

Pas De Deux

A play by Lee Gundersheimer

For the story ballet partners

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Pas De Deux

Cast of Characters

1919

- Alice Wilcox- A young girl, nineteen, from a well-to-do Jewish family in Macon.
- Nurse Cabbage- A dedicated worker in a sanitarium. (Doubles as Claire)
- Sarah Tupperton- Alice's good friend, eighteen, also from a well-to-do family though not Jewish.
- Elijah Pierce- A young farmer, twenty four.
- T. J. Pierce- Elijah's father, sixty four, a peanut farmer.

1976

- Old Alice Wilcox- Now an older woman, very ill.
- Claire Berkhartzmeyer- Her daughter, fifty-two.
- Marc Berkhartzmeyer- Claire's son, twenty- two

ACT ONE

The lights come up on a young man, Mark Berkhartzmeyer, who has just entered and is walking down center toward the audience.

MARC. Hi, thank you all very much for coming. Have you ever noticed how when you've just broken up with somebody every time you turn on the radio, there's a song that sounds just like what you're going through? Like they wrote it about you? (*If no response:*No? Oh, well... *A joke:* Thank you very much and goodnight...) "I Will Survive." That's the one I just heard. "At first, I was afraid, I was petrified..." I'm sorry, I'm probably not going to be very good at this. In fact, I know I'm not going to be very good at this-- See, I just broke up with my girlfriend. My first really serious one, living together and all- *makes quote gesture* "in sin"-- two years--and I know, I know that's not earth-shattering, everybody goes through it, or, well, not everybody- some poor fools still hold out and get married- even wait till the honeymoon to have sex- god help them, and some even manage to stay together their whole lives- marry the first crush next door or their prom date- who the hell knows any of these people, I hear there are pockets of them in Utah. But most of my friends, and definitely their folks, have done way too much time in beautiful downtown splitsville- and from what I've seen, most people are like on their third or fourth wife by forty...so anyway, first love, what is the big deal right? (And now I can truthfully say) Been there done that... but none of this is what I wanted to talk about. I am such a dork, someone dies, and here I am talking about my landshark of a relationship.... no matter how important things are in this world, huge things, that happen to other people, even a death---we always seem to need to find a way to relate them to ourselves don't we....That's so depressing....

OLD ALICE. (*appearing*) Might not be the best beginning...

MARC. Gram?

OLD ALICE. Yes, hello Sugar. I would steer clear of depressing the folks, but go on. Don't pay me any mind.

MARC. What are you doing here?

OLD ALICE. He's just a little nervous, you see. He's really very bright.

MARC. I don't believe this. This is...

OLD ALICE. Things will pick up once he finds his stride....

MARC. This is exactly who I wanted to tell you about. This is my grandmother.

OLD ALICE. And I am dead.

MARC. Yes!

OLD ALICE. Go on, dear.

MARC. She died a few days ago.

OLD ALICE. Good... And so?

MARC. Gram, what are you doing here?

OLD ALICE. Well, it's my ballet isn't it?

MARC. Can they see you?

OLD ALICE. You can see me? They can see me-- can't you? *(To Marc)* Yes, see? Good.

MARC. Of course they can. *(Realizing)* Because I must have wanted them to... *(Disappointed)* Aw Gram, I was going to write a very straightforward play. Like you always begged me to.

OLD ALICE. Sugar- nothing about me was ever straightforward...not a damn thing in my whole life. Pardon my French.

MARC. I wanted it to be so old-fashioned, like the kinds of stories you admire-

OLD ALICE. I admire a well told story... fashion had nothing to do with it. *(Recognizing the new past pronoun is now needed)* Had, Ha!...Just don't let it be dull or hard to understand. *(To audience)* Don't you hate that? You get a sitter, pay good money, and then they have the gall to bore you silly, put you right to sleep, or even worse, leave you wondering what in the heck and the hell it was even about? No, Marc, you are wrong. I never gave a spit if it was fashionable... But for your information, I was the first of my set to flap-flapped long before to flap was called flapping.

MARC. I am sure you did, Gram. I wanted not one ghost. My plays have too many ghosts... I can hear the critics already?

OLD ALICE. You've had critics review your plays already?

MARC. Of course not, I wish... This is only my second play.

OLD ALICE. Then isn't this concern for critical scorn a might premature?

MARC. Considering this is only my second play yes, but I added this scene. It is part of a rewrite.

OLD ALICE. I am here as a rewrite?

MARC. No, the play was always about you...Gram, it is a long story.

OLD ALICE. I'll say. You just added five minutes to my ballet. And I may have been old, but I wasn't always dead. I understand literature. And rewrites. Ha, even metaphorically. Who do you think made sure your mother had the most exciting writers to read?

CLAIRE. (*entering*) Forced me too.

MARC. Mom, not you too.

CLAIRE. Only thing we ever really talked about. Faulkner.

OLD ALICE. And he was cutting edge in his day-

CLAIRE. Fitzgerald, Eudora Welty, Flannery O Conner. My mother's milk was literature. I'd hear from you once a year, if that, and all you'd talk about was books. So of course, I was determined to know every book written in the twentieth century

OLD ALICE. And most of the best from long before that.

CLAIRE. The last thing you gave me before I had to go live with my father was A Tale of Two Cities. I was five.

OLD ALICE. And you were a good reader, too. But you never did try and write a word that might matter did you? Had to wait for Marc for that.

MARC. Both of you stop. This was supposed to be a play about the past. The long ago past.

CLAIRE. Marc- do you think I want to be in this silly thing? Portray a very one sided unsympathetic foil for my mother's warm and caring, tortured spirit.

MARC. That is not what you play. *Would* play, if I chose to have you in this-

CLAIRE. I told you to work on that terrorist play.

MARC. Hostages. It's about the Iranian hostages.

CLAIRE. A play with my mother as a lead character, will not work. Ultimately she's not sympathetic-

OLD ALICE. Hopefully more than a terrorist.

MARC. Hostages! The terrorists hold hostages -

CLAIRE. And that is something we certainly know about in this family.

MARC. Tell me about it...

OLD ALICE. That is true, isn't it. One thing we can all agree on.

CLAIRE. She lived a very tragic life. I will grant you that. Alone a great deal of it. But that was her choice.

OLD ALICE. That is not true Claire, and you know it.

MARC. I can't believe this. Nothing has even happened in this play yet-

OLD ALICE. Ballet. It ought to be a ballet... with lovely music-

CLAIRE. Look, it's your choice to make a mother who saw her daughter once in a blue moon, until once she got older and even more desperate, the daughter allowed her to come live with her, your heroine. I wish you all the luck in the world- and this is obviously how you see *me*- the badger in the family-

MARC. What? (*to audience*) Please, forgive me.

CLAIRE. We will all try and forgive you, because you are young. And like "your critics" say... obsessed with ghosts...

MARC. She wasn't even dead when I wrote this. Only now.

OLD ALICE. You are just a rewrite too? Make it a ballet, Marc, it will work so much better. Full of twirls and leaps—

MARC. And she was a wonderful mother... A bit critical.

CLAIRE: Do you wonder?

OLD ALICE. Leaps of faith they call them. When you just leap blindly hoping that your partner will be there to catch you-

CLAIRE. Sorry, it is a play. And in it the wonderful mother plays the unsympathetic daughter. Depending on which act that is.

MARC. And why are you dressed like that?

CLAIRE. Exactly my point. Because your own mother had such a small role in her own son's play that the producers have double cast me.

MARC. What?

CLAIRE. You wrote in a nurse. A nurse Cabbage. And even though everyone told you she should cut the part-

MARC. She is a representation of authority- to show how Grandma always sort of had issues--- questioned authority-

OLD ALICE. I had issues with assholes.

CLAIRE. And you wondered why I became an incessant worrier?

OLD ALICE. And most assholes end up in authority. That has never changed...

CLAIRE. And now I have to have try an Irish accent, and true to form I get to clean up after everyone. (*in perfect brogue*) Part of the job, part of the job.

MARC. This was all supposed to take place way in the past. A nice old fashioned-

OLD ALICE. Look, we are fifteen minutes in and nothing has happened. Except your mother is dressed like that woman from the Brady Bunch, and my story ballet has begun boringly.

MARC. No wonder you never wrote a single word, Mom.

CLAIRE. Just ignore her, son. Don't make the mistake I did. Look, I will get into place. You begin your story.

OLD ALICE. Ballet!

CLAIRE. And just for the record I did my share of writing. I wrote quite a bit of criticism. A wonderful graduate thesis: Unrequited Lives and Loves, the Major Motif in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Ladies of Letters. But not everyone who loves literature, decides to create it. Writers do need passionate and informed readers you know. (*She is gone*)

OLD ALICE. In a way she is right.

CLAIRE. (*Coming back on*) Which is something she may have never once said when she was alive.

OLD ALICE. The worst thing about death, in case you were wondering, Marc-- is the missing the books and the plays and the music... I used to lie in bed and anticipate them- ooh....

CLAIRE. (*agreeing*) What on earth will the next breathtaking novel be....

OLD ALICE. That's what actually got me through the roughest patches...

CLAIRE. And there were plenty of those....

OLD ALICE. My hunger for what will be created next. It's a new day and somehow, someone always creates....and then ttttpppt....it happens, doesn't it- happens to us all. You turn your life's corner, start that inevitable trudge toward eternity, and it all becomes regret. But as I aged, I shed not one tear for grey hairs and sagging breasts. I wept for words that would waste away unread, the music I'd never hear once gone deaf. But actually it is not so bad, not this play so far- I understand that is going right into the crapper- no I am talking about even though we, the departed, are doomed to a sort of absentia, we are allowed such a wonderful gift- this ability to influence, to muse- for lack of a better word- (*Noticing Marc is getting teary eyed*) Look, you are really going to have to get back on track and stop overwriting, Sugar, or we will lose them. (*pause*) And I will haunt you forever if the whole thing turns out to be this dull.

MARC. Okay, both of you get off stage. (*Claire disappears again and Old Alice is walking off until-*) see my grandmother died a few days ago. But before she died she told me this incredible story.

OLD ALICE. Ballet.

MARC. Ballet.

OLD ALICE. It's a story ballet. The ballet of my life.

MARC. The ballet of her life...

OLD ALICE. Therefore, I dance the lead.

MARC. Most people felt my Gram was a little off.

OLD ALICE. Most people should mind their own damn business.

MARC. Gram!

OLD ALICE. But they don't. They stick their noses right into-

MARC. Gram!

OLD ALICE. Which is why there are so few glass houses. *(to audience)*
Give it a moment... *(Starts to exit again.)*

MARC. See, my grandmother lived with us my whole life. In our house, which was definitely not made of glass... And she lived in this room at the end of the hall. And I was about twelve when I finally realized that might be considered odd. My friends used to say: "She lives with you?" And I used to say "Yeah," and they'd say "why?"-

OLD ALICE. You see. What business is it of theirs-

MARC. Because she does and always has-

OLD ALICE. Tell them to take a big broom-

MARC. Gram!

OLD ALICE. Honestly....

MARC. I mean I was twelve before it dawned on me that most families didn't have an old person who Charlie and the Chocolate Factory like lived with them...

OLD ALICE. They used to, you know. It used to be the custom. It was even considered odd not to have your parents provided for. Wasn't a home without all three generations, sometimes four- and it enriched life, don't you know. Made people more... I'm sorry, I am interrupting again---

MARC. Yes. Where was I?

OLD ALICE. I'm dead.

MARC. They know that now, Gram.

OLD ALICE. That's where you were-

MARC. Yes! But before she passed on, she told me this incredible story. And afterwards, when we were going through her things, I found these. This

is a poem, and this is a love letter. I can't tell you how much these mean to me. *(He stops, overcome.)* See, my grandmother lived with us my whole life, but I never knew her. I never knew a thing about her. Her life. Or thought to ask. I mean she was always just "grandma." This woman in a hairnet and a housecoat who made us fudge- she made great fudge- Who spent most of her time in the bathroom. *(Old Alice makes a noise of disgust TTT-ppt, which sounds a lot like spitting tobacco)* Well, you did spend a lot of time in the bathroom... But most of the time she stayed in her room watching "The Price Is Right" or listening to old ballets on her record player. *(A ballet, Giselle begins to be heard.)*

OLD ALICE. I was researching.

A young woman dressed in a World War I period dress and a young man in a period army uniform enter from opposite sides of the stage. They walk slowly towards each other, meet and circle around each other to the music.

MARC. She was researching....

OLD ALICE. For my ballet....

She has exited. The boy slowly exits while the young girl slowly lies onto the bed stage right.

MARC. Her name was Wilcox-

We hear a voice call "Alice" as the lights crossfade to a private room in an "institution" in Savannah, Georgia. Alice the young girl in the nightgown is sitting in the bed.

MARC. Alice Wilcox...

Again a call for Alice...Marc exits.

ALICE. I'm not really hungry, thank you. I'll wait for lunch today.

The nurse enters carrying a tray of food and a broom, and a young girl about the same age as Alice enter. Another young girl stays in the doorway.

NURSE. Good morning, Alice.

She hands the tray to the girl and "sweeps" Old Alice off the stage both because the nurse is "cleaning" and Claire is wanting her gone.

ALICE. I told you, I'm not very hungry. Didn't you hear me?

NURSE. Did you have a good night's sleep? You look as though you did?

ALICE. You know I slept. I'm lucky I can wake up.

NURSE. It's such a lovely day out today, isn't it? Just lovely.

ALICE. You promised you wouldn't do that anymore. You told me no more medicine.

NURSE. A perfect day for visitors.

ALICE. You enjoy ignoring me, don't you? It makes you happy.

NURSE. I brought you an extra biscuit.

ALICE. Am I the only patient you treat this way? Or do you go up and down the corridors ignoring everyone?

NURSE. Would you like to eat over there by the window? That might be a nice idea.

ALICE. I told you I wasn't hungry.

NURSE. We can just move the table over a little-

ALICE. I don't want any of that.

NURSE. That way you can enjoy the sunlight...

ALICE. I'm warning you, if you bring that tray anyway near me-- I'll scream. Did you hear me? I'm warning you. Miss Cabbage! You have been warned.

NURSE. You wouldn't want to do that.

ALICE. Don't bet on it.

SARAH. (*coming into the room*) Here, let me help you.

ALICE. Sarah?

SARAH. Hi.

ALICE. Ahh!

A playful but loud scream because the nurse has tried to move the tray. The nurse is startled and drops the tray to the floor.

NURSE. Now look what you've done.

ALICE. I warned you.

NURSE. What a mess. Just look at this mess.

ALICE. Yes, and you never had to eat it.

SARAH. Here-

NURSE. Don't trouble yourself, dear. I'll take care of it. Just let me get a broom. I'll be right back. This is not a good sign, Alice. What would Dr. Tyson say if he saw this? I won't be a minute, Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. Oh, that's alright. *(After glaring at Alice, the nurse is gone.)*

ALICE. Hi!

