Flower.

SUSAN

Oh - Bright Flower.

LENA

My father was very cr-eative.

Was? **SUSAN**

He is not - he has passed. **LENA**

Oh...my condolences. **SUSAN**

Thank you. **LENA**

And your mother? **SUSAN**

Also passed. **LENA**

I don't seem to be doing well with both feet in my mouth. **SUSAN**

Sorry. I don't understand. **LENA**

Seem to be asking the wrong things. Nathan never spoke about you in any of his letters. This is just so much of a surprise to me - a shock really. **SUSAN**

They said they would tell you. **LENA**

They? **SUSAN**

The army people. They sent a letter before I left. **LENA**

Right. They probably did. **SUSAN**
(taking a glance at Nathan's belongings
in the back)

You didn't know. **LENA**

I don't know anything about this other life of his. I can barely take a breath without smelling him running up those stairs in from football practice or hearing him laugh and then you show up at my door and all of a sudden my son's world has gotten much bigger than I ever thought it could. Now we're making small talk on this couch and I really am not sure what to do in the next hour let alone the next second. **SUSAN**

LENA goes upstairs.

SUSAN
(to herself)

Dammit.

LENA returns with a photo in her hand. She sits back on the couch, closer to SUSAN this time and gives her the photo.

LENA
My 19th birthday - August. You see my smile? This is the first time he held my hand - under the table. I was a little in shock. This is my father Omer. This - my mother Zenab. This is my uncle Laith - my father's brother. The rest are neighbors. I actually made my birthday cake for him because I wanted to impress him. Chocolate -

SUSAN/LENA
- his favorite.

LENA
We met 3 months before this. Things were getting very bad in Baqubah - my city. He and other soldiers were in my neighborhood looking for bad people. My mother had seen something strange and tried to warn them.

Fever spike. NATHAN appears in full army gear with his weapon at the ready.

NATHAN
Ma'am, I don't understand what you're saying!

Rising sound of soldiers, crowds, a woman yelling.

LENA
Shoo mama? [What mom?]

NATHAN
You! Tell her to calm down and let go of me.

LENA
Just a second!

NATHAN
(pulling his gun)
Don't make me say it again.

LENA
No - please! This is my mother. Please, she is not doing anything wrong.

NATHAN
What is she yelling about?

LENA
She wants you to follow her.

NATHAN
What? Why?

LENA

I don't know!

NATHAN

That's not good enough. Danger? What danger? She needs to stay back before she gets hurt. I don't want to use this. Please - tell her to calm down before -

LENA

She says you're in danger. She is trying to help. Please - she is just wanting to help you. Just listen to me. No, listen! All she wants -

A loud explosion, blinding lights, people screaming. When lights restore, NATHAN is on the ground, screaming, grabbing his leg. LENA is thrown against a wall.

NATHAN

Help! Medic!

LENA

(coughing)

Let me. I can help.

NATHAN

Stay back!

LENA

Shut up and let me help!

LENA takes off her scarf and ties it around the wounded leg. NATHAN winces and yelps.

NATHAN

Where did you learn that?

LENA

Baywatch.

NATHAN

You gotta be kidding me. What the hell is going on?

LENA

The car across the street is burning.

NATHAN

(starting to pass out)

We need to get out of here before - before -

LENA

No no no - stay awake. Come on - you need to keep your eyes open. Tell me your name.

NATHAN

Where is - Why -

LENA

What is your name!

NATHAN

Nathan. Nathan Davis.

LENA

Nathan. Good. Hello, Nathan. I am going to help lift you up, alright?

Despite NATHAN's protests, LENA manages to help him up to his feet and leads him to the kitchen door. He disappears.

LENA

That's it. Just a few more steps. [to soldiers] Over here! Please - he's hurt!

NATHAN

Wait! I don't even know who you are.

LENA

(calling after him)

Lena - my name is Lena!

(the world snaps back to normal)

My mother and I helped as many people and soldiers as we could. One day Nathan showed up with other soldiers to thank us. We brought them into our home and gave them food. My mother and I started doing the laundry for the soldiers to make some extra money - to help out. Nathan would make all the deliveries. And then all the pick-ups. Soon he was staying for lunches and dinners. Each time we spoke the conversation lasted a little bit longer. He started learning Arabic from my father. My mother started treating him like a son. He even came to church with us.

SUSAN

Church?

LENA, understanding SUSAN's confusion, reaches into her blouse and takes out the cross she wears on a gold chain.

SUSAN

Oh. I didn't - I thought that everyone there -

LENA

Many families in my neighborhood were Christian. Some hid it. But my father didn't care. We all worshipped the same whether we were in a mosque or a church.

SUSAN

Churches. Well then. Guess FOX news has been leaving some things out.

LENA

Very few are left now. Many have been bombed - attacked by insurgents during Sunday services. But I was never scared because Nathan always came with us.

SUSAN

I could never get him to go.

LENA

It became very hard for Christians - especially for my family because my mother helped that day. Too many eyes saw soldiers coming in and out of our house. Neighbors, people I had grown up with, whose homes I sat in and shared meals, would not talk to us anymore. I am sure some became spies.

SUSAN stridently gets up and starts to pace.

LENA

Miss Davis?

Silence.

LENA

Is something wrong?

Silence.

LENA

If I said // something -

SUSAN

What gives you the right to tell me any of this?

LENA

I thought you would want to know // about -

SUSAN

No! I didn't want to know a god damned thing.

LENA

I did not // mean to-

SUSAN

He died because of you didn't he?

LENA

What?

SUSAN

You knew there was all this danger and you still kept him near. What was he - some way for you to get out?

LENA

No, I swear // to God-

SUSAN

Then you come here and throw all of this in my face. You have no right! NO right, do you hear me!? He was MY son.

LENA

(quietly)

I love him.

SUSAN

LOVE?! You knew him for what - 5 months? I knew him for only 19 years. I raised him. I took care of him - protected him.

LENA

He loved me, // too.

SUSAN

He was stuck in some god damned country he had no right being in. He needed something. Anything.

LENA

It is so much // more.

SUSAN

And who are you to me? You're just sitting on my shoulder like some blackbird picking at whatever is left of me.

LENA

He wanted me to come here // and -

SUSAN

You should have stayed where you were. Far away from here. From me.

LENA

We loved one // another.

SUSAN

I am sure you were deeply in love with him and I am sure you think he loved you back. But I read his letters. He just wanted to be back home. To go to college. To have a family. He was so lost there.

LENA

Please you have // to listen.

SUSAN

I want you out. Get your things and get the hell out of this house and far away from me. Get out. GET OUT!

LENA

I'm pregnant!

A stunned moment.

SUSAN

You can go to hell.

As LENA speaks SUSAN turns, grabbing her keys from a side table, and opens the front door, striding out and slamming the door behind her.

LENA

He was taken from me - from both of us. I came here for Nathan. For this baby. Miss Davis!

The sound of a car peeling away as headlights stream across the windows.

LENA

Please!

A fever spike. LENA opens her mouth to scream - a cacophonous sound emerges - like a thousand voices screaming. The world darkens around her as the screams bounce around the house - echoing in on themselves. She begins to sing but we don't hear her. Until:

SCENE 3: DECEMBER 8 - 10AM

NATHAN enters, carrying a laundry basket of clothes, pushing the sound out, allowing us to hear LENA singing Oum Kalthoum's "El Atlal"(The Ruins). He places the basket in front of her and she reaches down to start folding. He moves away from her and watches. Then:

NATHAN

Marhaba. [Hello]

Startled, LENA turns and see NATHAN. She smiles and shakes her head then returns to her laundry.

LENA

Marhaba. [Hello]

NATHAN

Shakumaku? [What's up?]

LENA

La shay. [Nothing]

NATHAN

Wa shlonek? [How are you?]

LENA

I'm well. Thank you for asking. You're improving.

NATHAN

Yeah - the docs did a real good patch job.

LENA

I meant your Arabic.

NATHAN

Oh - yeah. Thanks.

LENA
But, yes, they have “patched” you very well. You have less of a limp every time I see you.

Got lucky. **NATHAN**

Yes. **LENA**

Thanks to you, too. **NATHAN**

It was nothing. **LENA**

Something. **NATHAN**

Teenage awkwardness.

You’re early. **LENA**

Am I? **NATHAN**

You’ve been early the last two times. **LENA**

Have I? **NATHAN**

Haven’t you? **LENA**

S’pose so. **NATHAN**

I won’t be done for another hour. **LENA**

Do you need help? **NATHAN**

This is woman’s work, no? **LENA**

I can still help. **NATHAN**

Don’t you have patrol? **LENA**

NATHAN

Yeah - but I think the guys would rather I make sure they got clean drawers for tonight.

LENA

Drawers?

NATHAN

Underwear.

LENA

Ah - my mother washes those. She doesn't think it's proper for my eyes. I do your uniforms.

NATHAN

Even better! In this heat those guys sweat through everything in a couple of hours. Smells like boiled ham in a can.

LENA looks at him quizzically. NATHAN gives her a goofy smile. LENA puts the sorted clothes into a basket and starts to head to the stairs.

NATHAN

Where you off to?

LENA

To fold the clothes. It will get done faster if my mother helps. Then you can go back.

NATHAN

I'm in no rush. Really. Take your time.

A moment.

LENA

Come on then.

NATHAN

Yeah? That'd be ok?

LENA

As long as you help.

NATHAN

If you teach me.

LENA

You want something to drink?

NATHAN

If it's not too much trouble.

LENA

We'll see.

LENA heads up the stairs. NATHAN pumps his fist and catches his rather absurd gesture and runs up the stairs.

The lights shift as the fever subsides. The sound of a car door opening and shutting. SUSAN walks in a little bedraggled. She is covered with grass stains - bits of mulch stuck to her.