SARAH. Hi!

ALICE. How are you?

SARAH. Fine. You?

ALICE. Fine, fine.

SARAH. You look good.

ALICE. Thank you. So, do you.

SARAH. No, I've put on some weight. Again.

ALICE. I made a mess, didn't I?

SARAH. Yes, yes you did.

ALICE. So, how have you been?

SARAH. Good. Busy.

ALICE. Really?

SARAH. Yes. Spring term is over-

ALICE. Is it really?

SARAH. Yes, thank goodness.

ALICE. Spring term is over already....

SARAH. And I'm going to see my Aunt and Uncle in Atlanta next month.

ALICE. Aunt Piggy and Uncle Wilt?

SARAH. Yes, Aunt Piggy and Uncle Wilt. I forget you know them. It's Peggy, though, not Piggy. We just call her Piggy. Because she never stops eating.

ALICE. Poor Uncle Wilt.

SARAH. He doesn't seem to mind. "More of her to love," he always says.

ALICE. Sure, that's what he says.

SARAH. (*pause*) Miss Tate told me to tell you "hello" and to let you know that everyone's been thinking of you.

ALICE. Are they?

SARAH. Yes, they all miss you.

ALICE. Mother told me they dismissed me, Sarah. My father won't even speak to me.

SARAH. Ali, they dismissed you because you broke the rules. Because you were gone without a signed request, not for what you did. Most of the girls don't even know. They think you went home because of a death in the family-

ALICE. Well, I did almost.

SARAH. You know what I mean. Miss Tate said that they were even going to ask you back. That there was a good chance that in the fall, if the doctors gave their permission, they would take you back. They wanted you to come back. She said you were going to be a brilliant writer. So gifted. The best she ever taught.

ALICE. Mother showed me the letter, Sarah. The dismissal letter. I made her show it to me. They won't be asking me back in the fall. Not this fall or any other fall. Wharton is no school for girls with such a troubled and fragile personality. Strong moral principles are to be nurtured at Wharton, not suicides. Apparently, doing away with one's self is not an accepted part of the curriculum. -At least not for freshmen. Not that I mind. It turns out I wasn't very adept at it.

SARAH. Did it hurt?

ALICE. Sarah -

SARAH. I'm sorry-

ALICE. No, don't be sorry-

SARAH. I just wondered.

ALICE. I forget how bold you can be sometimes, and you look so innocent. That's always been one of the reasons I liked you, Miss Tupperton. You have the wonderful ability to take me by surprise.

SARAH. Really? Do I? I like that. *(pause)* Did it?

ALICE. Hurt? No, it didn't hurt really. I was just scared. That's all. Very scared.

SARAH. Why?

ALICE. Do you think there is something after this? More than this difficult, beautiful life? I know what I am supposed to believe, I suppose having been born a Jew... but I am about as Jewish as a pickle.

SARAH. Stop....

ALICE. You have no idea how much lately I wish I had a faith to hang my hat on. I envy you and your bible thumping family. My parents have spent their whole lives trying to hide from the Lord. Our name was Wilcznsky but Daddy's daddy put a stop to that. I've been to Temple twice, both times in Atlanta. So no one in Macon might know. And there I was sitting in my window seat gathering the courage to hurt myself. Like some heartbroken Hamlet in crinoline, and all I could think of was what if there is only darkness, just this endless nothing...

SARAH. You mean Jews don't believe in hell or heaven?

ALICE. Hell, for us, is a really bad bagel.

SARAH. Stop-

ALICE. You never did care Sarah, did you. That I was a Jew.

SARAH. I wished you could get all gussied up with me, and sit in church, and sing hymns, but otherwise no.

ALICE. You are truly a rarest of rare birds, my sweet Sarah... No, we Jews hedge our bets. We are after all a very practical people. According to the boy Rabbi with the sour breath that my parents recruited, straight out of his Rabbi school from the looks of him, who has been "counseling" me, we must focus on the here and now. "We must not become enticed by the unknown", not the most helpful thing to say to a mournful girl with a straight razor hidden in her journal. "If there is an afterlife- an Olam Haba as he called it- a world to come, we cannot prove it or disprove it. So it is up to us to prepare as though there is one, and, to best prepare, we should live righteously." "Why", I said to this sweet boy who was so thin, you could have snapped him in two-"if it can't even be proved that there is such a place, who knows what it takes to be invited." "Because God is just and good"- "Is he", I interrupted. "Is he really? Did you worry about coming here." "Worry?" he said. "Yes, in the heart of the deep south, where they lynch Jewboys like you for sport, did you not worry? Traveling all alone with your kippah on? I hope you kept your straw hat on over it. My father must have offered you more than your usual fee? I'm sure he did....and I'm sure even then- you thought twice about coming..... tell me once again about just and good..." *(pause)* I'm not doing so well, Sarah Jane.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. They give me medication now. Almost every night.

SARAH. They told me you were doing much better-

ALICE. Did they?

SARAH. Yes-

ALICE. Then, why are you here?

SARAH. What?

ALICE. If I'm doing so much better, why are you here? Why did you come here?

SARAH. I came to see you.

ALICE. No, you came because they are very worried about me, and they've called in the reserves... First the Boy Rabbi appears out of the blue, and now you. I'm not doing well and that's a fact. Let's let a fact be a fact. That's one of the things I always admired about you, Sarah, you don't paint rosy pictures. If you don't like something, you don't like it. And if you do, you really do. Like kissing.

SARAH. Stop.

ALICE. Especially right here. (*She touches the back of Sarah's neck.*)

SARAH. Stop it.

ALICE. We care about each other, don't we?

SARAH. Yes. Of course we do.

ALICE. Good. Then don't try and make it all better. I'm so tired of people trying to make it all better.

SARAH. Oh, I miss you, Alice Anne Wilcox. I miss you so much.

ALICE. I miss you too, Sarah Jane Tupperton.

NURSE. (*entering*) What a morning. What a morning. I hope you haven't made more of a mess in here.

ALICE. Nurse Cabbage, how nice to see you again.

NURSE. Don't "how nice" me. Between you and that Hastings child, I'm an hour behind.

ALICE. I don't believe it.

NURSE. Well, believe it. And this is an inspection day.

ALICE. Did you hear that? She heard me. You heard me and responded. You didn't ignore me.

NURSE. What are you talking about?

ALICE. You heard me.

NURSE. Of course, I heard you, Child. I'm not deaf. And now I want you to hear this. It's my turn to warn you. Any further outburst like this morning and we will be forced to stop allowing visitors to see you.

ALICE. I didn't want any visitors; this was your idea. No offense, Sarah.

NURSE. Are you aware your mother visits this weekend?

ALICE. You mean you won't let my mother visit? Ha, good luck. She'll do worse than scream.

NURSE. Would you want her to know how disagreeable you've been?

ALICE. She'll understand. She can't make grits either.

NURSE. Excuse me, Miss Tupperton? May I be alone with Miss Wilcox a minute?

SARAH. Certainly.

ALICE. Careful, Sarah. She wants to slip me some more of that sleeping powder. Don't get too close, Sarah, you can't trust her.

NURSE. (*after showing Sarah out*) I'm glad you think this is funny, Alice, but this is not a game we are playing here.

ALICE. You're telling me.

NURSE. When are you going to realize we are only trying to help?

ALICE. Then stop giving me that sleeping powder. Is that what you call helping?

NURSE. We give you a touch of morphine to help you sleep. You forget, when you came here you hadn't slept for a week.

ALICE. And now all I do is sleep. I feel like Rip Van Winkle, I sleep so much. I'm tired of sleeping.

NURSE. But it's helping, isn't it?

ALICE. I don't want your help. I never asked for it.

NURSE. Well, someone did. You're here, aren't you?

ALICE. When are you going to realize I don't want to be here. I don't want to be helped.

NURSE. Of course you do.

ALICE. No. No. I don't. I want to be dead. That's all I want. All I want is to be dead.

NURSE. *(after a pause)* Would you like me to ask your friend to leave?

ALICE. I didn't ask her to come. Wait. Actually, if you don't mind, I would like her to stay awhile.

NURSE. Do you think you'll be wanting lunch, or should I just drop it on the floor?

ALICE. I'm sorry. Of course. Bring it in. Nurse Cabbage?

NURSE. Yes.

ALICE. I'm sorry. I don't mean to cause you trouble. Especially on inspection day.

NURSE. Yes, well, at least you didn't bite me. The Hastings boy did.

ALICE. Oh, no...

NURSE. Yes, he didn't want his hair combed and it was such a mess. Oh, well, part of the job. Part of the job. I'll send your friend back in.

SARAH. *(entering)* She said the coast was clear.

ALICE. Sarah, do you remember the day we skipped history and went to the lake? The day we skipped school?

SARAH. Last year, you mean?

ALICE. Almost two years ago now. It was such a beautiful day, remember? You even said so. The sky was bright blue.

SARAH. "Who could care about "ancient history" on a day like this," you kept saying. "Let's go make some history of our own." And I, like a fool, listened to you.

ALICE. You were so scared your mother and father were going to find out-

SARAH. They did find out-

ALICE. Only because you told them-

SARAH. I had to tell them-

ALICE. That's right. You got bit by a bug or something-

SARAH. A wasp!

ALICE. A wasp, you're right-

SARAH. A bug...

ALICE. How odd... A whole life changes like that- a bug bites, and here I am... Because you panicked. Screaming and yelling.

SARAH. Because it hurt. And that's why I told my parents. What was I going to do? Tell them I got bit by a wasp in the middle of history class? I could have killed you for that.

ALICE. *(She is over by the window now, looking out.)* Because of you and a bee, *(Before she can correct her.)* A wasp. I met Eli-

SARAH. Not really-

ALICE. Sure. We all knew him, about him, called him names. But that was the first day I met him. Actually talked with him. And it was all because you got stung.

SARAH. My leg puffed up like a balloon-

ALICE. He acted like I was the last person on earth he wanted to talk with. I remember I almost just walked away...

The lights quickly crossfade-all crossfades should be like jump cuts in a film- onto the porch of a house in Macon. A young man, Elijah, is trying to work on a rocking chair he is making out of wood.

ELIJAH. *(He has hurt himself, because she has distracted him with a question)* God Dammit! What?

ALICE. Nothing. Did you hurt yourself?

ELIJAH. *(after a beat)* I'm sorry I cursed.

ALICE. I was just asking if you thought she'd be all right. It seems to be taking them quite a while.

ELIJAH. She'll be find now that my father's looking at it. He can cure anything. Some people have a gift that way. "I could cure the warts on a toad," he always says.

ALICE. Toads don't have warts.

ELIJAH. That's what I always say. I say: "Toads don't have warts". And he says: "There, you see." Well, he thinks it's funny.

ALICE. Do you?

ELIJAH. No. *(pause)* Do you?

ALICE. Not really.

ELIJAH. *(They exchange a look)* Good. *(He goes back to work.)*

ALICE. What are you doing?

ELIJAH. Building something.

ALICE. *(pause)* What?

ELIJAH. Excuse me?

ALICE. What are you building?

ELIJAH. Oh, nothing really. It's a present for my father. *(pause)* It's his sixtieth fourth birthday soon-

ALICE. Sixty four?

ELIJAH. Yep.

ALICE. That's pretty old.

ELIJAH. Yes, it is. *(pause)* I was a mistake.

ALICE. I beg your pardon?

ELIJAH. I was a mistake. At least that's what I've been told.

ALICE. That's horrible.

ELIJAH. No, the best things in life are always mistakes. Haven't you ever noticed that?

ALICE. No, can't say that I have.

ELIJAH. Neither have I, but it makes me feel better to say it.

ALICE. Is it a chair?

ELIJAH. Yes. It's a rocking chair. He's always wanted one.

ALICE. I don't believe that. You're making a chair?

ELIJAH. Yep.

ALICE. Out of wood? I mean just out of some pieces of wood? You can do that?

ELIJAH. I'm not sure. I hope so. If not, I've wasted an awful lot of time.

ALICE. That's pretty amazing. No, really, I couldn't even make paper dolls. When I was little, I mean. Where did you learn how to do that?

ELIJAH. Huh?

ALICE. Where did you learn how to do that?

ELIJAH. From a book. You can learn a lot from books. If you want to.

ALICE. Really. I'll try to remember that. A book, huh. On rocking chairs?

ELIJAH. On furniture craftsmanship. Chapter five is on the rocking chair.

ALICE. Chapter five. What's chapter 12 about?

ELIJAH. Look for yourself. (*He tosses her the book.*)

ALICE. This is great. People write books about this sort of thing?

ELIJAH. Only the good writers, Dickens, Shakespeare-

ALICE. I adore Shakespeare, but I'd forgotten that he wrote about building things. Of course- Measure for Measure one of his masterpieces.

ELIJAH. (*Not able to resist the challenge holding up the tool.*) It's no Awls Well That Ends Well.

ALICE. Oh, that's...

ELIJAH. Awlful ? I agree not one of his best....

ALICE. I assume this is a Love's Labour's Lost. (*He tries not to smile but has to.*) But what have we here: Fine Furniture. The Build It Yourself Series. Catchy, but no Dickens.

ELIJAH. Dickens? You mean, Great Renovations... David Chesterfield.

ALICE. Yes, but they pale in comparison to A Tale of Two Settees. Chapter One: It was the chest of drawers, the worst ofAh, here it is, Chapter 12. Ha!

ELIJAH. What is so funny?

ALICE. That's perfect.

ELIJAH. I'll have to read that chapter.

ALICE. Chapter 12: The Canopy Bed.

ELIJAH. Yes? So? He didn't want a bed.

ALICE. I do.

ELIJAH. I beg your pardon?

ALICE. I mean I did. I always wanted a canopy bed.

ELIJAH. Oh.

ALICE. No, honest. Ever since I was a little girl.

ELIJAH. Ruining paper dolls.

ALICE. Right.

ELIJAH. Well, you can borrow the book, if you want. Once I'm finished.

ALICE. Thanks, but I think it would be better if you worked on it. Since you're so good at it and all. Practice up a bit. You've got plenty of time.

ELIJAH. Years.

ALICE. November. My birthday's not until November.

ELIJAH. I see.

ALICE. So, that gives you plenty of time. Go ahead, practice up on the easy stuff... What comes after the canopy bed? (*a joke*) Chapter 15, The Bleak House...

ELIJAH. I don't mean to be rude, but I really need to get back to work, here...

ALICE. Don't worry. I won't bother you anymore. You need all the practice you can get, but come November, Elijah Pierce, I want a canopy bed.

Elijah's father, T.J. Pierce, and Sarah come out of the house. One of Sarah's shins is wrapped in a cloth bandage.

MR. PIERCE. You just tell your folks that the Trojan war started because of a wasp. Everyone knows that. And you were doing research.

SARAH. I'm afraid I've never been very good at not telling the truth, Mr. Pierce.