She looks around to see if anyone is around. She quietly shuts the door behind her. She goes to a large stack of mail on a side table and starts rooting through it looking for something specific.

GLORIA

(sticking her head over the saloon doors)

Susan.

SUSAN

Jesus!

GLORIA

Where have you been?

SUSAN

I needed a break.

GLORIA

You were gone all night, sweetie.

SUSAN

I went to Savannah.

GLORIA

Savannah?

SUSAN

Don't. I just drove without thinking. Was almost there before I realized I left my purse at home and had less than half a tank of gas left. So I turned around. Then I went to see Jeffrey. Talk to him. Fell asleep on his grave.

GLORIA

Oh, Susan.

SUSAN

Why are you here?

GLORIA

I saw you take off like a bat out of hell. Ran over here and found that poor girl hysterical. Had Anne-Marie come over and help me calm her down.

SUSAN

Why'd you drag that poor girl into this?

GLORIA

I made Lena some dinner then put her to bed. She wasn't much up to talking. I passed out on the couch. I was just percolating some coffee. Want some?

SUSAN

Yes.

GLORIA

Have a seat. I'll bring it.

GLORIA heads into the kitchen. SUSAN keeps searching. She finds what she wants and rips open the envelope. GLORIA re-enters with a mug.

SUSAN

Son of a bitch.

GLORIA
(handing her the mug)

Language, Susan. Here.

SUSAN

Thank you.

GLORIA

What's that?

SUSAN

Army letter. She is who she says she is.

GLORIA

Well, of course she is.

SUSAN

Now I'm supposed to - what - be her mother-in-law? Nathan died only three weeks ago.

GLORIA

And he sent you this gift. The Lord is looking out for you, sweetie.

SUSAN

He's got a strange way of showing it.

GLORIA

Ours is not to question why.

SUSAN

How can you be so calm about this?

GLORIA

I'm a Baptist.

SUSAN

How are you not angry this girl here?

GLORIA

Nathan loved her. It may not be what you and I wanted for our kids, but I'm gonna respect what his last wishes - whether I like it or not.

SUSAN

She's pregnant.

GLORIA

Come again.

SUSAN

With Nathan's baby - apparently.

GLORIA

Oh. Well then.

SUSAN

See what I mean?

GLORIA

This changes everything.

SUSAN

Thought it might.

GLORIA

She's staying.

SUSAN

What?

GLORIA

There is no way you are letting her out of your sight now. She's having Nathan's baby. Your grandchild. You're gonna be a grandmother, Susan. A grandmother!

SUSAN

I can't possibly be having this conversation right now.

GLORIA

She can't go anywhere else being all pregnant.

SUSAN

(going back to the letters)

Something don't sit right with me.

GLORIA

What she must have gone through to even get here. All to bring your grandchild into your loving - Susan what are you doing?

SUSAN

(rifling)

Shush. Keep an eye out.

For what? **GLORIA**

Her. **SUSAN**
(rifling)

GLORIA
(flippantly dismissing Susan with a gesture)
Just imagine a little baby running around again. I gotta start on crocheting some booties. Pink or blue? Hm. Pink, I think. A little girl. Or maybe, blue. A little boy. I do hope he'll have Nathan's eyes. And her dark hair. How exotic.

Here! From the benefits office. **SUSAN**

You're just reading that now? **GLORIA**

Sh. **SUSAN**
(reading)

GLORIA buttons up and stands there.

I knew it! Damn her! **SUSAN**

What what? **GLORIA**

Here. Look. Nathan added her to the list of beneficiaries. **SUSAN**

So? She is his wife. **GLORIA**

She's after the money. **SUSAN**

Oh come on now, Susan. **GLORIA**

Makes sense. **SUSAN**

No it doesn't, sweetie. You're seeing ghosts where there are none. **GLORIA**

SUSAN
It's all too convenient: Whirlwind romance. Marriage. The baby. She's an orphan. Needs to get out. Go to a better country. Find a job. Hell, live off his death benefits. Bet she doesn't know she's gotta split it with me.

GLORIA

At least you don't have to move.

SUSAN

That's not the point.

GLORIA

Sure it is. Nothing has to change, really. You can stay here. Help her raise the baby.

SUSAN

If you think for one second I'm going to let her get away with this then you've lost what little sense you have left. Lena! Can you come down please?

GLORIA

What are you gonna do?

SUSAN

I got this.

LENA comes down the stairs.

GLORIA

Lena, darling! Everything alright?

LENA

(seeing Susan - unsure)

Yes. Thank you.

GLORIA

Slept well I hope.

LENA

Yes.

GLORIA

You hungry, darling?

LENA

Not really.

GLORIA

Well if you feel peckish later I made some pancakes. They're in the oven. I'm gonna head home now. Make breakfast for mine. You need anything you just come on by, ya hear?

LENA

Yes. Thank you.

GLORIA

My pleasure.

LENA

Please tell Anne-Marie I said "thank you."

GLORIA

Such manners. Susan sweetie, I'll talk to you later?

SUSAN

Sure.

GLORIA

Marvelous.

(walking in and whispering to her)

Don't throw this chance away. And you might want to run a comb through your hair.

*She picks a piece of grass out and hands it to her.
She heads to the front door.*

GLORIA

Almost forgot!

*She heads into the kitchen and comes back out
carrying a run-over "For Sale" sign.*

GLORIA

Found this on the curb. Figured you didn't need it anymore.

*She hands SUSAN the sign. Smiles at her. Then
heads out. Shuts the door behind her. SUSAN
leans the sign against a wall. LENA and SUSAN
stand there. Stealing glances.*

LENA

I am sorry if I said anything last night that upset you.

SUSAN

It happens.

LENA

I promise I am doing what Nathan wanted me to.

SUSAN

Lena let's not talk about Nathan, alright? I'd rather talk about you.

LENA

Ok.

SUSAN

Have a seat.

*LENA moves to the sofa. SUSAN sits in a chair
far from her.*

SUSAN

How come you came here?

LENA

I said last night.

SUSAN

I know what you said. Why not stay with your uncle?

LENA looks at her quizzically.

SUSAN

From the picture. You didn't mention last night that he was dead so I assume he's still alive.

LENA

He left three weeks before my parents died. He was trying to go to Syria to find a place for all of us. After the first week we didn't hear from him anymore.

SUSAN

Huh - ok. And no other family?

LENA

None.

SUSAN

So who'd you stay with when your parents died?

LENA

A neighbor who grew up with my mother took me in.

SUSAN

What would you have done under normal circumstances?

LENA

There is no normal for us. Maybe find work and a cheap place to live. Many girls work for the Americans, but many also are killed because of it.

SUSAN

So coming here was the better option.

LENA

Yes.

SUSAN

I take it they don't exactly have shelters for widowed mothers-to-be over there.

LENA

I needed for this baby to have a home. A family.

SUSAN

And what will you do once the baby comes?

LENA

I don't know.

SUSAN

Are you planning on work?

LENA

I don't know.

SUSAN

Planing on staying here for the rest of your life?

LENA

I don't // know.

SUSAN

Don't know - right. Why'd it take you so long to get here?

LENA

I had to answer so many questions for so many different people at the base. They wanted to know more about me and - us - and what we were doing. Then I had to wait for the paperwork to be processed so I could come to America.

SUSAN

What about the baby?

LENA

Very healthy. Almost four months.

SUSAN

I mean is it his.

LENA

Nathan was the first - he was the only man I ever loved.

SUSAN

Boy. He was a boy.

LENA

Boys don't carry guns.

A moment.

SUSAN

Well I suppose I don't really have a choice then since you don't have any other options. Don't think I can just throw you into the street. And if the army seems to think the baby is his -

LENA

(with bite)

It is.

SUSAN

Well - there you have it.

LENA

Yes.

SUSAN

Though we should probably think long-term. First thing's first: Gotta get some groceries into this house. Then we can figure out what comes next.

LENA

Can I help?

SUSAN

Yeah - why not. An extra set of hands would be good. Why don't you take a nap - refresh. I'll make a list and we can head out later.

LENA starts to head up the stairs. She stops midway.

LENA

Miss Davis . . . thank you.

SUSAN

. . . Yup.

Once LENA has cleared SUSAN takes the sign and shoves it into the side closet. She grabs the phone off the cradle and dials.

SUSAN

Judith? Susan. I'm fine. No no - nothing's changed. Look - how quickly could you could sell the house? Nope. Still a one-bedroom. Just one, Judith. Do your best please. Thanks. Bye bye.

She hangs up and thinks for a moment. She heads to the stairs then thinks twice. Backing away.

She goes to the sideboard and takes out a bourbon glass and a full bottle of bourbon that she cracks open. She pours herself a healthy amount - about three fingers. Takes a moment to consider, then puts the bottle away.

She takes a sip - feeling the burn - it's been a while.

She goes to the front door and opens it - muted daylight cast by an overcast sky barely enters the house.

She leans against the door jamb and drinks slowly. As day turns to night, the fever slowly spikes. The house darkens until only SUSAN can be seen, now bathed in moonlight pouring through the front door. She sways a little listening to the evening crickets. She starts humming "Didn't Leave Nobody But the Baby." Until:

SCENE 4: DECEMBER 14 - 5PM

We hear NATHAN singing that same song. It is an almost muted echo.

SUSAN starts at the voice, looking around thinking NATHAN is in the house, but realises she's just hearing things. She downs the rest of the drink and heads into the kitchen, leaving the door open.

The moonlight spreads, revealing NATHAN, shirtless, on the couch, LENA lying against him. They are in the aftermath bliss of rooftop lovemaking. NATHAN runs his fingers through LENA's hair as she runs her fingers along his hands.

NATHAN

*Go to sleep you little baby
Go to sleep you little baby
Your momma's gone away and your daddy's gonna stay
Didn't leave nobody -*

LENA

(eyes half-closed, smiling)

You're going to make me fall asleep.