MR. PIERCE. You're a woman, aren't you? Twisting the truth is in your blood. It's instinct.

SARAH. Yes... Well, maybe I just haven't developed it yet, then, or something. I really don't know how to thank you enough.

MR. PIERCE. Don't mention it, Miss Tupperton. I'm just glad Eli heard your crying. It's not often we get a visit from such pretty ladies way out here on the edge of town. It was our pleasure, I assure you. Gave Eli something other to do than whittle that damn fool what-ever-it-is. Did you have a nice talk with Miss Wilcox?

ALICE. Charming. He's going to make me a bed when he's finished.

MR. PIERCE. Gonna make you a bed?

ALICE. Build one. A canopy bed. And it is a rocking chair that he's working on.

SARAH. He's making a chair?

ALICE. Yes, isn't that wonderful?

MR. PIERCE. Going to be a rocker, son? Is that what we're wasting your time doing this month? What was it last month? It was those picture postcards-

ELIJAH. Photographs.

MR. PIERCE. Photographs. And the month before that, it was the guitar. And the month before that, it was poetry.

ALICE. You write poems?

MR. PIERCE. Sure, he writes poems. Or he used to. Going to make a fortune writing poetry. You name it, he's tried it. Anything to waste a little more time.

Eli leaves.

MR. PIERCE. (*yelling to Eli*) Go on, go. Go look for something else to do. How about gold mining? I hear there's still gold in (*mock hillbilly*) Californy- I-A, son. Why don't you go and try that?

SARAH. I think we should be going, Alice.

MR. PIERCE. Don't forget to put that lotion on your legs twice a day, Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. I will, Mr. Pierce. I promise.

MR. PIERCE. And stop touching it. If you leave it alone, it should be good as new in a week or two. If it stings, put some more of that lotion on it.

ALICE. You listen to him, Sarah. He could clear the warts off a toad.

SARAH. Alice-

MR. PIERCE. She's right, I could.

SARAH. Toads don't have warts. Do they?

MR. PIERCE. and ALICE. There, see.

MR. PIERCE. So you were talking to that good for nothing boy of mine?

ALICE. Yes.

MR. PIERCE. Gonna make you a “bed”... As if he doesn't have enough work to do.

ALICE. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to interfere with his work.

MR. PIERCE. Look at this waste of wood here. Where in God's name does he think this is going to get him?

ALICE. He's building this for you.

MR. PIERCE. Is he?

ALICE. Yes.

MR. PIERCE. Just what I always wanted...

ALICE. He thinks it is.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. He said: "My father always wanted one."

MR. PIERCE. Did he? You two seemed to have some talk out here. Is there anything else I should know about my boy? Since you seem to know more than me?

SARAH. My parents are going to crucify me Ali.

ALICE. I think you have a very nice son, Mr. T. J. Peanutbreath Pierce. And you're right; we had a very nice talk-

MR. PIERCE. Peanutbreath?

ALICE. (*realizing what she has done*) But now we have to be going.

MR. PIERCE. Peanutbreath?

SARAH. Ali--

ALICE. Uh...Thanks again for taking care of the bee.

MR. PIERCE. Wasp!

SARAH. Yes, thank you again.

They exit quickly

MR. PIERCE. Peanutbreath?

ELIJAH. *(who enters)* Yes, Dad. Peanutbreath. Because we grow peanuts. Our life is peanuts. That's all we ever get to eat around here. So our breath smells like peanuts.

MR. PIERCE. That's ridiculous. Does it really?

ELIJAH. Makes sense, if you think about it...

MR. PIERCE. Does it really? *(tries to smell his breath)* Does everyone call us that?

ELIJAH. Only everyone in Macon. The rest of Georgia doesn't know us yet. But give them time.

MR. PIERCE. What did I tell you, son. Women. Never trust them. They smile and tell you everything's fine, and then as soon as you're not looking, they'll stab you in the back. They'll fool you every time. They'll destroy you. Break you in two like an old dried up piece of red clay.

He leaves as the lights crossfade from Mr. Pierce to Alice. She is carrying an empty bottle of lotion.

ELIJAH. *(Said along with Mr. Pierce)* Break you in two like an old dried up piece of red clay.

ALICE. Is that what he said?

ELIJAH. Well, you can't really blame him.

ALICE. What do you mean, you can't really blame him?

ELIJAH. Nothing. It's a long story.

ALICE. Well, it looks like I've got plenty of time, being as how you don't know when your father is coming back. And I can't really leave without more bee juice for Sarah's legs. She holds me personally responsible, you know. So I'm all ears. *(She sits down on the steps and waits. Eli works on his chair. After a long beat.)*

ELIJAH. *(Under his breath.)* Bee Juice...

ALICE. Well, it's wonderful so far. Doesn't seem long to me... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt. Please continue... You don't like me very much, do you? Is that it? Or you do like me, you like me so much, you couldn't wait to see me again. You're madly in love with me. You just don't know how to show it. *(Elijah smiles)* Ah ha. Now we're getting somewhere.

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. You smiled.

ELIJAH. I thought what you said was funny, that's all.

ALICE. So, you're shy. I like that. I think. I don't know if I know very many shy men.

ELIJAH. No, I doubt you do.

ALICE. Oh, and what is that supposed to mean?

ELIJAH. Let's just say I don't think you have much of a problem meeting men in general.

ALICE. I don't have a problem meeting people. I like people. Can I help it if they find me irresistible? *(He gives her a look.)* I just have two other things to say to you; then I'll hush up and wait for your father, alright? Two more things. To say. To you.

ELIJAH. Are you asking for permission?

ALICE. No. I just wanted you to know I would leave you alone after I said these two things. Because you always look as though it causes you great pain to have to talk to me.

ELIJAH. It doesn't cause me pain-

ALICE. And I wanted to let you know it wouldn't last long. Anyway, thing number one... This is the first thing.

ELIJAH. Go on.

ALICE. I'm sorry if I embarrassed you in front of your father the other day. And I told him about the chair. I'm sorry. I must have ruined a surprise-

ELIJAH. No, you didn't. And you didn't embarrass me neither. Believe me-

ALICE. See, I always open my mouth when I shouldn't- who are we fooling, I always open my mouth, period. It's always open. So, naturally, half the time it's open when it shouldn't be. I hope you're not angry; if you are, I'm sorry.

ELIJAH. I'm not angry. I don't let it bother me. He's just not very happy.

ALICE. Why is he so unhappy? Oh, that's the long story, isn't it?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. Well, I told you, I'm all ears.

ELIJAH. What about "the second thing"?

ALICE. What?

ELIJAH. You said you had two things you wanted to say to me.

ALICE. Oh, yes. That can wait. No, honestly. We can get into that later, just remind me after the long story, so I won't forget. Do continue... I'm all set for a wonderful story.

ELIJAH. There is no "wonderful story."

ALICE. Oh.

ELIJAH. Look, what's the matter? Don't you have enough "stories" to giggle about at your little tea dances?

ALICE. "Tea dances"?

ELIJAH. Or whatever you call those "la-tee'da's" you have in your "nice" little house at the end of the best street in Macon. I know what you talk about. I know how funny it is when my father and I come into town. We hear the whispers. I feel how quiet it gets. How every one smiles ... So just be happy with "peanut breath" and move on to the next family. Leave us alone.

ALICE. I'm sorry about that-

ELIJAH. Don't be. You should hear what they say about you.

ALICE. What makes you so sure I haven't. Oh, I've heard all right. And I would repeat it just to prove my point except I wouldn't want to ruin your

impression of me. I'm much too much of a lady. And for your information, I hate living on the "best street in town"-

ELIJAH. It must be horrible-

ALICE. It is!

ELIJAH. Those awful sculpted trees, that horrible fancy motor car-

ALICE. It's more than that-

ELIJAH. I'll bet it is.

ALICE. It's what people expect you to be - you're doing it right now. You expect me to be a certain person, act a certain way, only to care about certain things. I could give a- I don't care about fancy cars, manicured lawns, stupid tea dances. I hope I never have to go to another luke-warm tea dance as long as I live... And I certainly can't help what house I was born into, Eli, anymore than you can... And I am so tired of being judged because of it...

ELIJAH. What do you know about being judged?

ALICE. See, even you! Do you know my Poppa spent his whole life hiding that his family is Hebrew, built this huge department store, joined all the right clubs, even the ones that hated Jews, that only let him in because they wanted his money, and the whole town knows it and whispers ... (*Eli looks at her*) You know what I think? I think sometimes that stork plays a cruel joke on us. When he sorts out the babies. When he's up there deciding which babies go with which family. He must think it would be very funny to pick a wrong one, one that just doesn't belong and just drop it into the wrong family, just for laughs. Just to see what happens... I'm sorry I offended you by asking so many questions. I'm not looking for "gossip". I was just trying to get to know you.

ELIJAH. Yeah? Why? You certainly don't need any more friends. You have more friends than you know what to do with.

ALICE. I don't know where you get that impression. That I am so loved and smothered in friendship. Every girl I know hates me.

ELIJAH. Because every boy in town's in love with you.

ALICE. Every boy in town is in love with me?

ELIJAH. Yes. Except maybe Richard Lamping. He's too busy dissecting frogs. *(Alice laughs. Pause. She is looking at him.)* But you are right. They may all dream about you, but they wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole.

ALICE. Well aren't you the picture painting of tact?

ELIJAH. People, they have never ceased to amaze me for their capacity to be full of cow crap. That's why I like living way out here... Not much of a call for tact on a farm.

ALICE. I like you very much. I think you're very good looking. And... I've been thinking about you all week. And I don't remember ever meeting any boy that's made me feel that way.

ELIJAH. Are you always like this?

ALICE. No, I'm never like this. Ever. That was all part of "thing number two." Sort of under one big heading. So, now you don't have to remind me...

ELIJAH. Well, you're right. You are certainly nothing like what you are supposed to be.

ALICE. I work at it. Constantly.

ELIJAH. *(pause)* Can I ask you a favor?

ALICE. Sure.

ELIJAH. Would you hold this for me? *(a piece of the chair)*

ALICE. Hold this?

ELIJAH. Here.

ALICE. Here?

ELIJAH. Yes. Thanks. *(They are sitting very close.)* I think your friend played a little joke on me too.

ALICE. Who?

ELIJAH. Mr. Stork.

ALICE. Oh.

ELIJAH. Do people ever wonder where my mother is? I mean, why my father seems to have no wife? Or does everyone just figure she died?

ALICE. I think most people just assume that. Yes. That she passed on.

ELIJAH. Passed on. Yep. That's what she did. She "passed on". When I was very little.

ALICE. I'm sorry to hear that.

ELIJAH. She's not dead, you know. She just left us. Moved.

ALICE. That's probably very true...

ELIJAH. No, Alice. I mean she never really died. At all. She's still alive. She just moved.

ALICE. Moved?

ELIJAH. To New York City to become a ballet dancer.

ALICE. She just left?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. Your own mother? That's horrible.

ELIJAH. Naw... she had been a dancer ever since she was a little girl. And my father sort of sidetracked her. For awhile. And my coming along certainly helped. But dancing was something she never forgot. She never thought she was any good at being a mother anyway. She loved us, it just wasn't what she wanted to do. She wanted to be a dancer. So, she left.

ALICE. How old were you when she left?

ELIJAH. Five. And she was only twenty two. She was sixteen when she met my father, and he was almost forty. Why they thought that would work, I don't know. My father had spent years overseas, helping set up farms in Africa, Asia. He had never once thought of getting married. But one May, he sailed into New York and was having his supper, and he was being served by this young girl who had lost both her parents to the influenza. And he took one look at her, and he said it was time to "re-evaluate his priorities." And first thing he told her was that she would never have to worry about feeling sick or losing any more folks to disease. He had traveled the world and knew cures, and he was supposed to set sail the next day for Central America and-well, let's just say she did a little sidetracking of her own... He

told me once that he paid the check, they went off, and he didn't leave that room until three days later... She was so pretty. That much I do remember. She had long red hair and blue eyes, deep blue. Like the color of the sky just before the sun starts to go down. She used to let me watch her practice her dance in the afternoons. It must have been one of my favorite things to do, because she'd always sit me down on the patio table with a cookie to hold, and I would nibble on it while she practiced her dancing. Her hair used to fly wildly when she turned, and every once in awhile, it would tickle me if she got too close. She'd lean her head way back, and her eyes matched the sky... Anyway, one day she crossed the river and went to New York, and we never saw her again. My father didn't take it very well. He started drinking. A lot. We had settled in New Jersey by then, and my father packed us up and moved us as far south as the train would take him. This peanut farm was for sale, and Papa took one look at me and said "Peanut, how'd you like to be a farmer?" And all I could think of was the circus, and the only time I had eaten nuts, so I clapped my hands and said "Peanuts!" And he bought it. He even called me "Peanut" until I was sixteen; that was always fun. Still does, when he's drunk or when he's trying to be nice to me. *(He smiles.)*

ALICE. What?

ELIJAH. Oh, I was remembering what he said once. One day when he was feeling particularly sorry for himself. He had had a little to drink, and I came out here and caught him looking at a picture of my mother. And he looked up at me, and I thought he was going to yell at me, but all he said was:

MR. PIERCE. *(appears, holding a picture of his wife)* Figure this one out, Peanut. I have a cure for anything. I've traveled the world and learned a cure for everything. From dandruff to an upset stomach, and they all work. But there are two things I can't cure. Hell, no one can cure them. Once you get them, you just have to wait them out. Nothing can cure them but time. The common cold is one, and a broken heart is the other. And a cold usually only lasts a week, but a broken heart? Good luck waiting that one out. That one can drag on for years...

He looks at the picture, as the lights crossfade back to Alice.

ALICE. He loved her a great deal, didn't he?

ELIJAH. Yes, he did.

ALICE. I don't think my parents were ever in love. Ever. Isn't that sad? The only reason they got married was to keep the store in the families. A good sound business decision. I asked my mother once, I said: "How did you and Daddy meet?" And she said that their daddies were best friends, they had known each other since diapers, they had grown up together. And everyone

just assumed that they would be married. So they were. And I said: "so then he was the only boy in the world for you, then?" And you should have seen her. She got all quiet. And her face... It just dropped... Poor Mamma. She probably never had a choice...

ELIJAH. "The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies,
When love is done."

ALICE. That's beautiful. Did you write that?

ELIJAH. No... (*He laughs.*) I wish I could.

ALICE. Who did?

ELIJAH. A man named Bourdillon. William Bourdillon. It's the only poem he's known for. Which is kind of sad. But I guess one is better than none.

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies,
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart just one;
Yet the light of a whole life dies,
When love is done.

ALICE. Well, I don't know about you, but my life is not going to be like that. No sir. The boy I marry and I are going to be so in love, so madly and passionately in love, we are going to make romantic history-

MR. PIERCE. (*entering with rifle pointed*) I'll give you to the count of ten to get off my peanut smelling property!