NATHAN

Kinda the point. Go ahead - I don't mind.

LENA leans into him, almost burrowing, wrapping his arms around her tightly.

NATHAN

Cold?

LENA

(shaking her head)

I love feeling you against me. Time is completely still and it is only you and me.

NATHAN

I love when you get poetic on me.

LENA gives his hand a playful slap.

A moment.

She burrows into him deeper.

NATHAN

What's wrong?

Nothing. **LENA**

NATHAN
I know when something is bothering you.

No, no. It's nothing. **LENA**

Lena. **NATHAN**

LENA
I wish we didn't have to meet like this in secret.

NATHAN
Seeing you only on laundry days ain't enough for me. And I don't wanna risk the wrong eyes seeing us together when I ain't on duty.

LENA
One day you're going to break your neck climbing up the side of the building.

NATHAN
Nah - I'm like a monkey. Nothing knocks me down.

NATHAN pretends to be a monkey hooting and picking through LENA's hair.

LENA
(laughing)
Nathan! Stop it!

NATHAN
I'd climb all of these buildings if I had to just to be with you. I'm not going anywhere.

NATHAN squeezes her tighter. A moment.

LENA
But you will. One day.

Lena - **NATHAN**

LENA
I know you don't like talking about it // but it's true.

NATHAN
(sternly)
Lena. No.

Silence. NATHAN starts to hum the lullaby.

LENA
You don't play nice.

I know. **NATHAN**

NATHAN kisses her head.

Why did you come here? **LENA**

What now? **NATHAN**

LENA
I always wonder what makes any of the soldiers decide to go so far from home to fight for a country they have no connection to.

Not real romantic talk here. **NATHAN**

Tell me. **LENA**

NATHAN
Money started running out after my daddy died. Mom hadn't worked a day since they married. And I wasn't making enough bagging groceries to pay tuition and help her out. Figured I could do this for a short time. Send some money home. And then go back to college on the army's dime.

LENA
You left your whole life behind for a country of strangers.

NATHAN
Mom was the hardest to leave. She wasn't none too pleased. But I think she understand why I did it.

No girlfriend? **LENA**

NATHAN
How long you been holding on to that question?

I have not - a while. **LENA**

No girlfriend. **NATHAN**

LENA
Really? Someone so charming like you.

NATHAN
Had one. Things didn't work out.

Why? **LENA**

We were young and silly.

NATHAN

Silence. LENA shivers.

You sure you're not cold?

NATHAN

Yes.

LENA
(shivering again)

Liar. I'm getting another blanket.

NATHAN

No no - I'm fine. Don't leave me here.

LENA

I'm just going over there. I'll be right back.

NATHAN

NATHAN kisses her forehead and walks out the front door, softly singing the lullaby again, closing the door behind him. LENA looks out, afraid, and wraps the blanket around her tighter.

The lights quickly shift to daylight. ANNE-MARIE is sitting next to her on the couch putting together a rather large nativity scene replete with angels, cherubs, natives, and animals. A large velvet nativity painting is leaned up against a chair as a reference.

They barely make eye contact throughout.

I can never remember where these things go. You'd think it'd be second nature by now. Every Christmas since I was 7 my mom has forced my dad and me to sit down and put this thing together because of that God awful velvet painting. She wouldn't let up until every single animal, shepherd, and fat angel figurine was in the manger.

ANNE-MARIE

Stable.

LENA

Right. Anyway, she'd run around the kitchen baking snicker doodles yelling at us over her shoulder if we put one of these things in the wrong place.

ANNE-MARIE

Snicker doodles?

LENA

My mother's weapon of choice. Extra sugary kind of cookie torture. You've probably never had anything like it where you come from.

ANNE-MARIE

Awkward silence.

LENA

Why isn't Mrs. Rogers putting this in her house?

ANNE-MARIE

She thinks it'll make Miss Susan happy - give her a bit of the Christmas spirit. And if that doesn't work she'll cram a snicker doodle down her throat and force her to sing along to Wayne Newton's Christmas album.

LENA

You don't seem to like being back home with your parents.

ANNE-MARIE

It's alright, I guess. It helps remind me why in the hell I got out of here in the first place.

(pulling out a cigarette pack and a lighter)

You mind?

LENA

(looking to her stomach)

Well-

ANNE-MARIE

(walking to one of the windows)

Right. I'll blow it out the window.

ANNE-MARIE pulls out a cigarette. Lights it. Starts to smoke.

LENA

(heading to the kitchen)

Would you like something to drink?

ANNE-MARIE

If I wan a drink - I'll get it myself. This is like my second home.

ANNE-MARIE slowly drags and blows, studying LENA.

ANNE-MARIE

You're not gonna tell my mom are you?

LENA

No.

ANNE-MARIE

Good. She'd lose her mind and yank me back home - probably accuse me of doing drugs or something.

(she slowly drags and blows)

Where was I?

LENA

Why you left.

ANNE-MARIE

Right. Mom and I argued for most of my senior year because she wanted me to go to the junior college. Living here is fine and all, I guess, but Panama City isn't exactly buzzing with excitement and energy. So I applied to all these colleges behind her back.

LENA

I like it here. Everything is much slower. Calmer.

ANNE-MARIE

I bet you stick out with that accent.

(putting on a thicker accent)

You're just about the closest thing they got to culture here in Lo-Al.

LENA

Lo-Al?

ANNE-MARIE

Lower Alabama. We're so close to it that we're like some mutant inbred sister city. The Redneck Riviera. I'm surprised people around here didn't start burning crosses when they found out who you were. That woulda been something.

Awkward silence.

LENA

So how did you tell her?

ANNE-MARIE

Hm?

LENA

Your mother - about college.

ANNE-MARIE

I had my dad take her to the Applebee's and tell her. She would never have a hair out of place in public, but she sure let me have it when she came home. Called me an ingrate. Asked me why I hated the house she worked so hard to keep.

LENA

She has been very kind to me.

ANNE-MARIE

Well she's not yours so I guess it's different. You an only child?

LENA

Yes. My parents wanted many other children, but after me my mother could not have any more. So she became like a caretaker for all the neighbors' new babies. The whole neighborhood mourned after she died.

ANNE-MARIE

That sucks.

LENA

It's the life we've had to get used to. So tell me: What do you study in college?

ANNE-MARIE

Broadcast Journalism. I want to be one of those CNN news people that travels to distant and exotic locations to report on civil wars or terrorist attacks or something. Ever since Obama got elected there're so many doors opening. I wanna step through 'em all. Mom thinks I'll be coming back home after I graduate. I can't imagine a worse thing: Me living here with some bubbah and screaming children.

LENA

There is the Super Target.

ANNE-MARIE

Oh shit! She got you too.

LENA

Your mother has taken me there every day for the last week. Every time she takes me we spend all the time in one aisle - she picks up everything and explains what it is.

ANNE-MARIE

Jesus, she probably thinks you lived in a tent back home and rode camels everywhere.

LENA

I don't mind - she makes me laugh.

ANNE-MARIE

Live with her.

LENA

Maybe not.

A moment of laughter that catches them by surprise.

ANNE-MARIE stamps out the cigarette and re-joins LENA.

ANNE-MARIE

So what did you want to do before the war?

LENA

It's hard to remember anything before that.

ANNE-MARIE

Did you go to college?

LENA

Almost - but it got too dangerous for me to leave home and the university was far.

ANNE-MARIE

Were you one of those nerds that loved going to school and got all A's?

LENA

I used to drive my teachers crazy asking for extra homework.

ANNE-MARIE

What did you want to be? Let me guess. A lawyer?

LENA

No.

ANNE-MARIE

Doctor?

LENA

I hate blood.

ANNE-MARIE

You probably loved math and science, so...engineer?

LENA

Numbers are too cold for me.

ANNE-MARIE

I give - tell me.

LENA

Zoologist.

ANNE-MARIE

Seriously?

LENA

Yes.

ANNE-MARIE

Hard to imagine a zoo in the middle of a desert.

LENA

Iraq is not all sand. The school used to take all the kids to the Baghdad Zoo every year. I fell in love with all the animals. I knew every single bird, reptile, and mammal.

ANNE-MARIE

(turning over a figurine)

Well then maybe you help me figure out what in the hell this is. I'm thinkin' a penguin.

LENA

It's a - well - I don't know.

ANNE-MARIE

I swear she must have added a dozen more things since I left for school. So you think you'll go back to school now that you're here?

LENA

I want to - but...

(gesturing to her stomach)

ANNE-MARIE

Good point. After?

LENA

I am not even sure what will happen tomorrow, but I know this baby has to be the most important thing. I will find a job. Start saving some money. I have to be prepared.

ANNE-MARIE

Why? You're gonna stay here for however long you want.

LENA

I don't think it is easy for Miss Davis that I am here.

ANNE-MARIE

She'll come around. She's just filled with all kinds of sadness.

LENA

I wish I could take it away from her. But I think maybe I cause too much of it.

They digest the moment. NATHAN descends the stairs.

ANNE-MARIE

Can I touch it?

LENA

Excuse me?

ANNE-MARIE

Your stomach? That's weird, right? // Sorry.

LENA

There is not much there - but - sure.

LENA presents her belly. ANNE-MARIE places her hand slowly on it. NATHAN places his on the opposite side.

ANNE-MARIE

What a cute little bump.

ANNE-MARIE just stares and rubs and after a moment puts her head to the belly startling LENA, who eventually relaxes into the odd gesture.

ANNE-MARIE

(chuckling)

I think I can actually hear the heartbeat. A little extra beat to your own pulse.

(a moment)

Amazing. Just amazing.

(another moment)
Nathan was my first love.

LENA is a little shocked and starts to say something but stops herself.

ANNE-MARIE

(her head still on LENA's belly)

High school sweethearts. Nothing I wouldn't have done for him. He was going somewhere, like me. I got so mad when he dropped out of college. We'd already broken up by then - two different colleges and all. Then one day he just up and calls and tells me he's signed up for the army. All those smarts and he was just gonna throw it away. We didn't speak much after that - always ended up fighting. I keep thinking what life would be like if he had stayed. Maybe if I tried harder. But that Nathan - once he makes up his mind he's as stubborn as a mule. I wish he was here.

A moment. LENA gets up to move away.

LENA

I'm going to get some water.

ANNE-MARIE

How did he propose to you?

LENA

I don't think -

ANNE-MARIE

Please.

NATHAN moves to LENA and caresses her cheek.

LENA

...

ANNE-MARIE

I gotta know.

Fever spike. NATHAN pulls LENA up and away.

NATHAN

Just five minutes.

LENA

Why are we up here right now?

NATHAN

You'll see

LENA

I have to help my mother finish making dinner for tonight. Besides -

NATHAN

Oh hush. Look up.

Why am-

LENA

Just do it!

NATHAN

(as she does)

It's the clearest night I've seen since I got here. And you're in for a treat. See that? That's Orion.

LENA

Yes - and those three stars are his belt.

NATHAN

OK then smarty pants - what's his story?

LENA

Um -

NATHAN

Ah ha!

LENA

No no - I know this.

NATHAN

No you don't.

LENA

No I don't.

NATHAN

So as I understand it. The goddess Artemis was deeply in love with Orion - a mere mortal. Her brother Apollo didn't think it proper for Gods to be mixing with people. One day, he dared her to hit this tiny little spot in the ocean. She was a damned good shot with a bow, so she took him up on the challenge. Hit it dead center. But Apollo had tricked her - the tiny spot was Orion going for a swim. Artemis was in so much grief, she turned him into stars and shot him right into the night sky so she'd never forget him.

LENA looks up into the night sky. NATHAN leans in and kisses her.

NATHAN

Thank you.

LENA

For a kiss?

NATHAN

Rescuing me.

LENA

That was months ago.

NATHAN

No - not that - well that, too. But from this - all of this around us. You've got me in your snares Miss Lena.

LENA

Such a strange way of saying things.

NATHAN

Means I'm fallin' for you.

NATHAN leans in for another kiss breaking it off before he makes contact.

NATHAN

Wait wait - there it is! There! Look!

LENA

(looking up)

Oh my god...

NATHAN

The Orionids meteor shower.

LENA

Perfect. . .perfect.

NATHAN

Yeah...marry me.

LENA

What?

NATHAN

Don't pretend you didn't hear me. You do that when you want to delay answering.

LENA

It's only - well -

NATHAN

Don't want to?

LENA

We should wait.

NATHAN

Why?

LENA

I do not think this is possible.

NATHAN

Sure it is. Trust me.

Even if my parents agreed - **LENA**

They will. They love me. **NATHAN**

It would still be incredibly difficult for me to leave. And what would happen to my parents? **LENA**

Got it all worked out. You'd be my wife, so the base would have to give you your citizenship and travelling papers. And your parents, too. I could bring you all over. **NATHAN**

But this is our home. How would we survive in America? What would my parents do? **LENA**

Anything they wanted! This is a chance to go to a better country and be free and have opportunities. To be safe. To be protected. **NATHAN**

We need to think more about this. Make sure we know what we are doing. **LENA**

You make me happy, Lena. With you I feel so free. I feel whole. And I love it. I love you, Lena. I LOVE LENA! **NATHAN**

Sh! People will hear you. **LENA**

I don't care! Come on. Say it. Say you love me. **NATHAN**

Nathan! **LENA**

Say it! **NATHAN**

Ahh. Ok. I love you. **LENA**

Louder! **NATHAN**

I love you! **LENA**

BE FREE! **NATHAN**

I LOVE NATHAN! **LENA**

They collapse into a jovial amorous hug. They kiss.

Marry me? **NATHAN**

Ok. **LENA**

Ok? **NATHAN**

Yes. **LENA**

Yes? **NATHAN**

Yes yes - yes. **LENA**

Yes! **NATHAN**

NATHAN picks her up and twirls her.

Ok enough - enough! I need to get back. **LENA**

Let's tell your parents. **NATHAN**

NO! I'll tell them. Somehow. Now go. **LENA**

I don't wanna stop lookin' at you. **NATHAN**

Go! Crazy! **LENA**

NATHAN runs off into the kitchen then runs back on to steal one more kiss before leaving.

LENA turns to ANNE-MARIE, holding that picture in her -hands.

LENA
A month later the army gave us permission to marry. We had two ceremonies: The official one at the base, and a secret one the week before in the living room of the neighborhood priest. It was very simple. His son played the *3oud* and his wife sang for us. It was the middle of the night with the curtains closed and candles lit everywhere. I only wish my parents could have been there.

That's - incredible. **ANNE-MARIE**

I am so sorry, Anne-Marie. **LENA**

Why? **ANNE-MARIE**

That it was me and not you. **LENA**

ANNE-MARIE
The first time I heard about you I got so jealous and angry. My mom's been trying to get me to spend time with you. But, truth be told, I didn't want anything to do with you. I thought mom would have taken it the hardest - she always wanted Nathan for a son-in-law, but even she seemed OK with you - just kept calling you "lovely." I wasn't planning on letting you off so easy. It's stupid, I know. But for all our lives all we ever heard from our mothers were Anne-Marie and Nathan, Anne-Marie and Nathan. All my daydreams of our big white wedding just seemed like a guarantee. But this whole day you've just been so damned nice and kind and... "lovely." Nathan must have been really happy with you.

LENA
(tearing up)
I miss him. So much.

ANNE-MARIE
(hugging her)
Yeah - me too, girl. Me too.
(Pulling away and wiping LENA's tears
and her own away)
Look at us - like a couple of Lifetime TV Movie gals.

LENA
I have so much to learn.

Laughter.

*SUSAN stumbles through the front door, her arms
filled with bags.*

SUSAN
Girls.

ANNE-MARIE
Hey, Miss Susan - here, lemme help.

ANNE-MARIE runs to grab some bags.

LENA
Me too.

SUSAN
(to LENA)

I got it.

ANNE-MARIE
(trying to diffuse)

Yeah, sit down, Lena. You're supposed to take advantage of people when you're pegggers. Where's my mom?

SUSAN
She ran home - forgot something.

ANNE-MARIE
You guys were gone for almost 5 hours. My mom get lost at the mall again?

SUSAN
(going to put the bags on the table)
I've never seen anyone spend so much time looking for bargains. And that damned Super Target.

ANNE-MARIE
Oh no, why did you let her in there?

SUSAN
She said it would only take 15 minutes. She lied.

ANNE-MARIE
She's gonna need a 12-step for that place.

SUSAN
What have you been doing?

ANNE-MARIE
Lena and I were putting the nativity scene together. She's been a lot of help. Sorry you got stuck with it this year.

GLORIA
(skipping into the house, carrying a large rectangular Tupperware container)
Woo hoo! I've got a surprise!!

ANNE-MARIE
Jesus, mom, why you gotta be so loud?

GLORIA
Oh, shush you. Oh my god - look at it. It's gorgeous! Right, Susan sweetie? I sure am gonna miss it, but it deserves to be with you this year. Bring you some light and love from the Lord. You girls did such a good job.

ANNE-MARIE
Lena and I couldn't figure out what this is.

GLORIA
Looks like a penguin.

A penguin?
SUSAN

Yes, sweetie. It's in the painting.
GLORIA

Where?
ANNE-MARIE

Next to the wise man - the mulatto [*Playwright Intervention: hit the "t"s please*] with no beard.
GLORIA

Gloria, why would there be a penguin in the desert?
SUSAN

(in all seriousness)
Susan, it was the birth of our Lord and saviour. Man and beast came from all corners of the earth to bear witness to a new age of mercy and peace.
GLORIA

Like a Lady GaGa concert.
ANNE-MARIE

Don't blaspheme Anne-Marie Elizabeth Rogers.
GLORIA

Mom, the little porcelain baby Jesus is not going to break into tears.
ANNE-MARIE

You don't know that. You hear on the news all the time how these statues and paintings of Jesus and Mary in South America start crying or bleeding for no reason. So it's possible.
GLORIA

We only get the weirdos who see Jesus in their burnt toast or the Virgin Mary on the side of a glass office building.
ANNE-MARIE

You believe me, don't you Lena?
GLORIA

I guess it is possible. We had a woman once who-
LENA

This is a small child on his knees praying.
SUSAN

What? No - I've studied that painting for years. I know it's a penguin.
GLORIA

The kid's wearing a tux.
SUSAN

GLORIA

That's not possible.

SUSAN

You bought that painting from a hippie in a trailer park.

GLORIA

It's practically a holy relic.

SUSAN

Oh, Gloria.

GLORIA

What "Oh, Gloria"? It's faith.

SUSAN

(taking the bags into the kitchen)

Just admit it's a child, Gloria.

GLORIA

(studying the painting)

Well, I just don't know. Oh oh oh! Before I forget - Lena, I made these early this morning so they would be ready just in time for you to celebrate your first Christmas.

ANNE-MARIE

Mom, she's a Christian. She's celebrated Christmas before.

GLORIA

Not OUR kind of Christmas.

ANNE-MARIE

What kinds are there?

GLORIA

Well we're baptists and she's - Lena, honey, what are you?

LENA

Just Christian.

GLORIA

Really? Well. . . SNICKER DOODLES!

ANNE-MARIE

(under her breath)

Oh god.

GLORIA

A family tradition I want to pass down to you. Have one. Go ahead. You'll love them.