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. Shut up, son. (*To Alice.*) You heard me.

ELIJAH. She just came here to get more medicine for her friend, Dad.

MR. PIERCE. I don't care what she came here for. She must have needed something. Or she wouldn't be here. All you want is what you can get, isn't it? Isn't it?

ELIJAH. Dad, come on. Put the gun down.

MR. PIERCE. (*Slowly lowers rifle.*) Probably even tried sweet talking the poet here, didn't you? Talked real nice to him, didn't you? Well, he's an easy one to fool. Everyone knows that. He got fooled once. So, you'd think he'd learn, but no. Not him. He still writes his love poems. Tried to get me to go into town. Going to meet some ladies. Going to have a good time. Ha, isn't that a laugh? You'd think he'd learn. I have. I'm no fool. I know what you really are. (*Raises gun again.*) What you bring with your sweet little voices. And your talk of "I need you" and "forever".

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. All you bring is bad luck. Bad luck and a lot of wasted time.

ALICE. Mr. Pierce, I am sorry about what I said to you the other day.

MR PIERCE. Why? My boy here said everybody in town talks about us like that, so why should you be sorry. You were just telling the truth. The truth is a powerful cure all, but I will be goddamned it don't hurt. Smarts all to hell, the truth does. But the more it hurts, the more it helps.

ALICE. Well, I'm sorry. I have this habit of

MR. PIERCE. What, sticking your noses into other people's business.

ELI. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. Or is it selling folks a bill of goods. They say all your kind is cheap and stingy, but you sure do like to jack up the price for other folks now don't you.

ELI. Dammit-

MR. PIERCE. What? She told us the truth about our family, I ought to return the favor and say what everyone says behind her back. About her people and that over-priced marble step store of theirs.

ALICE. I am sorry if my words hurt you Mr. Pierce-

MR. PIERCE. I told you, you have until the count of ten to get off this farm, and I meant it. You didn't hurt anyone yet, and you're not about to.

ELIJAH. Dad-

He is moving toward his father now. Alice is walking slowly, watching the gun.

MR. PIERCE. (*Raising the gun*) No one is going to ever hurt us again-

ELIJAH. Goddammit!

He has knocked his father down, and, as he does so, Alice screams. Lights immediately crossfade.

NURSE. (*who has appeared next to Alice and is holding her arm.*) There now, let's get back into bed now, Miss Wilcox. And get some rest. We just tried to do too much for one day.

ALICE. Sarah?

SARAH. Ali, you wouldn't listen. You acted like you didn't hear us.

ALICE. Hear you, what?

NURSE. We tried to get you to come away from the window, child, that's all.

SARAH. You really couldn't hear me, Ali? I kept calling your name.

ALICE. It's the medication, Sarah. They keep giving me that medication.

NURSE. We need to let Miss Wilcox get some rest now. We've had enough excitement for one day.

ALICE. Make them stop.

SARAH. I will.

NURSE. Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. I'm coming.

ALICE. Sarah

SARAH. I'll be back soon.

ALICE. No, don't go. Please don't go-

SARAH. I have to, but I'll be back.

ALICE. They won't let you. They won't let you come back.

SARAH. Let them try and stop me.

ALICE. They keep giving me that powder... And I can't think straight.

SARAH. You rest now, Alice, and I'll be back. (*whispering*) Don't worry. Alice Ann Wilcox, if I have to knock down the door and carry you out of here, you are going to get out of this place, you understand? (*Alice nods.*)

NURSE. Miss Tupperton.

SARAH. You rest now. We're friends, remember?

They exit. After a beat we hear the sound of a pebble being thrown against a window. Again. Alice sits up in the bed.

ALICE. Who is that? (*She goes to the window, opens it and looks out. A pebble almost hits her.*) Hey!!!

ELIJAH. Oh, are you all right? I'm sorry.

ALICE. Elijah? Is that you?

ELIJAH. Yes. I'm sorry about that. I didn't see you coming. Did I hurt you?

ALICE. Yes, I'm dying. What are you doing here?

ELIJAH. I came to apologize. For my father. Where have you been? For the last week?

ALICE. I went to Atlanta with my mother. Why?

ELIJAH. Because I've been out here every night for a week. I didn't know where you were.

ALICE. Oh. My mother had to go meet my father in Atlanta, and she hates to take the train alone, so she dragged me along with her. I just got back today.

ELIJAH. I know. This was your last chance. If you weren't home tonight I was going to give up.

ALICE. Well, lucky me. Hi.

ELIJAH. Hi.

ALICE. So... apologize.

ELIJAH. Oh. He was just very drunk. He had no idea what he was doing. Or saying. He was very upset about it when he sobered up. It was their anniversary. My mother and father's. I should have known. He always gets drunk on that day. And on her birthday.

ALICE. Remind me not to come for the birthday.

ELIJAH. Anyway, what can I say? Except, I'm sorry. So... I'm sorry. You do have funny sculptured trees.

ALICE. My mother likes them like that. You should see the dog. It's a poodle. I don't like it very much. Oh, guess where we went in Atlanta? Where my mother took me? You are never going to guess.

ELIJAH. I don't know.

ALICE. Try.

ELIJAH. I have no idea. *(She pantomimes a dancer one arm over her head it looks vaguely like a monkey.)* I don't know. The zoo?

ALICE. No, silly. The zoo. The ballet. Isn't that bizarre? I mean, after all you told me about your mother? It was so beautiful. I loved it. These dancers from Europe were performing and my mother wanted to impress some people, so we all went. They were doing Giselle. Do you know it?

ELIJAH. Not offhand.

ALICE. It is so sad. Oh! Are all ballets so sad?

ELIJAH. I don't know. I've never seen one.

ALICE. Is this bothering you? Talking about this?

ELIJAH. No...

ALICE. It just made me think about you, that's all. And it was so beautiful. The way they move. She dies of a broken heart, Giselle. That made me think of your father... Well, I couldn't spend the whole week thinking about you. I wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea... Eli, do you ever hear from her? Your mother, I mean.

ELIJAH. Sure. We get a letter every now and then. She thinks about me, though. I can feel it. I know it sounds silly-

ALICE. It's not silly-

ELIJAH. But I believe in things like that.

ALICE. There are more things in heaven and hell than are dreamt of...
(yawns)

ELIJAH. Heaven and earth. Hell's got nothing to do with it, Horatio.....

ALICE. Oh, listen there are spirits in Giselle. The Wilis. They are the ghosts of the girls who have died before their wedding day. And if you aren't careful they will haunt you and make you dance until you die... I think I like ballets, though if you ask me they need more of a plot. What I adore about novels or Mr. Shakespeare is the story, the intricacy- a whole life gets packed in there. Much more than a boy who meets a girl and she gets all silly, falls in love and yet she knows so little about him, she doesn't even know that he is promised to another, but when she finds out she is so grief stricken she kills herself? She tries to stab herself with his sword, but fails!

ELIJAH. How do you fail to stab yourself with a sword?

ALICE. Got me. You forget to sharpen it? And *then* she dies of- wait until you hear this- shock.

ELIJAH. That seems like a unnecessary plot twist... either way she's dead.

ALICE. True. And that is the whole story, except she becomes one of the spirits who live in the woods, and when he returns grief-stricken to the woods, she decides to save the boy rather than have him dance to his death... I thought: first of all stop pining away and straighten your tutu and find another boy out hunting in the woods- you just met him... (yawns) but I do like those spirits that make you dance to your death...

ELIJAH. Listen, it's late...

ALICE. Dance for me....

ELIJAH. And you must be tired.

ALICE. I've never had anyone "pay me a visit" like this. I feel like Juliet.

ELIJAH. That's certainly a sophisticated love story... they meet and two scenes later they are poisoning themselves.

ALICE. Yes, because it is forbidden love, sworn enemies and all... and she is so smitten... "What light from yonder window breaks?"

ELIJAH. That's his line. Romeo says that.

ALICE. Oh, yeah. Wouldn't make much sense for her to say it, now would it? What does she say? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet", right?

ELIJAH. Among other things.

ALICE. See, that's why I like you. You've read "Romeo and Juliet". And Hamlet. Say it. Say "what light from yonder-"

ELIJAH. Look, I just wanted to say I was sorry. And to make sure you were okay.

ALICE. Why? Are you leaving?

ELIJAH. It's late.

ALICE. Look, you woke me up. I didn't wake you.

ELIJAH. I know-

ALICE. Did I say something wrong?

ELIJAH. No-

ALICE. You don't have to do the Romeo thing.

ELIJAH. Look-

ALICE. Do I scare you or something?

ELIJAH. Scare me?

ALICE. Yes. I mean, not that I'm a monster or horrible looking. Not that kind of scare you. I mean- why are you leaving? Is it because we are sworn enemies?

ELIJAH. I just don't want your parents to wake up and get upset. That's all.

ALICE. Why? My Dad doesn't even own a gun, let alone know how to use one.

ELIJAH. I'm glad you're back. And that you understand. About my dad, I mean.

ALICE. Sure, he's not the problem. It's you I don't understand. *(pause)* I'll see you tomorrow.

ELIJAH. Excuse me?

ALICE. Tomorrow. We're going for a walk.

ELIJAH. Alice, I have a lot of chores to do. At home. Really.

ALICE. I understand.

ELIJAH. But I'll come by soon, though. And say hello.

ALICE. Sure, next time you're in town. We all know how much you love to come into town.

ELIJAH. Goodnight.

ALICE. Goodnight, Sweet prince. *(to herself)* Parting is such sweet sorrow. Yeah, TT-Ptt. *(a noise she makes out of disgust, that sounds like a spitting tobacco.)*

She goes back to her bed. Sarah is sitting on it dressed in a nightgown. It is weeks later.

SARAH. And I told him I didn't want to leave him, to go away to school. And he said he didn't want to leave me either, and how much he was going to miss me. Then he kept telling me how much he cared about me. And he hoped I would wait for him. You know, not let any other boys call on me. And I told him I would. That I didn't want to be with anyone else. Which is true. I mean, ever since ninth grade, I have always wanted to be courted by only one boy- Richard Lamping. And I told him that. And he said, "really?" He was so surprised. You should have seen him, Ali. He was so sweet. And I said, "it's true."

ALICE. What about Scott DeLorenzo?

SARAH. Who? Oh, well, that's different. He just happens to be unbelievably nice looking. So what. I mean, he's just someone to look at during math class. And wonder what it feels like to look perfect. Like an isosceles triangle-

ALICE. I know. I was just kidding.

SARAH. Anyway, it was still raining. It was pouring, so we were sitting there-

ALICE. Under Stackpole Bridge-

SARAH. Under Stackpole Bridge. And well, I told you we've, you know-

ALICE. Taken a stroll or two-

SARAH. Yes, but- I mean, we've been courting for two years, almost, and he's never even touched me-

ALICE. Not that he hasn't dreamed about it.

SARAH. Well, he doesn't have to dream anymore.

ALICE. What?

SARAH. I said: "he doesn't have to dream about it anymore."

ALICE. I heard you the first time. I just don't know if I believe you. You mean-

SARAH. Yes.

ALICE. Really?

SARAH. Yes.

ALICE. No-

SARAH. Yes.

ALICE. What happened?

SARAH. What do you mean what happened?

ALICE. What happened?

SARAH. Well, we were sitting there talking, and we started to kiss. And then he started to really kiss. I told you he's a wonderful kisser. Well, he kissed me on the back of my neck, right about here, and I thought I was going to die. It felt so good. I mean, it felt wonderful... Anyway, we were soaking wet from the rain, and he took off his shirt. And he looked so

handsome sitting there with his hair all wet and his chest... And he said he loved me.

ALICE. No.

SARAH. Yes. He said he thought that he was in love with me. And I said, "what?" And he said, "I love you". And then, he said it about twenty times like he had been afraid to say it and now it was so easy, "I love you, I love you, I love you." And at first I thought "All right, Richard, enough" But then I looked at him and started to cry. And he hugged me, and we were kissing. And then the next thing I know, I had taken my blouse off. Or he had. Or we both did, who cares. And he was kissing me all over, and it felt incredible. And then, I took off my camisole-

ALICE. No-

SARAH. Well, it was soaking wet. Why not? And you should have seen his face, Alice. He was so sweet. He told me I looked beautiful. Which was about the most perfect thing he could have said. And he did too. He has the nicest chest... Anyway, it all felt so wonderful. I couldn't stop. I've never felt like that before. It's not logical. Nothing mattered? Does that make sense?

ALICE. Of course it does. I'm getting goose-bumps just listening...

SARAH. You mean you would have done the same thing?

ALICE. With Richard? No, he's your boyfriend.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. Yes, I'd have done anything. I'd make him dance until he died...

SARAH. You say the oddest things... So then it wasn't a horrible thing to do?

ALICE. Terrible. Don't let it happen again.

SARAH. Oh, I'm so glad you understand, Ali.

ALICE. Understand? I'm so jealous of you I could scream. Why can't Eli fall in love like that with me?

SARAH. I don't know.

ALICE. You'd think I was a gargoyle or something.

SARAH. I think you need to forget him, Ali.

ALICE. I know. Believe me, I wish I could.

SARAH. You could have any other boy in town.

ALICE. Would you want any other boy than Richard?

SARAH. No, but if Richard didn't want me -- I'd have to die. I would just die. I love him so much.

ALICE. It's not like he tries to avoid me, Sarah. We see each other now, all the time. Don't worry, I'm taking your advice.

SARAH. Let a friendship develop.

ALICE. Do you know that he has never even tried to kiss me? Not even once.

SARAH. Maybe it just hasn't been the right moment. Some boys know to wait for just the right moment. Isn't that what you always tell me?

ALICE. And some boys wouldn't know the right moment if it hit them over the head.

The lights crossfade to the porch

ELIJAH. That is ridiculous.

ALICE. Well, it's true.

ELIJAH. You know I forget how illogical you can be sometimes.

ALICE. Illogical? Thank you.

ELIJAH. Well, you are. You make these statements that come from nowhere. I mean, we were talking about biscuits. How we both love biscuits and the next thing I know, you're telling me that you're going to go to college next fall.

ALICE. Because I was looking at your eyes-

ELIJAH. Oh-

ALICE. Yes. And I was thinking how much I liked your stupid eyes. And I wondered if you ever did that. I mean, in the middle of a conversation with

me, did you ever catch yourself just looking at me, which I doubt. Then I remembered that I couldn't sleep the other night, so I was coming up with theories about why you don't like me as much as I like you. But they were all depressing me, so I tried to convince myself that it wasn't important because I was going away to college anyway. And then I remembered that I hadn't even told you that I was going, so I told you. But, see, it was very logical. See, there was a very logical thought progression from biscuits, to your eyes, to Wharton School for Girls. (*She tries to stand but can't.*) So, don't call me illogical. I hate that. People always accuse me of that. But it's not true. My mind just works differently. Sideways. I go off on these thoughts, in this direction or that. But I know where I'm going. Trust me.

ELIJAH. Fine.

ALICE. I'm stuck. My skirt is stuck.

ELIJAH. Where?

ALICE. I don't know. On the chair.

ELIJAH. (*trying to help*) Here...

ALICE. I can manage, thank you.

ELIJAH. Just wait a minute-

ALICE. I can manage. It's just caught.

ELIJAH. I see that.

ALICE. I'll get it myself, Eli- Thank you.

ELIJAH. Careful-

ALICE. Thank you.

ELIJAH. Did it tear?

ALICE. No, it didn't tear. May I have my skirt back, please?

ELIJAH. I'm sorry.

Eli drops the edge of the skirt, embarrassed and moves away.

ALICE. Why didn't you kiss me?

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. Why didn't you kiss me? Just now.

ELIJAH. I don't know.

ALICE. You do like me?

ELIJAH. Sure.

ALICE. Then, why? TTT pttt. You must have at least thought about it. As much time as we spend with each other. You mean, you have never thought about it? You have never thought: "Hmm, Alice is nice looking. Why don't I just put my arms around her and kiss her?"

ELIJAH. Yes, I have.

ALICE. What happens? I mean, what stops you? Please don't tell me it is because your father hates Jews? I mean not that he's crazy about anybody....
(*Awkward pause.*) Oh, why do you do that?

ELIJAH. Do what?

ALICE. Get all quiet like that? Every time I tell you how much I care about you-

ELIJAH. Because I don't like to talk about it.

ALICE. Why? What's wrong with talking about it? Why is it such an awful subject? I think you're the most incredible boy I've ever met. The most talented-

ELIJAH. Oh, right-

ALICE. The best looking. The funniest, when you want to be. So, why can't I tell you that without feeling like I'm doing something wrong? I'd tell you every day of my life if you wanted to hear it.

ELIJAH. Well, I don't.

ALICE. Of course you can also be a real stick in the mud when you want to be.

ELIJAH. I just don't feel that way about you, alright? So it doesn't feel right for you to say it to me.

ALICE. Fine...

ELIJAH. I don't want to feel like that about anybody. Don't take it personal-

ALICE. Oh, no-

ELIJAH. Look, I think we are just very different, Ali. We want different things... Do you understand?

ALICE. I think we are very much the same, we like the same books, poetry, we laugh at the same things. There's only the one difference between us and the whole world seems to not want to forgive me for- (*He kicks the rocking chair in disgust.*) It's my fault. Ask a silly question...

ELIJAH. Where are you going?

ALICE. I don't know. Home. I don't feel so good. All of a sudden.

ELIJAH. I don't give a good god damn what faith you were born into, or wish you hadn't been. And I am sorry that most folks, including my father, have been hateful to you at some point or other. But don't you ever believe that I would treat you any differently because of it. That is the furthest thing from the truth-

ALICE. Then what is the truth?

ELIJAH. The truth about what? Be damned if I know. I don't put a lot of stock in truth. I've never had the pleasure of meeting the real honest to goodness, no pun intended, truth. Wouldn't know it if it slapped me right across the face.

ALICE. According to your father, it'll do more than slap...

ELIJAH. I do know deceit. I certainly have met her, many times....Aw, look, I never want to hurt you Alice.

ALICE. I don't exactly feel wonderful right now.

ELIJAH. But I will never lie to you either.

ALICE. What does that leave? You won't lie and never met the truth? What's left? Some nice chattin about the weather and whittlin wood...

ELIJAH. Alice, I could ask you the same thing. What does that leave? You're the one going away in the fall- off to college, whole trainloads of more eligible book smart Romeos to fawn over-

ALICE. Is that what you are worried about?

ELIJAH. I'm not worried about anything. Except my chores that aren't getting done.

ALICE. Oh yes, the never ending chores. Funny how the chores seem to pile up whenever I come around.

ELIJAH. The chores are there every day, Alice, lots of them. Listen- I do appreciate the distraction-

ALICE. Oh, is that what I am?

ELIJAH. I appreciate your visits.

ALICE. A distraction?

ELIJAH. Try running a farm some day, it's not such stuff as dreams are made of, I assure you.

ALICE. Yup. Tactless sort of places, I remember. So why do it. If you don't love it, why do it?

ELIJAH. Alice just leave it be, alright?

ALICE. No!

ELIJAH. Because I live on a farm, Miss Logic Lady, I woke up one day and saw I lived on a farm and thought well "gosh darn"- I might have to do myself a little farming.

ALICE. Eli your father wanted this farm, not you. That was his choice. Why not just leave, go do something you choose-

ELIJAH. Choose?

ALICE. Yes. What you want.

ELIJAH. What I want? Them's fancy town words, wants, choose. I can't remember the last time I ever got a thing I wanted.

ALICE. I hate when you do that. Get that hang dog feel sorry for yourself attitude.

ELIJAH. I wanted this conversation to end about fifteen minutes ago. Did I get that?

ALICE. Fine. And I promise you I will never “distract” you from your chores ever again. You can be sure of that.

ELIJAH. Alice, I don’t expect you to understand. Hell, how could you. Just answer me one thing. Just tell me the last time you shed even one tear from wanting something?

ALICE. Just a couple of minutes ago, and doesn’t that make me a fool.

ELIJAH. I’m talking about life things Ali- I’m not talking about courting or a kiss or two

ALICE. Is that all you think I want? That you mean to me-

ELIJAH. I have no idea what I mean to you? I have no idea what any of us mean to anybody. You want to know my truth? How I see it is most people- they latch onto somebody like building some fort, like those stick houses you make playing as kids, glue us together a family so we can forget how alone we really all are. I look at my father, and if he wasn’t my dad, I mean if he was a total stranger - I’m not certain we’d even say hello to each other. He’s never been particularly fond of me, I’m sure he never thought once about having a kid, and there I was, this strange little boy, he had to worry about feeding, and how in the hell did he get into my life... And then I am supposed to tickle him and tell him I love him? Better to just get your work done and get on with it.

ALICE. Sarah thinks I am batty to spend so much time with you. “I mean what is he going to amount to anyway. Do you really aspire to becoming a peanut farmer’s wife”, she says? And I tell her I wish that made a difference, but it doesn’t. It honestly doesn’t. I enjoy being with you more than anyone I know. How could I give that up? Well, I think maybe now I need to try to give it up. What do you think?

ELIJAH. I think I enjoy being with you more than anyone I know, too. But then, I don't know that many people so that isn't saying much. But, if that's what you need to do, I understand.

ALICE. Have you ever been whaling?

ELIJAH. I beg your pardon?

ALICE. Whaling? Ever been?

ELIJAH. No...

ALICE. Just wondering.

ELIJAH. Oh, uh-

ALICE. Where did that one come from?

ELIJAH. Yeah.

ALICE. I'm have to read Moby Dick by Friday. And I haven't started. I decided to do my final project on whether it is arguably the greatest novel ever written, that is until I finish my first one or two, and I needed to read at least 200 pages tonight.

ELIJAH. Oh.

ALICE. See-

ELI AND ALICE. Perfectly logical.

Mr. Pierce comes into the yard.

MR. PIERCE. Marguerite?

ELIJAH. No, Dad. It's Alice.

MR. PIERCE. Alice? Alice, who?

ELIJAH. Alice Wilcox, Dad.

MR. PIERCE. No, I'm looking for your mother. We're supposed to have some dinner. But I can't seem to find her. At all. She's something, that woman. She's something, all right. I should have gone to Panama, Son. I was all ready to go, you know. But I took one look at that girl, and I said to myself: "you must be some kind of fool to want to get on a boat and leave her behind. Who in their right mind could leave a girl like that." You say you haven't seen her? Son? Well, have you?

ELIJAH. No, Dad.

MR. PIERCE. Haven't seen her... Well, that's what I was afraid of. She's probably out back kicking and twirling and spinning. Keeping me waiting for my supper. Loves to keep me waiting. Well, hurry up, Son, and come inside and get washed up. I don't want to be waiting on you too. You hear me?

ELIJAH. Yes, Dad, I'm coming.

MR. PIERCE. *(as he leaves)* Who in their right mind could leave a woman like that?

ELIJAH. I really do need to go. Make sure he's all right.

ALICE. Eli?

ELIJAH. It's nothing. He'll be asleep soon. He just feels bad because he's getting too old to help with the farm. He's feeling more useless than ever. I'll come by soon and see you.

ALICE. Sure. Whenever.

The lights crossfade back to Alice's bedroom.

SARAH. How long ago was that?

ALICE. Three weeks ago. Three weeks...

SARAH. And you haven't heard a word from him?

ALICE. Not a word.

SARAH. And he knew today was your birthday?

ALICE. I told him. A couple of times. I mean, he had asked, and I told him. He might have forgotten, but he knew.

SARAH. Well. Maybe he did forget

ALICE. His father was very sick, Sarah. He does have a lot on his mind.

SARAH. True... Uh-oh, it's almost midnight. Happy birthday, Ali. One last time.

ALICE. Thanks. Where are you going?

SARAH. *(a phrase meaning to the bathroom)* I'm going to see a man about a dog.

ALICE. Close that window, will you, Sarah Jane?

SARAH. Sure. It had better not stay cold like this. I only brought one sweater. Ali? What is this?

ALICE. What?

SARAH. On the ledge here.

ALICE. What?

SARAH. It looks like a box.

ALICE. A box? Sarah, be careful. You'll kill yourself.

SARAH. It is a box, Ali. It's a present. And I bet you anything I know who it's from.

ALICE. *(opening the box)* He must have put it out there when we were having dinner. That jerk. What if I hadn't seen it?

SARAH. You didn't. I found it.

ALICE. *(It is the carved whale from the beginning of the play.)* Oh, look.

SARAH. What is it?

ALICE. It's a whale. A great white whale.

SARAH. A whale? *(She is closing the window.)*

ALICE. Like in "Moby Dick-"

SARAH. Oh, how romantic...

Claire walks in. She wears clothing from the mid seventies. She sits looking at Alice who is sitting on the bed. Sarah and Alice cannot see her. Two realities happening.

CLAIRE. Did you say something mother?

ALICE. There's a card, too.

SARAH. Who's it from, Ahab?

ALICE. Very funny. Look, he wrote me a poem.

SARAH. Well, that makes up for the whale.

CLAIRE. Mother?

ALICE. Where are you going?

Marc enters. Claire can see him Sarah and Alice cannot.

CLAIRE. I'm not going anywhere. *(to Marc)* Did you find a place?

MARC. *(At the same time as Sarah)* Only on the street. With a meter.

SARAH. *(Almost same time as Marc)* I told you, to the ladies. Don't worry, I'll be back to hear the poem, if it's not too mushy.

MARC. Nowhere else but in this slum lord section of Miami do they have parking meters.

SARAH. See, he didn't forget. He's just strange. I keep telling you that. *(She goes out.)*

CLAIRE. You didn't hurt the car, did you?

MARC. No. Love the neighborhood Mom, every ghetto should have palm trees... Hope we still have our hub caps in an hour. How is she?

CLAIRE. I'm not sure. She's been sleeping.

MARC. She doesn't look very good, does she?

CLAIRE. What do you expect, Marc?

MARC. Are *you* okay?

CLAIRE. Yes, I'm fine.

MARC. Look at this place...

CLAIRE. What about it?

MARC. It's not very nice, Mom. I mean, look at it.

CLAIRE. Marc-

MARC. It's pretty depressing.

ALICE. *(She has read the poem to herself and now reads it aloud.)*
If art is love;

Or is it love's an art?
I can never get it straight.
And if so, which do I choose?

CLAIRE. It's the best we could find.

MARC. Yeah, what were the bad one's like?

ALICE. Should I love like the painter,
Colorfully, stroke after stroke,
Stepping back to admire
Until I have you pictured forever?

MARC. Gram? Oh shit, Mom, do you have any quarters?

CLAIRE. Don't tell me you forgot to feed the meter...

MARC. There was a little time on it, relax, plenty of time...

ALICE. Or like the musician, do I
play a bit, then practice,
Practice harder, and play some more
Until I hear your song immortal?

CLAIRE. She talks to herself. Constantly now. *(Giving him quarters)* Do not tell me if you got a ticket.

MARC. Nice mumbling with you, Gram, be right back. Don't say a word we can understand till I get back. *(He leaves.)*

ALICE. Or like the dancer, leap into your arms,
Heart spinning, Blood swirling,
Every moment counting,
Arms outstretched, soaring high,
One big flourish before the curtain falls.

CLAIRE. Mother? Are you crying?

ALICE. *(She puts the card down, and looks at the whale. Then laughs through her tears.)* What difference does it make how? Just love me, silly. Like I love you... like I love you.

The lights fade to black with Alice on the bed and Claire sitting in the chair.

End of Act One

ACT TWO

The lights come up on a room in a nursing home in Miami, Florida. It is August, 1976 and Alice now quite old and very ill is lying in bed sleeping. Young Alice is standing nearby watching her. Her daughter, Claire Berkhartmeyer, who is 52 years old, is folding some housecoats and laundry and putting them away in a dresser. The room is plain, almost shabby and Claire has tried to brighten it up with a few of Alice's possessions.)

YOUNG ALICE. I've heard, you silly fool.

OLD ALICE. (*mumbling in her sleep*) I know what you've done.

CLAIRE. (*who only sees Old Alice*) Mother?

OLD ALICE. And don't you ever expect me to forgive you.

CLAIRE. Mother? Are you awake?

YOUNG ALICE. If this is just another one of your excuses to avoid me-

OLD ALICE. It's not going to work, you know. You can't get rid of me forever.

CLAIRE. Mother? No one is trying to get rid of you. What are you talking about? (*Alice rolls over, still asleep.*) Oh, this is too much for one person to bear. I can't take much more of this... How can you possibly sleep in here, Mother? It is stifling. (*She sits and wipes her forehead and sighs.*)... I brought you some new clothes. I put them away in your dresser... I brought you some coconut patties, too. Don't let them just sit in there and melt. You need a haircut, do you know that? We'll have to take you to get your hair done soon. I saw a place just down the street... We could go on Saturday. If it's not too hot. I'm not going anywhere if it's this hot... (*Stops*) Now see this is what I mean- I just had a whole scene and what was it for, to show it was hot in Miami, duh...and that I am a bitch. And in the whole first act did he once mention us? Or that my parents divorced when I was five. Which meant just like that we were cut off from the family. We had done more than enough to darken the name... My father and I, were never spoken of, financially and in every other way, forgotten. In the nineteen thirties to have your parents divorce, and to be a Jew, and to find yourself growing up in a Podunk Florida town because your father has moved you to live with him because it is not clear if your mother could ever hope to raise you, or go completely crackers, and harm herself. And to basically not know her at all, all the time you are growing up, school dances, graduation. She is just some woman who shows up on the oddest days and gives you a butterscotch

lifesavers every now and then, with her red lipstick, always a bit too red. Maybe a gift just once on one birthday, and once on Hanukah- the same year in fact, once in your whole life. And then one day you get a phone call and this complete stranger who just happens to be your mother is on the line and she needs your help, she needs a place to live... the state will no longer care for her, and well, that is the stuff of a good play if you ask me.