*ANNE-MARIE gestures wildly out of sight for
LENA not to touch the confections.*

LENA

(avoiding any impoliteness and picking up a small piece)

Thank you so much. Very thoughtful. I am sure it is delicious.

GLORIA

Well, it's not to stare at darlin'. Eat eat eat.

LENA places it in her mouth and chews slowly trying not to react to how sweet it is.

LENA

Very good.

GLORIA

Not too much sugar I hope?

LENA

(trying to swallow)

No - no - fine.

GLORIA

Anne-Marie?

ANNE-MARIE

(quickly)

No thanks! Don't wanna ruin my appetite for dinner.

SUSAN

(coming back out - seeing the tupperware- afeared)

What is that in your hands?

GLORIA

SNICKER DOODLE!

SUSAN

Oh, Jesus, Gloria. You're still making those God awful things?

GLORIA

Everyone loves them.

SUSAN

It killed the Davidson's dog last year.

GLORIA

That mutt was just old.

SUSAN

Those things are lethal.

GLORIA

Well Lena likes them - don't you darlin'?

LENA smiles with her mouth closed tightly.

SUSAN
(grabbing the backs and heading back
into the kitchen)

I rest my case.

GLORIA
(calling after her)
Well I love them! And so does Bryan! Anne-Marie, look what I picked up.

*GLORIA pulls out a tissue ball and unravels it -
presenting a shiny porcelain cherub.*

ANNE-MARIE
Oh, God. Not another one.

GLORIA
To hang right above the cradle.

ANNE-MARIE
You have a problem, woman.

GLORIA
The one that's there is old - it's got a chipped wing, the poor thing. This one will look better.

ANNE-MARIE
Along with the penguin.

GLORIA
(giving her daughter a playful rib poke)
Sassy pants.

ANNE-MARIE
(gleefully reacting)
Mom! Stop!

GLORIA
(going after her a-poking)
What dear?

ANNE-MARIE
Quit it! I'm a grown woman!

*LENA wistfully watches as mother and daughter
turn into little school girls.*

GLORIA
You're still my baby girl. Now what do you say?

ANNE-MARIE
Stop - stop I can't breathe.

Say it! **GLORIA**

Uncle! Uncle! **ANNE-MARIE**

Darn skippy uncle. **GLORIA**
(letting up)

GLORIA hugs her then pulls away, cupping her face.

It's so good having you home, dear heart. **GLORIA**

Don't get all sappy on me. **ANNE-MARIE**

I'm a mother, it's what I do. **GLORIA**

GLORIA hugs her again. She sees LENA saddened.

Do me a favor, dear? Go give Susan a hand. **GLORIA**

Sure. Don't let her talk you into another Snicker Doodle. You'll go into an diabetic coma. **ANNE-MARIE**

You best get. **GLORIA**
(smacking ANNE-MARIE's butt on her way to the kitchen)

GLORIA watches her leave then turns to LENA, looking at her for a moment.

How you doin', darlin? **GLORIA**

Good. **LENA**

Things getting better with Susan? **GLORIA**

Everything is good. **LENA**

Now don't you fib me. **GLORIA**

LENA

Pardon?

GLORIA

Fib. Tell a lie. I can sense these things. Anne-Marie's given me enough practice.

LENA

It's ok - really. Things like this take time. I am just - thinking about my parents a lot.

GLORIA

The holidays'll do that to you.

LENA just starts to stare off in the distance. A high pitched squeal starts to sound and get louder very quickly.

LENA

Remembering things I don't want to.

GLORIA

The past crashing into tidings of joy.

LENA

The stars were bright.

GLORIA

Lena?

LENA

So bright.

GLORIA

Darling?

Fever spike. A flash of light. A loud explosion. LENA is thrown to her knees and when the lights re-adjust NATHAN is on the ground next to her. Sounds of people screaming and yelling, and soldiers barking orders.

NATHAN

Lena! Can you hear me?

LENA

Just the sound of a whistle. His lips moving. My body numb. Wet.

NATHAN

Lena! Dammit! I need to get you out of here.

NATHAN helps her to the couch and lays her down. He sits in the chair next to it and holds her hand.

LENA

(still in a reverie)

I woke up two days later. My head was wrapped in bandages, my right arm was in so much pain. I had these little cuts everywhere. I could barely hear his voice but he kept saying the same thing over and over.

NATHAN

I'm so sorry, Lena. I'm so sorry.

LENA sits up and looks around - searching.

LENA

Mama? Baba? Waynhoom? Wayn?? [Where are they? Where??]

NATHAN

(grabbing her and holding her)

Lena! It's OK. Shh. It's OK. I'm here.

LENA

Nathan? Where are they?

NATHAN

I need you to calm down.

LENA

(starting to get up)

We need to find them. Help me!

NATHAN

No, Lena. No. It's too late.

LENA

...

NATHAN

I'm so sorry.

LENA

Tell me.

NATHAN

So sorry.

LENA

Tell me!

NATHAN

A missile into the room next to theirs. My unit responded as soon as we heard the explosion. I pulled you out first. I tried to find them, Lena. I swear. I even went back the next morning. But there was nothing left but rubble and ash.

LENA stares out.

NATHAN

Lena? Can you hear me, Lena?

GLORIA

Lena?

LENA

Only half a wall was left. A message written on it said: Let this be a lesson. One neighbor was brave enough to offer me her home, but she forbid me from seeing Nathan again. So we started to meet in secret. But each time I felt such guilt. I didn't want him to be in danger. He had a life and a home here and I didn't even know if I would live from tomorrow or the next day. But where else could I find some kind of freedom? Happiness.

GLORIA

You dear sweet child.

LENA

(stoic)

I miss everyone so much.

GLORIA

(initiating a hug)

I know, darling. I know. But you have us now. And nothing is ever going to happen again to you. You hear? Nothing.

LENA

Thank you, Mrs. Rogers.

GLORIA

(pulling away and putting her hand on
LENA's cheek)

Now you stop before my mascara gets to running.

SUSAN comes out of the kitchen carrying a pitcher of tea and glasses - seeing them for a moment and tensing.

SUSAN

Gloria - get that thing off the coffee table so I can set these down. Anne-Marie bring the sandwiches will you?

ANNE-MARIE

(from the kitchen)

Sure thing!

GLORIA starts to move the nativity. LENA sees SUSAN struggling and jumps up to help her.

LENA

Let me help, Miss. Davis.

SUSAN

I got it.

GLORIA
Let the girl help you. You're gonna drop something.

SUSAN
I'm doing just fine.

LENA
Here, I can take these.

LENA reaches for the glasses - they and the pitcher drop to the ground as she struggles to help SUSAN.

GLORIA
Jesus!

SUSAN
Look what you did!

ANNE-MARIE
(coming out of the kitchen)
What happened?

LENA
(dropping to her knees to get the pieces)
I am so sorry.

GLORIA
Just a little accident. Grab some paper towels, honey.

ANNE-MARIE runs into the kitchen.

SUSAN
Just?

GLORIA
Yes, "just." They happen sometimes.

ANNE-MARIE
(coming back out)
Let me help you, Lena.

SUSAN
Look at this mess.

GLORIA
It's only a little glass and liquid.

LENA
I can clean this up.

SUSAN
Just leave it. I don't need your help.

She's just trying to do her part. **GLORIA**

I am perfectly capable of carrying a pitcher and some glasses to the table. **SUSAN**

Lena, you shouldn't be down there like that. **GLORIA**

It's OK. It was my fault. **LENA**

Susan! **GLORIA**
(whispering)

Don't start with me. **SUSAN**

I didn't mean to cause any problems. **LENA**

Well, darlin', it is pretty late for that. **SUSAN**

Ladies. **GLORIA**

I said I was sorry. **LENA**

Let it be, Lena. **ANNE-MARIE**

I don't know how many times I can say "sorry" to you. **LENA**

Then stop saying it. **SUSAN**

What do you want from me? **LENA**

Not a damned thing. **SUSAN**

I only want to do my part. **LENA**

I don't need you to do anything. **SUSAN**

You shouldn't have to do everything in this house by yourself. **LENA**

I been doing it long enough darling. **SUSAN**

I don't see what harm it // could - **GLORIA**

Gloria, enough! **SUSAN**

You've barely said one sentence to me the whole week. **LENA**

Why are you here? **SUSAN**

Excuse me? **LENA**

Tell me - us - why you're really here. **SUSAN**

I don't know what // you're talking - **LENA**

The money? **SUSAN**

Susan! **GLORIA**

Let her fess up. You're just here for the insurance money. **SUSAN**

What's she talking about? **ANNE-MARIE**

Why don't you head on back // home now, Anne-Marie? **GLORIA**

No! Let her hear this, too. You knew about the money, didn't you? **SUSAN**

Yes. **LENA**

I told you! **SUSAN**

Lena, darlin'? **GLORIA**

They told me at the base. I told them I didn't want it. **LENA**

SUSAN

Oh really.

LENA

How could I take money from his death?

SUSAN

Might as well get paid for what you did.

LENA runs upstairs.

GLORIA

Oh, Susan, how could you say such a thing?

SUSAN

She didn't deny it. Did she?

ANNE-MARIE

She couldn't do something like that, Miss Davis.

SUSAN

Desperate people do desperate things, sweetheart. She ain't getting any free passes off my blood and tears.

LENA marches down the stairs and slams the check on the coffee table.

LENA

Here. Take it.

SUSAN

You've had this the whole time?

LENA

I told them I didn't want it. But they shoved this into my hand. You refuse to believe me. So take it. I don't know how else to make you understand that I truly want to be here for Nathan, this baby, and for you. To help you.

SUSAN

How many times do I need to say this: I don't need your help. Christ! I will be so happy when this house sells. Then you can take that money and get out of my life and be helpful somewhere else.