SARAH' S VOICE. Ali!

CLAIRE. Your friends all have June Cleaver-like mothers, cupcakes and Tupperware and girl-talk, someone to teach you makeup and kisses, to play scrabble on nights no boys have come calling...

(The lights crossfade to a writing table in a dorm room at Wharton. ALICE is looking at a term paper and frowning.)

SARAH. *(from outside)* Ali?

CLAIRE. And you have a stranger's voice on the phone asking you if she can move in with you... *(Lights out on Claire)*

SARAH. *(Coming into the room)* You must be deaf. I've been calling for you.

ALICE. I was trying to write.

SARAH. I did it. He gave me an "A". Do you believe it? On my chemistry paper. What did you get? *(Sarah sees it lying on the table.)* A "D-"? *(reading)* "The Differing Levels of Stupidity That Make Up The Controlled Environment of Warfare"? "Or How Much Gas Does It Take To Kill a Man Beautifully." You didn't turn this in, did you?

ALICE. Yes, why, you don't like it either?

SARAH. No.

ALICE. Well, I'm sorry.

SARAH. What is wrong with you?

ALICE. Nothing.

SARAH. Why did you do this?

ALICE. Eli was drafted, Sarah. I got a letter a few days ago. Into the Army.

SARAH. Drafted?

ALICE. Yes.

SARAH. I didn't know they were still drafting people.

ALICE. Apparently so. I was writing about Hydrochloric Acid, but I ripped it up. He won't last a minute, Sarah. I know it.

SARAH. Sure, he will. It might even be what *he* needs.

ALICE. I mean on the battlefield. He won't last a minute. He won't. He'll take off his helmet, sit down and try to reason with them.

SARAH. He has six months training anyway. Richard did. Six to eight months. The war will probably be over by then. Haven't you been listening in history class?

ALICE. Yes. Six months? Really?

SARAH. At least.

ALICE. Good. I mean, what kind of Army would want Eli?

SARAH. True.

ALICE. Can you picture him marching? In perfect step with the others? He'll never be able to do it.

SARAH. No. He won't.

ALICE. Where is Richard now?

SARAH. (*She is reading Alice's paper.*) He's in France somewhere. Near the Marne River...

ALICE. Don't you worry about him?

SARAH. Of course. Sure, I worry. All the time. But what can I do? I mean, what good is worrying? Besides, he'll be back. He'll make it. Richard's too resourceful to get killed.

ALICE. Well, I'm not going to be as good at this as you. I can tell already. This sitting by the fire and waiting for the men to come home from the kill...

SARAH. I don't believe you wrote this-

ALICE. Why, it's all true. All of it.

SARAH. This is horrible. "It is ironic that perhaps the most creative of the new methods of murder that our friend Mr. Chemistry has developed for the new War is from the gas family. Completely invisible except for its yellow-green color and sweet almost fruity fragrance. Dichlor-ic-"

ALICE. Dichloroethylsulphide. Yperite.

SARAH. "Otherwise known as Mustard Gas, is not only an effective killer, extremely lethal, but it is also an equally effective morale crusher. Every soldier has heard the stories and must daily live with the fear, when, he too, hears the explosion and sees the cloud of death it carries with it. He must sit and hope, maybe even say a silent prayer, that he, too, has time to reach for his mask-- so he won't end up like so many before him--twisting in agony--gaspng, choking, throwing up blood as the life is ripped from his lungs."

ALICE. Okay, maybe I went overboard a bit, but it's all true. Believe me. I did quite a bit of research. Do you know that almost a million men have been killed already? And 49,000 of them have been Americans.

SARAH. But it is for a cause, Ali. A good cause.

ALICE. I don't know about you, but I can't think of a single "cause" I would want to see Eli die for. Not one.

SARAH. Is this all true?

ALICE. What?

SARAH. All of this?

ALICE. Every word of it. But you won't hear it in chemistry class. No matter how hard you pay attention.

SARAH. This is horrible.

ALICE. Yes, it is.

SARAH. Now you've got me worried. I haven't heard from Richard in almost a month. What if he's in trouble?

ALICE. I'm sure he isn't.

SARAH. We're gonna be late for homemaking class. I would have heard by now, wouldn't I?

ALICE. Of course you would have. I'm sure he's fine. Besides, he's coming home, remember?

SARAH. He is, you know. I'm sure of it.

ALICE. Good. *(They begin to leave for class.)* I've always believed there is a great power in knowing something is true.

The lights start to crossfade to the nursing home. Alice is still sleeping. Claire is sitting in a chair watching her.

OLD ALICE. *(mumbling in her sleep)* Every good thing that has ever happened to me, I had some inkling, some way of knowing it was going to happen.

Marc enters wearing his Miami Dolphins cap.

MARC. You are going to kill me Mom.

CLAIRE. You got a ticket.

MARC. No. Moved it. Found a lot behind the 24 hour car wash and massage parlor. How's she doing?

CLAIRE. I'm not sure. She's been sleeping. Why am I going to kill you?

MARC. 'Cause now we either have to get a massage or a wash. I opt for the former. What is she doing in this place Mom?

CLAIRE. There are not many "places" that would even take her, Marc.

MARC. Why not? You pay them money, don't you?

CLAIRE. This is not the first home we tried, son. She's been tossed out of a few already. I am not blind you know. This is my mother. You think I want her here? You haven't been home for awhile. You don't realize how bad things have gotten.

MARC. I'm sorry. How bad is she, Mom?

CLAIRE. I don't know. I get a different story from every doctor.

MARC. Well, that's easy. Stick with the doctor who gives you the best story.

CLAIRE. She's like a child now. How she carries on. Makes a scene. You should see her. And she needs constant care. She forgets things, who she's talking to.

MARC. When did she get this bad?

CLAIRE. I don't know. It just keeps getting worse.

OLD ALICE. Why.

CLAIRE. First it got so bad we couldn't keep her at home anymore. She kept us up all night. And we couldn't leave her alone during the day.

OLD ALICE. Why would you do this?

CLAIRE. Now they've got her filled up with so many drugs, I've lost count. You can see it too.

OLD ALICE. I'll be alone.

CLAIRE. No one should have to go through this. No one.

OLD ALICE. You left me all alone.

MARC. What? What did you say? Grandma?

CLAIRE. She keeps mumbling to herself. She thinks we're trying to get rid of her.

MARC. Is that what you think? Yeah, well, fat chance, lady.

CLAIRE. She can't hear you, Son.

OLD ALICE. And you promised me. Promised.

MARC. Grandma?

OLD ALICE. (*very startled*) Get your hands off me. Don't you dare give me another of your goddamn shots.

MARC. Whoa!

CLAIRE. Marc!

OLD ALICE. Did you hear me?

MARC. Gram, it's me, Marc.

OLD ALICE. Marc?

MARC. Yes.

CLAIRE. Mother?

OLD ALICE. Is that you, Marc? It is you. Oh, my little Marc. My sweet little Marc.

MARC. How are you, Gram?

OLD ALICE. Terrible. I feel terrible. I thought you were that fat nurse with the mustache.

MARC. Nope, see, no mustache.

OLD ALICE. No, but you need a haircut. Oh, it is so good to see you.

MARC. Mom's here too.

OLD ALICE. I know. Hello, Claire.

CLAIRE. Hello, Mother.

OLD ALICE. You look good. Are you feeling better today?

CLAIRE. I'm all right. Why?

OLD ALICE. You looked terrible the last time you were here. I was worried about you.

CLAIRE. How are you? Better?

OLD ALICE. No, not really. But what do you care?

CLAIRE. All right, Mother, let's not start that.

OLD ALICE. (*Like a child*) Take me home then. It's awful here. I hate it here. I want to go home.

CLAIRE. Mother-

OLD ALICE. Please? Please, Claire?

CLAIRE. You know we can't, Mother. Now stop it.

OLD ALICE. I hate it here.

CLAIRE. The doctor says you need to be here.

OLD ALICE. I hate that doctor. What does he know. I want to go home, Sarah, make her take me home. I don't like it here. I want to leave. *(Pause, as she collects herself)* I'm going to die here, I hope you know that. You've left me here to die. *(She holds her chest.)*

MARC. Maybe we should get someone.

OLD ALICE. No, no, no! I'm fine. Don't go. They'll just give me another shot. Please. I'll be good. Please. Don't go. Don't go, my baby... Wait a minute, what in the fudge are you doing here? I thought you were up North?

MARC. I was. But I came home to see you.

OLD ALICE. That's a bunch of hooley. I haven't seen you in, I don't know how long-

MARC. A few months-

CLAIRE. Longer than that, Marc.

OLD ALICE. You're telling me. A few months. A year, maybe, is more like it. So?

MARC. So, what?

OLD ALICE. So, why are you back? What could bring you to this God-forsaken city in the middle of the summer.

MARC. It's a long story, Gram.

OLD ALICE. Well, go on, tell me, I'm not going anywhere. I can't. They tie us down at night.

MARC. They don't-

OLD ALICE. Sure.

MARC. This place sucks.

CLAIRE. Marc-

MARC. Well, it does.

OLD ALICE. You heard him, Claire. This place sucks.

CLAIRE. Both of you stop it.

OLD ALICE. *(to Marc)* Well, I'm glad *you're* here. Tell me what have you been doing? What's new?

MARC. Not much. Still working. Writing a little.

OLD ALICE. Good. Can anyone understand this one?

MARC. Hope so.

OLD ALICE. I mean that one play of yours, how long was that Claire?

CLAIRE. I certainly don't know-

OLD ALICE. It was three hours if it wasn't a minute. And I will kiss you right on the bottom you were born with if you could tell me what it was about.

MARC. It was dealt with greed Grandma. And it was two hours and forty minutes. And, it wasn't "about" *(makes quote gestures)* anything really. It was more of a mood piece...

OLD ALICE. A mood piece? For two hours and forty minutes? Is catatonia a mood?

MARC. You tell me.

OLD ALICE. Touché... And your mother showed me your latest one. About the Hostages, and the gas crisis, and the environment, and good Lord what isn't that play about...

MARC. Let's talk about something else, bed pans, anything....

OLD ALICE. Listen, James Joyce- the beginning was very confusing these two hostages- obviously a metaphor for what is going on in the Middle East, but then you just end- then repeat, and then it just stops-

MARC. Exactly I wanted it to have no clear beginning- I was playing with structure- if the middle comes first- and then if there was no end, only a beginning of an end-

OLD ALICE. Marc, I am seventy six years old, do you think I want to argue confusing endings with you? And that title?

MARC. What is wrong with Something Better?

OLD ALICE. Think about it... But don't pay me any mind, I am just dying and what is my worry if all of fine art and literature are racing me to the finish line. Why is it every generation thinks they have the corner on what art should be, needs to be, must become. You are not the only artist who is convinced he is avant and the rest of the world is tres gard... At Wharton we used to Isadora dance with no knickers on and think we were changing the world... Know where that term comes from?

MARC. What? Knickers?

OLD ALICE. Avant gard.

MARC. No. Actually.

OLD ALICE. Your mother does. She's a good teacher. Knows her literature...

CLAIRE. As if I had a choice...

OLD ALICE. Tell him Claire-

CLAIRE. Avant gard was a military term- the French military- to be in front of the troops- as in the scouts sent out to make sure it was safe-

MARC. For the others, to blaze the trail, what is wrong with that-

OLD ALICE. Not blazing- dying. They were sent down the road like canaries in a coal mine.

CLAIRE. That is open to interpretation.

MARC. If no one ever took the risk there would never be any change-

OLD ALICE. They were built in bullet catchers! Change? Stop trying to be bold and new! The one thing you can count on to never change, is that nothing important ever changes!!! (*an awkward pause. Finally.*) How's Karen?

MARC. (*after looking at his Mother*) She's fine.

OLD ALICE. She's so pretty. Is she here?

MARC. No, she's in New York...

OLD ALICE. I like her. Has she read your play?

MARC. We broke up, Gram. About a week ago.

OLD ALICE. I thought you were going to say that. Why?

MARC. Who knows. There were a lot of reasons. We're both still trying to pick the best one.

OLD ALICE. Well, that explains the trip to Miami in August.

MARC. Hey, now I resent that. I flew five thousand miles to see you.

OLD ALICE. Te ptt. Like hell you did. But that' okay. Sometimes it's good to come home and lick your wounds. Sort things out.

MARC. Get your laundry done.

OLD ALICE. Ha. Yes. Oh, it's good to see you.

MARC. It's good to see you too.

OLD ALICE. It may still work out, you know, who knows.

MARC. I doubt it, but maybe.

OLD ALICE. You'll have to tell me about it. Maybe I can help.

MARC. Sure, Gram. Maybe.

OLD ALICE. What? You don't think I'd understand? You think I'm such an old cow I couldn't possibly begin to understand?

MARC. Moo...

CLAIRE. Marc-

OLD ALICE. Hush a minute, Claire. This boy of yours still thinks of me as this old woman, who's been boarding in the house with him for as long as he can remember, and who can blame him? That's all he knows about me. And now, he probably thinks I'm a loony because I'm sure you've told him a thing

or two. Well, maybe I am half gone, but I have a thing or two of my own to say before I go-

MARC. You're not going anywhere, Gram.

OLD ALICE. Yes, I am. I'm dying. They tell me I have a hole in my heart, which doesn't surprise me, but I'm glad you're here. Because we have some talking to do.

CLAIRE. Mother-

OLD ALICE. What, Claire? What?

CLAIRE. We can only stay for a few more minutes today.

OLD ALICE. Why?

CLAIRE. George, has a doctor's appointment at four.

OLD ALICE. What's wrong with George?

CLAIRE. Nothing.

OLD ALICE. Then what does he need a doctor for?

CLAIRE. It's nothing, Mother. Nothing, really.

MARC. He has diabetes-

CLAIRE. Marc-

MARC. It's official now.

OLD ALICE. Diabetes?

CLAIRE. Yes, Mother.

OLD ALICE. That's what you call "nothing"? Diabetes?

CLAIRE. I didn't want to worry you.

OLD ALICE. You mean, you didn't think I'd care. How is he?

CLAIRE. Fine. As long as he takes his insulin. The doctor just wants to monitor his progress, that's all.

OLD ALICE. No wonder you look so tired lately. Is he still eating for four? (*Marc smiles.*) Well, it's true. How does he expect to get better eating like that? Your father is the only man I know who could empty a Piggly Wiggly single-handed. My friend Sarah had an Aunt Peggy just like him.

CLAIRE. He's on a diet now. A strict diet.

OLD ALICE. Well, that's good.