The room comes to a standstill.

GLORIA

You're still selling the house?

Nothing.

GLORIA

Susan?

SUSAN

Yes - ok? Yes! Judith found a buyer and they want to close right after Christmas. Surprise!

SUSAN turns around and heads to the kitchen.

ANNE-MARIE

Shit.

GLORIA

(still dazed)

Language, Anne-Marie.

LENA

I can't believe she is doing this.

GLORIA

Don't pay her no mind, darlin'. She's not selling this house.

ANNE-MARIE

She seems pretty serious about it.

GLORIA

She's just not thinking straight right now. And what with Nathan's birthday in a couple of days she's just feeling blue all over again. It was bound to get worse before it gets better.

A moment. Then:

LENA

(getting up)

I'm leaving.

GLORIA

That's good, darlin' - a nap'll do you good. Anne-Marie and I can clean this up.

LENA

No. I am leaving this house.

ANNE-MARIE

You can't be serious.

GLORIA

That's just your hormones going crazy.

LENA

She doesn't want to believe me. So let me actually be guilty for what she thinks I did. I will take this money and raise this baby. Away from her.

GLORIA

Oh, no. No no, darling. You can't go. This is your home.

LENA

This is her home. And there is no room for anyone else in it. Every morning I wake up and decide which guilt I should feel the most - being a burden, being an obligation, or being a reminder.

GLORIA

Anne-Marie, talk some sense to her.

ANNE-MARIE

Need help packing?

GLORIA

Anne-Marie!

LENA

I truly wish it could be different. But for Susan I am just a reminder of why Nathan is dead. I can't let my child be infected by that guilt.

LENA climbs the stairs.

A moment.

GLORIA

Well - darn it all - lemme go check on Susan.

GLORIA turns and heads to the kitchen.

ANNE-MARIE looks up to the stairs then walks to the manger picking up the baby Jesus figurine.

ANNE-MARIE

Happy Birthday Baby Jesus.

A gentle fever spike. She places the figurine back - making sure it's in the right place. She moves it to a place of prominence that isn't in the way. She grabs the painting and heads out. She opens the door and NATHAN is standing there.

She turns abruptly and looks back into the house - in disbelief. She can feel something that wasn't there before.

NATHAN brushes past her and into the house, walking around her, unseen. She smiles and hold the painting close to her, allowing herself to chuckle a little before walking out and closing the door behind her. Day turns to night and moonlight bleeds into the house.

SUSAN enters from the kitchen, in bedraggled sweats and NATHAN's old football jersey. She's carrying a bunch of letters, a glass of bourbon, and a chocolate cupcake.

She sits at the table. Takes a clumsy sip. Spreads out the letters. Takes a sip. Pulls a lighter and a candle from her pocket. Puts the candle into the cupcake, delicately and slowly. Her breath catches and she takes another sip. She lights the candle, the light unbelievably spreading through the house, revealing NATHAN sitting at the foot of the stairs.

SCENE 5: DECEMBER 17 - 2 AM

The fever plateaus at its zenith.

SUSAN

(sung)

Happy Birthday to you -

She takes a sip and picks up a letter.

NATHAN/SUSAN

(SUSAN fades out by //)

“Dear Mama - Hi! I hope everything is going well there. // Training is kicking me square in the behind but I have met a great group of guys. They help me keep my mind off of missing home. Keep me focused on -

She tosses the letter, taking another sip.

NATHAN moves to the coffee table and sits on the end of it.

At some point in the following, LENA appears at the top of the stairs, eventually sitting on a step to watch SUSAN.

SUSAN

(sung)

Happy Birthday to you-

She picks up another letter.

NATHAN

Hey Mama - God it's hot out here. Worse than Florida in August. We sit around in all our gear and uniforms with wet towels on our heads to try and stay cool. But the sun is so strong the towels dry out after a couple of minutes. It's pretty bad, mom. I keep dreaming of being home. Didn't think I'd miss it. I can just hear you saying:

SUSAN

I told you so.

NATHAN

And I miss your pot roast. And, God, your meatloaf.

She drops the letter, downing the rest of the bourbon.

NATHAN turns to watch her then heads to the front door.

SUSAN

(sung)

Happy, happy, happy. To you...

She searches through the pile for a specific letter. She finds the right one, staring at it and hesitant to read it.

During the following, LENA comes down the stairs to make sure SUSAN is alright.

SUSAN

Here!

NATHAN freezes just before he opens the door and turns around. Over the following he moves to LENA.

NATHAN

Hi Mama. Sorry I haven't written in a while. Things have been really crazy here. I have so much to tell you, but we're moving out again in a couple of minutes. They've got us working 18 hours a day. It's non-stop. But God sent an angel to watch over me and keep me safe. It's crazy mom. Just wait until I get home to tell you. You're gonna laugh. You're gonna love it. I swear.

(turning to look at SUSAN)

I love you, mom.

NATHAN watches LENA move slowly to SUSAN before going up the stairs.

SUSAN

I love you, mom.

(she laughs - accidentally putting out the candle. In a half-sung, half-drunk ramble she tries to relight the candle - unsuccessfully)

Happy Birthday to - to... Happy Birthday... Birthday... "I love you, mom." Nathan, love you. Nathan, love. Birthday. Happy Birthday.

LENA

(cautiously)

Miss Davis?

SUSAN

That's me. Who are- Oh, Lena. Lena Lena Lena. Hi, Lena.

LENA

Are you OK?

SUSAN

Of course...not. Yes, I am. Sit. Want to sit? Can you sit?

*LENA carefully takes a seat unsure what to do.
SUSAN pours some more bourbon and sips
throughout.*

SUSAN

You know what today is? Of course you do. Right? Right, you do. It's his birthday. Birthday for Nathan. Twenty. So young. I can barely remember my 20s anymore. God, was I ever 20? It's his birthday, right?

LENA

Yes, Miss Davis.

SUSAN

Who is Miss Davis? I am Susan. Susan - which means - nothing. Not a bright flower, like you. See all these? He sent me these. He loved me. So he sent me all these.

*SUSAN runs her hands through the letters, picking
some up like water from a stream and letting them
tumble down her face.*

SUSAN

So many words. All these words. His words.

LENA starts to put the letters in a neat pile.

LENA

Let me help with this.

SUSAN slams both her hands on the table.

SUSAN

NO! Don't touch his words. They're for me.

*SUSAN lowers her head to the table, resting her
face on the letters.*

SUSAN

Smells like him. And like heat. Heat like anger. So angry at him when he left. You know - he left because of me. Ask me why. Go on ask me. . . Ask me!

LENA

Why.

SUSAN

Not enough money. A husband you love dies. A cold body of pension checks. Not enough. Don't ever die. It costs too much. He wanted to be a lawyer.

LENA

He loved to argue. Loved to win.

SUSAN

Oh he argued. And won. The husband dies and leaves you nothing but clothes you can't wear and a pillow you can't stop smelling. No husband, no school, no lawyer - not for Nathan. He promised it was only for a short while. So I let him go. I...let him go. I paid for his death. The son dies and they send money. He pays for my life, I paid for his death.

LENA

It's not your fault.

SUSAN

Who then? Who? You? Just a little girl. His angel. Right? God sent you to him. He says so right here. He took care of both of us. I couldn't take care of him. But you did. Did what I couldn't. So this...THIS is you, right? All of this is you. This is all you.

SUSAN throws the glass against the wall.

SUSAN

That is all me. Oops. Oopsie. Look at all those little pieces - so many of them.

LENA

You are not to blame. You did not do this.

SUSAN

(getting up to wander)

See all that? Over there? That is Nathan. Boxes and bag. Bag and boxes. All Nathan. He is in there, but shhhhh...don't wake him up.

LENA

(walking to her)

Let me help you upstairs so you can sleep.

SUSAN

(shrugging her off)

NOOOOOOO! Stop trying to help me. I don't want to be OK. I don't want to sleep. I don't want to be better. Fourth of Julys, shoving little flags in his hand. Praying for soldiers before breakfast, lunch and dinner. Honoring freedom. Proud to be an American. These colors never run. NEVER RUN. Freedom is expensive. Who can afford it - any of it. No! NO NO NO! Me. Only me - I killed Nathan. I killed him. I killed him. I killed him. I killed him.

SUSAN keeps repeating the phrase as she loses balance and falls to the floor. LENA catches her, easing her down.

SUSAN

(softly)

Please. . . just let me be alone.

LENA gets up and gets the cupcake and lighter from the table. She sits next to SUSAN cradling the impromptu birthday cake. She lights it.

*Happy Birthday to you.
Happy Birthday to you.*

LENA

SUSAN softly joins in.

*Happy Birthday to Nathan.
Happy Birthday to you.*

LENA/SUSAN

Blow out the candle, Miss Davis.

LENA

SUSAN feebly, but successfully, blows out the candle. Then, for the first time, she breaks - unleashing the flood of sorrow she's been holding back. LENA cradles and comforts her, then helps her to her feet and up the stairs. Morning light approaches and encroaches.

SCENE 6: THE SAME DAY - 11AM

A tentative knock at the front door followed by a tentative "WooHoo?" Another set of knocks. Still some more.

The door finally creaks open and GLORIA sticks her head in.

WooHoo?

GLORIA

GLORIA steps in, closing the door behind her. She walks over to the kitchen and looks over the doors. She notices the glass on the floor, the cupcake, and the letters scattered about.

Sweet Jesus, what did you do Susan?

GLORIA

GLORIA goes into the kitchen. She comes back out with a wastebasket and starts cleaning.

SUSAN appears at the top of the stairs, wobbly but aware.

Lena?

SUSAN

GLORIA
(quickly putting the cupcake in the wastebasket)

No, Susan sweetie.

SUSAN
(coming down the stairs)
Gloria - why are you always here?