MARC. Right. I give it two weeks.

CLAIRE. All right-

OLD ALICE. Two weeks? That's good for him.

MARC. Well, she said it was strict, didn't she?

CLAIRE. All right, both of you, stop it.

OLD ALICE. Well, Claire, it's true. I've been saying it for years: why you married that man, I'll never know. I mean, what kind of last name is Berkhartzmeyer? That should have been reason enough to write him off, but one good look at him, and any fool could tell he was the booby prize.

CLAIRE. And we all know you're the expert when it comes to marriage, aren't you, mother? Didn't you set some kind of record. Down the aisle and into the courthouse, isn't that what they used to whisper? (*pause*)

OLD ALICE. I know I didn't love him, Claire, but I was good to him. And I know I wasn't very good to you, and you hate me for it. But I was scared, don't you see? I was scared you could tell. You used to look at me with those green eyes, just like his, and I knew you could tell.

CLAIRE. It's alright, Mother.

OLD ALICE. But I needed him, Claire. At the time, I needed him. And so I thought I loved him. And I needed you. You were my reason for being. And he took that away from me. He just took it away. And look what I'm left with. Look what I have to show for it. In and out of hospitals for years. And a daughter who hates me, who doesn't even know me-

CLAIRE. Who got you out of those hospitals. Who gave you a place to live.

OLD ALICE. Who put me right back in this one-

CLAIRE. And don't say I hate you. I don't hate you.

OLD ALICE. Then why do you leave me here? Why else would you let them give me drugs, and dope me up, and leave me here to die? Why else, if you didn't hate me?

MARC. Come on, Gram. Stop it.

OLD ALICE. I only wanted the best for you, Claire, and look what I've got. Look. Look where you've left me to die. Look at me... You do hate me. You won't even look at me. Look, look what I've become.

CLAIRE. (*picking up her purse and starting to leave*) You are what you've always been. Someone's problem.

OLD ALICE. I'm your mother, Claire.

MARC. Mom?

OLD ALICE. That's what I am. Take a good look. Take a good look at your mother.

Claire is gone. The lights crossfade to just outside the dorm room, Sarah is holding a telephone waiting to give it to Alice.

ALICE. Is it my momma?

SARAH. I don't know. I didn't answer it. Laura Dirkin did. She said it was a man's voice.

ALICE. Hello?

ELIJAH. (*who is on another telephone stage left*) Hello, Ali?

ALICE. Yes?

ELIJAH. Hi.

ALICE. Eli? Is that you?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. Hi. How are you?

SARAH. Is it him?

ALICE. Yes. Shhh.

ELIJAH. Fine, you?

ALICE. Okay. Surprised. Where are you? Where are you telephoning me from?

ELIJAH. I'm in Atlanta.

ALICE. Atlanta? What are you doing in Atlanta?

ELIJAH. I heard they had a nice zoo.

ALICE. Very funny. I thought you were stationed in Macon.

ELIJAH. I was. We're being shipped out next week.

ALICE. Next week? *(to Sarah)*

SARAH. What?

ALICE. You told me six months-

ELIJAH. We leave for New York on Monday.

SARAH. It was.

ELIJAH. How are you?

ALICE. I'm fine. Busy. Exams are next week.

ELIJAH. Are they...

ALICE. Yes. Yech. And I'm doing some writing.

ELIJAH. Good.

ALICE. Just a story. The beginning of a story. For you. For your birthday. It's about a chair. Just kidding. I'm so glad you telephoned. I miss you.

ELIJAH. I miss you too.

ALICE. I can't believe you're doing this. It must be costing you a fortune.

ELIJAH. Yes, but you're worth it.

ALICE. Sure, I know that. But since when do you?

ELIJAH. Since I became a rich soldier on pay day.

ALICE. Uh-oh. Look out Atlanta. Listen, there's a nice hat in a shop on Piedmont, if you want to pick it up for me. As long you're feeling generous.

ELIJAH. The grey one or the red?

ALICE. The red, of course.

ELIJAH. Of course.

ALICE. You're becoming quite the flirt, has anybody ever told you that?

ELIJAH. Comes with the uniform. You know us soldiers.

ALICE. Well, I'm glad to see the Army has done something for you.

ELIJAH. Yeah, I can hardly wait to see what comes next...

ALICE. What? Speak up. I can barely hear you. Don't mumble, you ninny. At five dollars a word, the least you can do is speak up.

ELIJAH. What do you care? You're not paying for it.

ALICE. True. But I can't stand to see money wasted. Deep down I'm my father's girl.

ELIJAH. What are you doing this weekend?

ALICE. Excuse me?

ELIJAH. I said, "What are you doing this weekend?"

ALICE. (*A jest*) Well, we were going fox hunting, but the dogs got sick.

SARAH. Fox hunting?

ALICE. Why?

ELIJAH. I was wondering if you wanted to come to Atlanta. For the weekend. I'd like to see you. Very much. We could go to dinner. Wherever you wanted.

ALICE. I'm sorry, I still don't think I can hear you. Did you say: "I want you to come to Atlanta?"

ELIJAH. For the weekend, yes.

ALICE. How?

ELIJAH. By train-

ALICE. Oh.

ELIJAH. I could pay you back for the tickets. I'll pay for everything. You just have to get here.

ALICE. Are you feeling okay?

ELIJAH. Yes. Well- I'm feeling fine. Ali, please come. I want to see you. I'd like to talk to you.

ALICE. (to Sarah) He wants me to come to Atlanta.

SARAH. What?

ALICE. Shhh! Sarah says "hello".

ELIJAH. Tell her "hello" for me.

ALICE. He says "hello".

SARAH. Is he crazy?

ALICE. Sarah-

ELIJAH. Tell her I'm not crazy.

ALICE. Are you sure?

ELIJAH. I just need to see you.

ALICE. I can't just come to Atlanta. I can't just leave school.

ELIJAH. Why not?

ALICE. I can't.

ELIJAH. Come...

ALICE. I don't believe you.

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. How long are you going to be gone?

ELIJAH. What do you mean-how long am I going to be gone"?

ALICE. I mean, after you leave Atlanta?

ELIJAH. Ali, I'm going to a war. They don't give you much of an itinerary, you know.

ALICE. No?

ELIJAH. No.

ALICE. Well, that's very rude of them. I wouldn't go then. That was a joke, feeble as it may have seemed.

ELIJAH. I heard you.

ALICE. Don't be upset.

ELIJAH. I'm not upset.

ALICE. You are upset. I'd be upset. I am upset. Eli, do you have any idea what you are asking me to do?

ELIJAH. Yes, I am asking you to get on a train and come to Atlanta and spend this weekend with me.

ALICE. You've never even asked me --

ELIJAH. I know. Well, now I am...

ALICE. Eli, you have awfully odd ideas about courting. Has anyone ever told you that?

ELIJAH. I'm scared, Ali. And you're the only person I know who would understand.

ALICE. What are you scared of, Sweetheart? That was a stupid question. I'd be scared too. I'd be terrified... Eli, I will be expelled from here if I leave without permission.

ELIJAH. Alright, I understand. What I'm asking is ridiculous. I understand. I just got this whim, that's all. It was silly.

ALICE. It's not silly. It's not. It's just pretty much impossible, that's all. Will you telephone me again, though, before you go? I like talking to you on the telephone. It's much better than writing.

ELIJAH. Sure, if I can.

ALICE. But don't stop writing, all right?

ELIJAH. Alright. I should go then. There's a line of people wanting to use the phone here.

ALICE. Okay. Promise you'll telephone me.

ELIJAH. I'll try. If not, I'll talk to you soon. (*About to hang up.*)

ALICE. Alright. Eli, are you there?

ELIJAH. Yes? Ali? (*pause*) Ali, what?

ALICE. Where are you? I mean, where are you staying?

ELIJAH. The Peachtree Hotel. Why?

ALICE. Where is it?

ELIJAH. On Peachtree Street, I guess. Why?

ALICE. I want to come. I'm going to come.

ELIJAH. What?

SARAH. What?

ALICE. I said, I'm coming. To see you.

ELIJAH. How?

ALICE. By train. Wasn't that your idea?

ELIJAH. Yes-

ALICE. Well, then, listen to me, you peanut brain. You had better meet me at the train station. By the main ticket window. There's a clock there, a big clock, right next to the window, I think. Yes, I'm sure of it. Alright?

ELIJAH. Alright, I'll find it.

ALICE. You'd better. I'll meet you under the clock. Tomorrow.

SARAH. Ali-

ALICE. Hush.

ELIJAH. When?

ALICE. Tomorrow, you ninny.

ELIJAH. When tomorrow?

ALICE. How should I know when tomorrow? I'm making this up as I go along. Just go there and wait. Alright?

ELIJAH. Alright. Ali, thanks.

ALICE. Sure. What are friends for?

ELIJAH. Bye.

ALICE. Bye.

SARAH. Are you crazy?

ALICE. Very. But I'll be damned if I'm going to let him leave, just like that.

SARAH. You're not really going to do it, though-

ALICE. Of course I am.

SARAH. How?

ALICE. I don't know. On a train. Come on. We've got a lot of work to do.

The lights crossfade back to the nursing home. Marc is next to Alice's bed hoping she won't hear him as he picks up his cap he left on the chair. He makes a noise accidentally.

OLD ALICE. Are you looking for something?

MARC. No. I couldn't tell if you were awake?

OLD ALICE. Neither can I. Half the time. Come here, and sit down by me.

MARC. No, Gram, I just came to make sure you were okay. We're going to go now.

OLD ALICE. Marc, wait. Don't go. You just got here.

MARC. We have to. We have to pick up Dad.

OLD ALICE. But I need to talk to you. I need to tell you something.

MARC. It'll have to wait, Gram.

OLD ALICE. But it can't. You don't understand.

MARC. It'll have to.

OLD ALICE. Marc, listen to me. I'm going to die.

MARC. Gram-

OLD ALICE. I'm not complaining. Now you listen to me-

MARC. Okay, but hurry.

OLD ALICE. Look, I'm the one who doesn't have much time, not you.

MARC. Mom is waiting out front.

OLD ALICE. She'll wait.

MARC. *(pause)* What?

OLD ALICE. I want you to understand something. Something about life.

MARC. Gram...

OLD ALICE. There are moments. We don't get to choose them--- most of the time they are things we have no control over. But if you are lucky and learn to listen to, I don't know, to some sort of signals, you will get this feeling, this premonition, that you are smack dab right inside one, of those moments where your history is being written. It's as if you can reach out and feel that if you turn left instead of right, just round this corner, and you will see an old friend. And there you are suspended in this moment wondering if

you should say hello, and you do, and most days you are very busy, but you happen to have time this one day. Just a Tuesday. And he does too, and he asks you out for lunch. And there is something about his laugh, that feels alright. Comfortable. That helps you to forget. And then, before you know it, you begin to date, and somehow you are getting married, having a child, and all because you said hello and turned that particular corner.

MARC. Gram, don't get all Kierkegardian on me it's too hot...

ALICE. Did you know I was once in love? Desperately in love, with someone, long before I married your Grandfather. It was a long way back, just after the dinosaurs. I was still living in Macon. And I was going to Wharton School for Girls. And the boy I loved was about to be shipped overseas to fight in the war. He was in the Army. Anyway, he called me one weekend, saying he was in Atlanta, and he wanted me to come visit him and wish him off. He wanted to see me. Now you have to understand, Marc, girls didn't act like they do now, back then, we didn't just run off and live with our boyfriends whenever we felt like it. In fact, if a girl even spent the night with a boy before she was married- everyone would have pretended it had never happened. No one would have ever talked about it. But he wanted me to come to Atlanta- and something told me to go. Not to say no.

She crosses to a box and opens it and takes out her whale.

MARC. So you went?

OLD ALICE. You bet your sweet patooties, I went. Wild animals couldn't have kept me out of Atlanta that weekend.

MARC. Was he glad to see you?

OLD ALICE. Yes, yes, he was. And I was glad to see him. He looked so beautiful. He was in his uniform. All pressed. He was the best looking man I've ever seen... And he was so glad to see me... *(She is trying not to cry now.)* I'm sorry. Oh, I miss him so much, Sarah. I loved him so much. I don't know if you can understand.

MARC. Gram? Look, let me tell Mom to go on without me.

OLD ALICE. No, I'll be fine-

MARC. I'll come right back.

OLD ALICE. Are you sure?

MARC. Yeah, I'll take a bus home. Hey, don't worry, I wouldn't miss the end of this story for the world.

OLD ALICE. Come back.

MARC. I will.

He goes out. Alice wipes her eyes and sighs.

OLD ALICE. Come back....

The lights crossfade to a hotel room in Atlanta, back in 1918. There is a large bed with a sheet propped over it, a makeshift canopy bed. Elijah is asleep on it. His head is bandaged and his face is bruised. Alice is sitting in a chair, looking at him, a blanket pulled over her. It is late morning. Eli rolls over onto the bandage on his forehead.

ELIJAH. Ow! (*startled, he sits up quickly and knocks into the makeshift canopy, which falls. Tangled and half awake, he tries to free himself, and, like in a slapstick comedy, in doing so, falls out of the bed.*) Ow! Damn!

ALICE. Good morning.

ELIJAH. Huh? Oh, yeah. Hi. Good morning.

ALICE. How's your head?

ELIJAH. Terrible. Alice, what did I do?

ALICE. You were in a fight. A fist fight.

ELIJAH. Great. With who?

ALICE. Well, I didn't get his name. He was a soldier too. Pretty big.

ELIJAH. Oh. How big?

ALICE. Big.

ELIJAH. Very big? (*She starts to gesture.*) I think I get the picture. I haven't been in a fight since grammar school. Philip Perry and I. I won that one. How'd I do?

ALICE. Well, put it this way, you've won one and you've lost one.

ELIJAH. How bad did I lose?

ALICE. Not too bad. It was over pretty quick.

ELIJAH. Was it?

ALICE. Yes.

ELIJAH. Well, remind me not to try and help you next time.

ALICE. I was doing just fine without you.

ELIJAH. Were you?

ALICE. Yes. I threw the champagne bottle at him.

ELIJAH. You what?

ALICE. Well, he was hurting you.

ELIJAH. I hope you hit him-

ALICE. No, but it scared him off.

ELIJAH. Good for you.

ALICE. I thought it was pretty spunky of me.

ELIJAH. You wasted a perfectly good bottle of champagne though.

ALICE. Well, it was the second bottle...

ELIJAH. Oh, well, then.

ALICE. So now has it all come back to you?

ELIJAH. Most of it. I remembered most of it. I just hoped it was all a bad dream. So, aren't you glad you came?

ALICE. Well, it certainly hasn't been boring.

ELIJAH. Did I wake you last night? At all?

ALICE. No, you slept. Pretty soundly.

ELIJAH. Did you sleep over there?

ALICE. Yes.

ELIJAH. Why? Was I snoring?