GLORIA
Wanted to make sure you were alright.

SUSAN
Leave that alone before you cut yourself. I'll broom it up later.

GLORIA
What in God's name happened? And what is that smell?

SUSAN
Bourbon.

GLORIA
Bourbon! Well - I just don't understand. I mean I really don't.

SUSAN
I'm a grown woman. I don't need a lecture.

GLORIA
Ok, Susan sweetie. I won't say a thing. Not a word from me. I would never want to do anything to unbalance you.

SUSAN
Your kindness is biblical.

GLORIA
Can I at least make you some coffee?

SUSAN
Please.

GLORIA walks into the kitchen. SUSAN eyes the table and starts gathering the letters into a pile.

SUSAN
Can you also get the aspirin from the top of the fridge and a glass of water?

GLORIA
(from the kitchen)
Of course!

SUSAN takes the moment of silence to regain her bearings and her legs.

GLORIA
(re-entering)

Here you go, sweetie.

SUSAN
Feels like a freight train is running circles in my head.

GLORIA
Coffee should be ready soon. It'll perk you right up.

SUSAN
(swallowing a couple of aspirin and a
gulp of water)
I always thought the fur on the tongue thing was just some joke. I swear there's a retriever sitting on mine.

GLORIA
Just how much did you have?

SUSAN
Not sure - I stopped counting after the 10th finger.

GLORIA
In all our years I have never seen you like this.

SUSAN
I just needed something to calm my nerves last night. I wanted to deal with Nathan's birthday quickly.

GLORIA
It's still today.

SUSAN
(turning sharp)
I know that.

*GLORIA falls silent and stands there watching
SUSAN return to organizing the letters.*

GLORIA
Still planning on selling this house?

SUSAN
Let's not get into this right now.

GLORIA
Why not?

SUSAN
Because I won't have any answers.

GLORIA
Fine. Where's Lena?

Asleep. I suppose.

SUSAN

A moment.

She's afraid of you.

GLORIA

Stop talking stupid.

SUSAN

She is, Susan. You barely register her existence. And the poison you spit out of your mouth at her.

GLORIA

We just need to get know each other better.

SUSAN

That's impossible the way you've been avoiding her. That girl is carrying Nathan's child. Your grandchild. That should be enough. Shouldn't it? I love you, Susan. I do. You know I do. God knows I do. I forgive a lot and I ignore a lot and I know you think I'm just some silly woman, but I am telling you here and now that if you don't make amends and let that girl into your heart I will never forgive you for it. And neither will your grandchild. That girl came here alone and scared and look at her. You are so blind with anger and sadness, and you have every right to be, no one would say differently or blame you for that, but come out into the light, Susan.

GLORIA

SUSAN chuckles ironically.

I duct-taped blankets to my bedroom windows. After I found out Nathan died. I got so tired of waking up to the sun hitting me in the face. I tried closing the blinds but each morning there they were - these little shafts of sunlight forcing their way through. These narrow paths of daylight just inviting me to start each day. And I am so sick of it - I just want to fall asleep to the darkness and wake up to it. But you know what? The damned sun just sneaks around the corners and finds a way to me. I am so tired, Gloria. I don't want to think about any of it, but all I can do is think about it. I walk by Nathan's room and I think of it. I keep tripping on these damned boxes and I think of it. I see her and I think - of - it.

SUSAN

Lena is leaving.

GLORIA

What?

SUSAN

She's going to take that check and go make a life for herself and that baby - without you. The two of you, I swear, thinking you are so alone in the world, when you can't look to see what's right in front of you.

GLORIA

LENA appears at the top of the stairs and descends.

GLORIA

(to SUSAN)

Try to be cordial, you hear?

(to LENA)

Good morning, Lena darling. How are you? Sleep well?

LENA

Yes, thank you. You as well?

GLORIA

Yes I did and thank you for asking. Anne-Marie kept me up a little too late gabbing about school and boys, but every once in a while won't kill me. Just give me my 7 hours of beauty sleep no matter the time of day and I am good to go.

Silence. GLORIA nudges SUSAN.

LENA

Good morning, Miss Davis.

SUSAN

Morning.

LENA

Are you feeling OK?

SUSAN

Just a little headache.

LENA

I can make you some coffee.

SUSAN

Gloria already started some.

LENA

I can finish it. Would you like some, Miss Rogers?

GLORIA

Yes, please. Five spoons of sugar and a splash of milk or half and half, but preferably milk. And what exactly is it half of and half of? I mean what a silly notion when you can just use plain old milk. Nothing better than it.

SUSAN

Gloria, let the girl go.

GLORIA

Sorry, dear. Thank you.

SUSAN

Help yourself if you would like some.

LENA

Yes - I will - thank you.

LENA goes into the kitchen. GLORIA turns to look and smile at SUSAN.

SUSAN

Stop smiling like the Cheshire cat.

GLORIA

Who? Me? No dear, just happy is all.

GLORIA walks to the pass through.

GLORIA

Actually, Lena, darlin'. I need to get back to my place. But I'll come by later and we can head over to the Super Target.

LENA

(from the kitchen)

Um...ok.

GLORIA starts to head to the front door. Stops herself. Hugs SUSAN.

GLORIA

I love you, Susan.

She holds on for a few more seconds. Detaches. Leaves.

LENA comes out with two coffee mugs.

LENA

Here you are.

SUSAN

Thanks.

LENA

Do you need anything else?

SUSAN

(going to sit.)

No - I'm good. This will fix me right up.

LENA

Ok.

LENA starts to head upstairs.

SUSAN

Come sit down here, Lena.

LENA

Are you sure?

Yeah. **SUSAN**

LENA does so. A few silent moments. Sipping.

How bad off was I last night? **SUSAN**

Not too bad. **LENA**

Didn't put my foot in my mouth again did I? **SUSAN**

Not - really. **LENA**

Today is his birthday. **SUSAN**

I know. I never got to celebrate one with him. I would have liked to. **LENA**

He hated birthdays - his own. **SUSAN**

Really? **LENA**

He was impatient about becoming grown. But he sure did love making everyone else feel good on theirs. **SUSAN**

When I turned 19 he surprised me by taking me to the zoo. **LENA**

Zoo? **SUSAN**

I had spent most of my childhood there. I didn't know the Americans had rescued it when they came in. Many of the animals were gone, but the tigers - my favorite - were still there. It was the best birthday I ever had. It's when I knew I was in love with him. **LENA**

A moment.

How did he die? **SUSAN**

Maybe this is not the best time. **LENA**

It's not. Tell me. . . Please. . . **SUSAN**

LENA opens her mouth to speak, but:

The worst fever spike. NATHAN bursts out of the kitchen door, jovial and a little drunk, singing very much off tune.

I kissed a girl and // I liked it. **NATHAN**

Shh! **LENA**

The taste of her // cherry chapstick. **NATHAN**

You'll wake up the whole neighborhood. **LENA**

I kissed a girl // just to try it. **NATHAN**

Stop it stop it! Sh! **LENA**

I hope my boyfriend don't mind it...wait a minute. **NATHAN**

They look at one another in bemused shock and start laughing.

Lena Davis. Sounds good, don't it? **NATHAN**

Has a nice sound to it. **LENA**

Nathan and Lena Davis. **NATHAN**

Mrs. Nathan Davis. **LENA**

And how does Mrs. Nathan Davis feel after 2 days of being a wife? **NATHAN**

She feels good. **LENA**

Just good? **NATHAN**

Very good. **LENA**

Good. Have fun tonight?

NATHAN

I never laughed so much. Your friends are very nice. And a little crazy.

LENA

They usually don't have much to celebrate so they figured they could get a little loose tonight.

NATHAN

Yes, you are a little loose tonight.

LENA

I know how to hold my liquor, Miss Ma'am.

NATHAN

You think your friends liked me?

LENA

Hell yes!

NATHAN

You are very lucky to have them.

LENA

I am very lucky to have you.

NATHAN

They walk for a bit in silence.

NATHAN

Still scared.

LENA

What?

NATHAN

You're still scared.

LENA

No.

NATHAN

You suck at lying.

LENA

...

NATHAN

You shouldn't be at all.

LENA

It's easy to say.

NATHAN

It's easy to do. Just don't be it. You got me.

LENA

I keep holding my breath - waiting for something else to happen. Aren't you scared?

NATHAN

Sure am.

LENA

Really?

NATHAN

Yeah - but only when I think of a future without you. I found life again in you. Feel like I can do and be anything.

LENA

I wish I could live in dreams like you.

NATHAN

They're not dreams.

LENA

To me they are.

NATHAN

You trying to pick a fight with me?

LENA

I only want you to be serious.

NATHAN

I am. This is me being serious. I want something I go for it. Being scared doesn't get you anywhere but stuck.

LENA

Again - easy to say. For someone who doesn't live this life.

NATHAN

Whoa whoa now. You make it seem like I am here on vacation.

LENA

I don't want to tempt fate again.

NATHAN

You think you're to blame for your parents.

LENA

Yes.

NATHAN

You're not.

I am. **LENA**

How so? **NATHAN**

If I had stopped talking to you they would be alive. **LENA**

So you wish all this had never been. **NATHAN**

That's not what // I said. **LENA**

No, I get it. **NATHAN**

No you don't. Stop saying you get it! You don't get it, Nathan! You never will! **LENA**

Hey listen if you want me to get lost I'll just go right ahead and do that. Wouldn't want to mess up your life anymore than I already have. **NATHAN**

I didn't say you did! **LENA**

You just stood there and all but said that! **NATHAN**

I'm scared! **LENA**

Who isn't? **NATHAN**

I don't want you to go anywhere! **LENA**

I won't! **NATHAN**

You will! **LENA**

I won't! **NATHAN**

You will! **LENA**

Lena, I said I won't! **NATHAN**

Ok! **LENA**

Say you believe me! **NATHAN**

I believe you! **LENA**

Can we stop yelling now?! **NATHAN**

OK!! **LENA**

They look at each other and start laughing.

NATHAN
'Bout time we had our first fight. Was wondering if it would ever happen.

I'm sorry. **LENA**

NATHAN
In a few more months my tour will be over and we'll get on a plane headed away from here. To build a life together. Make a home. Make some children.

LENA
Hey hey - slow down Mr. Davis. Let me live life a little more with you first.

NATHAN
Deal. I don't wanna feel anything life has to offer - good or bad - without you.

LENA
I want you to have no regrets - ever.

NATHAN
Never. I couldn't. You are the sweet honey in the rock.

LENA
Oh that mouth of yours.

He kisses her.

LENA
It's a very good mouth.

NATHAN
I know.

They start laughing.

LENA

(out of the moment)

That laugh. . . I love that laugh.

The sound of a crack.

NATHAN leans against LENA.

LENA

(laughing)

Watch the rocks - you'll break your ankle.

NATHAN starts to slide down slowly.

LENA

Ooff - come on now - this is not funny. You're heavy.

NATHAN collapses to the ground.

LENA

Nathan? Come on. What's wrong with you? Get up.

LENA goes down to the ground next to him.

LENA

Nathan?

(Starting to shake him. Almost violently.)

No. No no no no. Come on. Wake up. Get up. We need to go home. Come on. Get up. Get up!

(LENA starts rubbing his face - trying to revive him. She cradles his head, half in the moment half in reality)

I felt something wet. I moved my hand behind his head and could feel the hole. I started to scream. But no one came to help. People yelled at me to get away before I was next. I put my head to his chest. I swear I heard his heart still beating. I promise it was there. We were only five steps from the house. Five steps.

(NATHAN slides out from underneath, getting up. Looking at the domestic scene unfolding, breaking, and healing in front of him.)

The neighbor I was staying with ran out and dragged me inside. I begged her to bring him with us. The next day his body was gone. American soldiers came for me. Took me to the base. I was still covered in blood - wearing the same clothes. Doctors poked me. Checked for damage. And then all the questions. I found out I was pregnant from an old doctor in a gray room. No congratulations. No celebrations. I tried so hard to be happy in that moment. And then they shoved the check in my hand and put me on a plane. Every night before I sleep I hear his laugh. It never leaves me. You were right. It's all my fault.

SUSAN moves to LENA and slowly wraps her arms around her and hugs her. This goes on for a while. NATHAN, proud, gets up to leave, but:

LENA
(feeling a pang of pain)

Oh god.

SUSAN

What is it?

LENA

Something is not right.

Pain. NATHAN can only helplessly watch.

SUSAN

Talk to me - what's going on?

Pain.

LENA looks down. She is bleeding.

LENA

Oh god.

SUSAN

Jesus.

LENA

Oh my god.

SUSAN

Ok - calm down honey.

LENA

The baby. The baby!

SUSAN

It's gonna be alright.

SUSAN runs to the front door and throws it open.

SUSAN

Gloria! Gloria get over here!!!

(back to LENA)

We need to get you in my car and to the hospital.

LENA

The blood.

SUSAN

Don't worry about that. Just deep breaths and stay calm. I need you to walk ok?

GLORIA

(running through the front door)

What's going on?

SUSAN

Lena's not feeling well right now. We need to get to the hospital. // Get my keys off the hook in the kitchen and get the car started would you? Gloria - Gloria? - Gloria!

GLORIA

What? WHAT?! Oh god. Oh Jesus. Oh lord have mercy on this child and that baby. Oh God, Susan. What do we do?

SUSAN

Get the damned keys and start the car!

GLORIA

Right. Keys. Car. Baby. Got it. Oh God. Sweet God.

SUSAN

GLORIA!

GLORIA

(running to grab the keys and head out)

I'm going. I'm gone.

SUSAN

Call Anne-Marie for me!

From offstage we hear GLORIA screech for ANNE-MARIE.

SUSAN

You're going to be alright, Lena. Just stay calm, OK?

SUSAN starts to head to the closet.

LENA

(grabbing her arm)

Don't go!

SUSAN

I'm right here.

LENA releases her. SUSAN runs to the side closet to get their coats.

ANNE-MARIE comes running into the house.

ANNE-MARIE

What's wrong? What happened?

SUSAN

We need to get Lena to the hospital, honey.

ANNE-MARIE

Is she OK?

SUSAN

Just lend me a hand. Your mother's starting the car.

ANNE-MARIE

You can't let her drive - she'll kill us all in a Christian panic.

SUSAN

I'll handle her. Come on.

SUSAN and ANNE-MARIE help LENA to the front door.

ANNE-MARIE

Well you just had to upstage the baby Jesus, didn't you?

LENA

Trying to get a spot in the manger. I'm scared.

ANNE-MARIE

You got this, girl.

SUSAN

Just a few more steps and we'll be in the car.

They head out, SUSAN shutting the door behind her with her foot. NATHAN runs up to the door but can't do anything about it.

The sound of a car squealing away.

SUSAN

(offstage)

GLORIA YOU FOOL WOMAN! YOU FORGOT US!

The fever breaks. NATHAN begins banging his head against the door, the thumps getting louder and louder until he opens his mouth to scream, but we hear LENA's voice screaming instead- the pained strains of labour, or something akin to it.

NATHAN paces frantically, like a caged animal. Before throwing himself onto the bottom step of the stairs. Trying to control his breathing - his chest rising and falling. As it slows, the scream subsides, and a calm falls over the house. Until:

SCENE 7: THE NEXT MORNING - 6:30 A.M.

The sound of a car door closes, cutting out all sound completely. Another car does closes.

GLORIA

(offstage)

You gonna be alright? You need help?

SUSAN

(offstage)

Thanks, Gloria, I think we got it.

GLORIA

(offstage)

You call me if you need anything.

SUSAN

(offstage)

Will do.

ANNE-MARIE

(offstage)

Make sure you get some rest, girl.

LENA

(offstage)

I will.

The front door opens and SUSAN helps LENA in.

SUSAN

If I'm moving too fast you just let me know.

LENA

I am OK.

SUSAN leads her to the couch and helps her down.

SUSAN

You're a pretty brave girl. Kept it together the whole time. Doctor said you should be back to normal in a couple of days.

LENA

What if this keeps happening?

SUSAN

You heard the doctor: Just stress-spotting - normal stuff. We'll keep an eye on it. If we gotta keep driving back then that's just what we'll do.

LENA

Thank you, Miss Davis.

SUSAN

I'm gonna make us some tea.

Just as SUSAN hits the kitchen doors.

Sell the house. **LENA**

Why don't you rest a little? **SUSAN**

If not being here will make you happy then you should sell the house. **LENA**

It's nothing you gotta worry about. **SUSAN**

And take the money - I don't want it. It should be yours. **LENA**

Nathan meant it for both of us. And now it can be for the baby. **SUSAN**

I know things will take time between us, but if being apart will help it faster then I am ok with that. **LENA**

You can't be on your own right now. **SUSAN**

I can manage. **LENA**

Bringing a child into this world ain't easy. **SUSAN**

I will find a way. **LENA**

What would you do for money? A place? **SUSAN**

I can do it on my own. **LENA**

But you don't have to. **SUSAN**

I know. But I can. **LENA**

That Nathan sure did figure it all out, didn't he? **SUSAN**

With a little help from me. **LENA**

A smile.

Let me see to that tea. **SUSAN**

LENA reaches grabs her arm.

Please - sit with me a little longer. **LENA**

Alright. **SUSAN**

SUSAN sits.

Silence.

LENA lays her head on SUSAN's lap.

Silence.

SUSAN starts stroking LENA's hair. She starts humming. Then:

*Go to sleep you little baby.
Go to sleep you little baby.* **SUSAN**

To her surprise, LENA joins in.

*Your mamma's gone away and your daddy's gonna stay
Didn't leave nobody, but the baby.* **SUSAN/LENA**

*NATHAN joins in and the song sounds like the
familiar 3-part version of the lullaby.*

*Go to sleep you little baby
Go to sleep you little baby
Everybody's gone in the cotton and the corn
Didn't leave nobody, but the baby.* **SUSAN/LENA/NATHAN**

*You're a sweet little baby [LENA falls asleep]
You're a sweet little baby [NATHAN drops out]
Honey and the rock and the sugar don't stop -* **SUSAN/LENA/NATHAN**

*Seeing LENA is asleep, SUSAN carefully gets up
and covers her with a blanket. She starts to walk
into the kitchen, then turns around and goes to the
boxes and duffle bag.*

She half drags / half carries the duffle bag to the dining table. She sits. Takes a deep breath, then slowly opens the bag. She starts pulling items out. A book, some pictures - which she looks through, chuckling at some of them - a hairbrush, his shoes, a camo jacket, some green shirts. She holds one of shirts to her face and takes a deep breath. As she pulls it away, a bloodied head scarf falls from the folds. SUSAN examine its, realising it is the one from NATHAN and LENA' first meeting.

NATHAN puts his hands on her shoulders, leans down and kisses her head. SUSAN reaches up and places a hand over his and breathes in deeply - surprised. A brief moment passes.

NATHAN moves away from her and goes to the front door, opens it, looks over his shoulders, steps out, and walks away.

SUSAN opens her eyes and for the first time genuinely smiles. A small one. A content one.

Sunlight starts to pour through the windows. SUSAN gives a little shiver as the warmth flows through her. She turns to look at the window and is surprised by the front door, wondering if she had closed it or not. She goes to it and looks out, but there is no one to be found.

Sunlight begins to pour through the front door. SUSAN tilts her head back letting the sun wash over her. And smiles.

END OF PLAY.