ALICE. No, I just felt more comfortable over here. I couldn't sleep for a while, from all the excitement.

ELIJAH. Great...

ALICE. What?

ELIJAH. Well, that is hardly the way I wanted the night to turn out.

ALICE. Could have fooled me.

ELIJAH. What?

ALICE. Nothing.

ELIJAH. No, what did you mean by that?

ALICE. You mean it wasn't all a big plan to avoid me again?

ELIJAH. Listen, I want to talk to you about that.

ALICE. Eli, relax. I was just kidding.

ELIJAH. I know. But I want to talk to you about that.

ALICE. We've already talked about it-

ELIJAH. When, last night?

ALICE. No, before. A long time ago. Many times.

ELIJAH. But we didn't talk about it last night. Did we?

ALICE. No-

ELIJAH. Oh. Because I was trying to get drunk enough to talk about it.

ALICE. Well, good. But now we're both sober, and I slept about five minutes, so I'm pretty exhausted. So let's not talk about it now? Alright? I really don't feel like it.

ELIJAH. Alright. Alice, I have two things... Two things I want to say to you... And then I'll shut up.

ALICE. You don't have to shut up-

ELIJAH. Because it seems to give you such pain to talk to me-

ALICE. It doesn't give me pain. Go on...

ELIJAH. Thing number one...

ALICE. Thing number one.

ELIJAH. This is hard.

ALICE. See...

ELIJAH. Ali, I enlisted. I wasn't drafted.

Mr. Pierce appears on the porch. Two realities.

ALICE. / MR. PIERCE. What?

ELIJAH. I wasn't drafted. I enlisted.

MR. PIERCE. You did what?

ELIJAH. I lied to you. I'm sorry. I knew you'd kill me if I told you the truth.

ALICE. Why?

MR. PIERCE. You think I don't see what you're doing, don't you?

ELIJAH. You'd know how wrong it was, and you wouldn't be afraid to say it.

MR. PIERCE. Well, don't kid yourself. I know what you're up to-

ALICE. No, I mean what would make you do a thing like that?

ELIJAH. You are away in school, and got so... I don't know sad, and my father-

MR. PIERCE. Oh, no you don't!

ELIJAH. I couldn't take his yelling anymore.

MR. PIERCE. Don't you go trying to blame this on me. Don't you dare. I've been trying to make something of this farm, to make a life for you, for I don't know how many years. And from day one, all you could think about was a way out of here. You just couldn't wait, could you? Just like your mother. Just can't wait to leave. Well, go on. Go.

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. When do you leave?

ELIJAH. The end of next week.

MR. PIERCE. Don't waste much time, do you?

ELIJAH. It's not really up to me.

MR. PIERCE. No, of course not... What about the farm?

ELIJAH. I've already taken care of that.

MR. PIERCE. Son...

ELIJAH. I've got a man and his boy coming by-

MR. PIERCE. Don't do this...

ELIJAH. To talk about overseeing the place while I'm gone.

MR. PIERCE. What do you mean overseeing?

ELIJAH. Helping you out while I'm gone.

MR. PIERCE. You said overseer. You didn't say help.

ELIJAH. Dad-

MR. PIERCE. I don't need any stranger to tell me how to run my farm.

ELIJAH. You can't do it all by yourself.

MR. PIERCE. I've been doing just fine by myself up 'til now, haven't I? I don't need you or anybody else to tell me how to run my farm. You want to go? Go. But you leave me and my land alone. And another thing, don't you ever come back here again. You hear me? You leave, but don't you ever set foot on this farm again. Ever.

The lights crossfade to the hotel room.

ELIJAH. I do seem to have a knack for upsetting him.

ALICE. From what I've seen, it doesn't take much.

ELIJAH. Well, it's not the first time he told me never to come back. When I was seventeen, I told him I was in love with a girl I had met in school, and that her family had asked me to go hiking up north with them. I told him her name was Joanne. Joanne Ferguson. Of course, there was no Joanne Ferguson. I was making it up.

ALICE. I don't understand.

ELIJAH. I know. Wait. Let me finish. I was making it up because I wanted to get away for a few days. And I needed a good excuse. And he told me I couldn't go, but I went anyway. And to this day, that's where he thinks I went. Hiking with Joanne Ferguson and her family.

ALICE. So, where did you go?

ELIJAH. To New York. I hopped the train to New York. I wanted to see my mother. It was my birthday, and I hadn't heard from her. Again. And, I don't know, I just felt like it was time to try and find her. Anyway, I had this address from the last letter she had written, so I went. And when I got there I couldn't decide what to say, so I sat down on the steps to try to figure it out, and just then, this little boy opens the door to sneak outside. He was about seven, and he had curly red hair and freckles. And he was playing with a toy gun, and he looks up at me, points the gun and says: "Sssshh!" Then he whispers: "Put your hands up." And I did. And then he says in the great way only a kid can immediately, you now, get bold: "Hi" ... "Hi" ... "you live here?" And I said: "No, not really. I'm just visiting. A friend upstairs ... "Oh, we live here," he says proudly. "Do you," I say forgetting my hands are up. "I said put your hands up and keep them up." Just then she calls through the door. "Aaron? Aaron, where are you?" "That's my Mom." he says. And then he looks at me real hard. "Okay, I guess I'll let you go. You can go now." And I said, "Thank you," and started to walk upstairs. And just as I get one flight up, his mother - my mother - comes out looking very worried, and she starts hugging him. "You scared me. I didn't know where you were." "I was playing," he says. And then she kissed him on the forehead. "Well, don't go outside like that, sweetheart." she said. "It's too dangerous." "I know," he said, "I almost shot a man." And he pointed up toward me, so I ducked back. But I saw her. I saw my mother. Her hair and her white robe. She had turned around and was carrying the boy in her arms like she used to carry me. And she was tickling him, and he was giggling... They went inside and shut the

door, and I waited a bit and then walked back down the stairs. And I could hear Aaron playing inside, shooting "Bang, bang." And I just kept walking, and when I got outside, I started to run. And I would have run all the way back to Georgia, if I could have. I don't know why it hurt me so much, but it did. To see my mother hug him and kiss him on the forehead. I had never felt anything like that before. That ache in my stomach. Anyway, I got home, and my father whipped me good for leaving without his permission. But, I never told him. I even waited a few weeks and told him Joanne Ferguson and I had broken up. So that he wouldn't ask me why she never came around. He loved that. "See, son, what did I tell you? Never trust a woman. Never." And for the first time, I agreed with him. I knew what he meant. And I said: "You're right, Dad. Don't worry. I know what you mean. I understand now." God, my head is killing me.

ALICE. What is it, sweetheart?

ELIJAH. I mean, I haven't been able to trust a single thing I have ever tried to do. Don't you see that?

ALICE. Why?

ELIJAH. Oh, come on. You know how ridiculous I am. I must have tried a hundred different things to want to be and never followed through with any of them. I'm always too afraid. I haven't finished a damn thing I've started in I don't know how long.

ALICE. You finished your father's chair.

ELIJAH. Big deal.

ALICE. And my whale.

ELIJAH. I'm talking about life things, Alice. What I'm going to do with my life. I'm twenty-five years old, and I have no life yet. No goals.

ALICE. You've got time. Twenty-five is not the end of the world, you know.

ELIJAH. I know that... Lordy... I feel like I've already been to war.

ALICE. Good, don't go then.

ELIJAH. I've thought of that, believe me ... It's not that I'm a coward, Ali. I'm not afraid.

ALICE. I know, I saw you fight an ox, remember? Oh, Eli, it's my fault isn't it.

ELIJAH. What? That you are so pretty. Why do you have to be so pretty?

ALICE. Eli-

ELIJAH. You are.

ALICE. Yeah, well, I don't feel very "pretty" right now. No, this whole war thing. I begged you to leave the farm and make something of yourself. You ninny, why did you listen to me? Why?

ELIJAH. I love you, Alice Wilcox... That's thing number two. That I wanted to say to you. I love you. *(She turns away)* Well, I didn't expect you to be thrilled, but I didn't expect it to upset you.,

ALICE. Stop it...

ELIJAH. I love you, Ali. I just never have been able to admit it. But, it's true... Look at me. Look at me. *(She does.)* I love you more than anything else in the whole world.

He reaches out and takes her in his arms. And kisses her.

ALICE. Oh, I love you, Eli. I love you so much.

ELIJAH. *(She hits his head accidentally.)* Ow! Careful.

ALICE. Sorry.

ELIJAH. Alice, I have no idea what I want to do when I get back.

ALICE. Don't worry about that-

ELIJAH. But I do know I want you to be part of my life. That much I'm sure of.

ALICE. Well, you have to start somewhere...

ELIJAH. I don't want to lose you, Ali. But I don't expect you to sit at home and wait for me. I just don't want to lose you either.

ALICE. Eli, I love you. I've known that I love you for quite some time now-

ELIJAH. And I love you-

ALICE. Yeah?

ELIJAH. Yes.

ALICE. So then how are you going to lose me, Silly? You couldn't get rid of me even when you wanted to... I would wait forever for you, don't you know that?

He kisses her again. Then her neck. Her shoulders. And they lower down to the bed. The lights crossfade to the nursing home. Old Alice is alone.

OLD ALICE. *(Said with young Alice as the last scene crossfades)* I'd wait forever, don't you know that ...

Marc enters.

MARC. If you're asleep again, I'm going home.

OLD ALICE. I'm not asleep. I was just resting my eyes. I've been waiting for you. Thought you weren't coming back.

MARC. I told you I would.

OLD ALICE. I've never gotten over losing him, Marc. Never. And I've taken it out on everyone. Even myself. I couldn't write... Nothing ... Nothing made any sense after that.

MARC. He did die, then-

OLD ALICE. Yes-

MARC. In the war?

OLD ALICE. Yes. He left Atlanta, and I went back to school. And four and a half weeks later, he was dead. Killed in the Meuse-Argonne battle. Near a forest. Poor Eli. He hardly lasted a month.

MARC. Shit.

OLD ALICE. And after he had promised me he would come back, Sarah ... I had this friend, her name was Sarah. She was luckier. He came back. Richard Lamping. They even got married. Moved to Arkansas... Eli's father died the same year. The Spanish Flu. Took about half our town... They buried Eli in France. I went there once. To visit him. It's a nice grave site.

But there were so many... So many... Anyway, I don't know why I'm tell you all this-

MARC. I'm glad you did.

OLD ALICE. I guess, I just wanted to you to know your grandmother isn't some old loony, mooching off her daughter in her final days. But, that's what I am, I guess. That's what I am.

MARC. I can't believe this

OLD ALICE. What

MARC. I've known you my whole life, and we have never talked about any of this, not once. There is so much I want to know. Gram, how can you be so sure? Don't be angry, but with what is going on with me and Karen, I just- I mean how did you know that he was the one.

OLD ALICE. There is no "one" my sweet. There is never only one. But there is right. And right feels much, much better than wrong. And try as you might, but wrong-- it won't ever wake up one morning and feel right.

MARC. But how can you be sure.

OLD ALICE. You will.

MARC. I need me one of those moments Those life changing time warps...

OLD ALICE. Eli used to say the best things in life are always mistakes, haven't you heard that.

MARC. Uh, No.

OLD ALICE. That's what I'd said. I'd said "no I've never heard that." And he'd said "neither have I, but it makes me feel better to say it." But now I would also say that the best things in my life have come out of my mistakes. I have you, and your mother.

MARC. This is reeking havoc on my self-esteem issues.

OLD ALICE. Don't you ever go off and fight a war. Do you hear me? Ever. I mean that, Marc. Work in a hospital, Type letters, if you have to. But don't you ever walk onto a battlefield with a gun to shoot someone else's boy. You hear me?

MARC. Okay.

OLD ALICE. Promise me.

MARC. I promise. But I don't think you have much to worry about though, Gram. I just missed one war. And everyone thought that one was stupid, so I don't think we're going to have another one for a while.

OLD ALICE. Don't kid yourself.

MARC. No, really. War is very unpopular now.

OLD ALICE. It was very unpopular then, Marc, believe me. The one thing that never changes... *(She closes her eyes.)*

MARC. I know... I know... Hey, I think you need to get some rest now. What do you think?

OLD ALICE. I think so. You're a good boy, Marc. Do you know that?

MARC. Thank you. You're not a bad grandmother either. Do you want anything? Before I leave?

OLD ALICE. Yes. On the dresser. My whale. My little white whale. There on the dresser.

MARC. This?

OLD ALICE. Yes, Eli made it for me.

MARC. Really? Well, then okay, one whale coming up. Here, you go. Anything else?

OLD ALICE. No. Thank you. It's funny I used to think: "How am I going to live, without him? My whole life, without him? And now that it's over, I'm worried that I still won't have him. I'm scared, Marc. What if I die, and he isn't there?"

MARC. You're not going anywhere, Gram. I'll come by and see you in a few days, okay? *(He kisses her.)* You get some rest. Bye-bye. *(He is gone.)*

OLD ALICE. Good-bye, Marc.

Lights crossfade to Marc who is down center.

MARC. She died later that afternoon. She was right about that... I stopped writing the play with no end or middle or beginning. Because things do end.

My Grandmother, Alice Wilcox, was born in at the turn of a century, in 1900, and lived through two World Wars, and electricity, and airplanes, and men on the moon, television, the automobile, a gas crises, the atomic bomb. She listened to ragtime and big band, bee-bop and even a little rock and roll. She lived seventy six long years, but she didn't even have a will. She didn't really own anything. Still, she left these in her room with a note saying they were for me. This is the poem that Eli wrote for her birthday. And this is a letter he wrote her from overseas... Alice, Hi. I hope you're all right and that you are getting my letters. But it just occurred to me that I might have written to the wrong address, since I haven't heard from you. If I am, I'm sorry. My address book got soaked in the rain. I'm in a forest near Rheims. It's beautiful here. I'd like to come back someday after the fighting... I've been in two battles already, Ali, and I don't mind saying I hope they're my last. There's talk of the war being over soon and I hope they know what they're talking about because it's not everything it's cracked up to be.

The lights start to come up on the hospital bed where young Alice is standing over Old Alice. The pas de deux from Giselle can be heard.

I have to go now. But I'll say more later. I already have in my other letters. But I guess some girl in Wyoming is getting those. Write me if you can.

Elijah appears in the doorway. Young Alice sees him and isn't startled. They look at each other for a long beat.

I can't wait to see you again, Ali. I miss you already. I can't wait to run "leaping into your arms."

Alice runs to him and he lifts her high in the air. Slowly she begins to slide down his body. Her hands run through his hair, touch his cheeks-

MARC. I love you more than anything in the world,

Her arms spread wide and slowly wrap around his back, until they finally kiss.

MARC. Eli

The lights have gone out on Marc and fade slowly on Alice and Elijah as they embrace. The last thing we see is her arms slowly circling him in and holding on to him. The lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY