

J, Turtle, Loverboy, and the Asshole Father,
or (Noble pursuits vs the Id)

A Play in Two - Acts

By Kendra Augustin

augustinkendra@gmail.com

<https://www.kendraaugustin.com/>

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JESSIE, 35, a pianist and harpist, not quite as successful as she'd like to be, desperate to become a Fulbright Scholar, Myrtle's mother.

MYRTLE/TURTLE/ANNABELLE, 15, Jessie's colorful haired daughter, a bit bruised, foul mouthed, a budding scientist and part time poet.

LEO, 38, visual artist/art history professor, Jessie's long- term boyfriend, desires domesticity more than he initially let's on.

RAFE, 46, Myrtle's father, Jessie's ex, former bad boy, current bad boy.

SETTING:

PRESENT DAY

LOCATION:

JESSIE AND LEO'S UPPER WEST SIDE LIVING ROOM

JESSIE's living room.

There's a grand piano with a bench on the left side of the living room. A harp with a stool on the right side. A sofa is in the center of the two. A side table on the left of the sofa holds a landline phone. Something like a French Vintage coffee table, with neatly laid down graphic novels on top of it, is in front of the sofa. An arm chair is across from the table on the right side. Various artistic images hang on the wall: sketch drawings, illustrations, surrealist paintings.

JESSIE, 35, dressed in black, enters while drinking from a glass of water. She puts the glass down on top of the piano then sits at the bench. She touches various keys and marvels at how in tune the piano sounds. She plays something by Dvořák. After a minute or so of playing, the landline begins to ring. She rolls her eyes at the interruption. She plays louder to drown out the ringing. The phone continues to ring. She plays not just louder but more aggressively. It finally stops ringing. She feels pleased as if her aggressive piano playing was the reason the person stopped trying. She grabs the water because she's thirsty from all that energy she just exerted. As she returns to sit, the landline rings and she gets up and picks it up angrily.

JESSIE

I don't drive, so no, my car warranty is not about to expire!

A pause.

After a few moments, there's a knock. Jessie looks at her front door, afraid to open it. A beat. She hangs up the phone, and cautiously goes toward the door. She opens it up and it's RAFE, 46. He's dressed in a black suit, white button down, and a brightly colored tie. Jessie faces Rafe. Rafe faces her.

JESSIE

Rafe.

RAFE

J.

A beat.

RAFE

You've aged.

JESSIE

Fuck you.

RAFE

It's not a judgement. Just an observation, now that I've got more time to really look at you.

He really looks at her. She doesn't look at him.

JESSIE

I gave you my contact info for emergencies only. Is there an emergency?

RAFE

Can my emergency be that I missed you?

JESSIE

Ok. Bye.

Jessie is about to shut the door on him.

RAFE

I'm not doing so well, J.

He waits for her to say something, she doesn't.

RAFE

I've been struggling. Really struggling.

A beat.

RAFE

I'm going to rehab.

Nothing.

RAFE

If I don't get help, I'm in danger of losing our girl.

After a beat, Jessie does a "you may now enter" gesture. He enters. As he does, she moves to the side. He saunters in, takes in the living room, clocks the piano, heads on over to it then hits a key.

JESSIE

Don't touch that!

He puts his hand up like someone showing a cop that they're hands are clean. He clocks the landline.

RAFE

Stuck in the past?

JESSIE

I only give that number to people who aren't worth my immediate attention.

Rafe takes out his android cell phone and dials. The landline rings. He laughs. After a beat, he picks the receiver up so it can stop ringing then puts it back down. He turns and sees the harp.

RAFE

Bougie.

He touches the sofa with one finger as if he's checking for dust. Turns around and examines the artwork on the wall. He's tempted to speak on the art but he decides he'll save his opinions for a later date. He turns to her.

RAFE

How are you? Or how've you been?

No response.

RAFE

I would really love to know how things are going? Seems like you're still doing the music stuff?

Jessie doesn't say anything.

RAFE

Still with that artist boy who was fucking you while you were pregnant?

JESSIE

His name is Leo!

RAFE

That fuckin' simp. I mean, have the cojones to not fuck a pregnant girl...woman. Woman. Have some respect for yourself, man.

JESSIE

We are still together. And he's still great.

A beat.

RAFE

You married yet? Any other kids?

JESSIE

You married yet? You have any other kids?

RAFE

When you don't want people in your business you're a cold, cold (*stops himself from saying "bitch"*)-

She looks at him with a "I dare you to say it" look. He doesn't say it. He stands across from her.

JESSIE

What do you want from me?

RAFE

I miss your voice. Your skin. Your hair. Your ti-

JESSIE

What the fuck do you *need* from me?

RAFE

I *need* you take in our girl!

A beat.

RAFE

She's got nowhere else to go.

A beat.

JESSIE

You promised we wouldn't meet until she was eighteen.

RAFE

That's when I thought I had more control of my life. Isn't that our problem? That we think we have power over how things are gonna work out?

JESSIE

What about your parents, can she stay with them?

RAFE

They're in the Cayman Islands now.

JESSIE

Oh, Mexico City wasn't cutting it?

RAFE

That was thirteen years ago, J. Since then, they've lived in The DR, Haiti, Aruba, Peru, Guatemala-

JESSIE

You don't have to name every place they've lived since I last saw them. I'm not that interested.

A beat.

JESSIE

How long would you need us to take her in?

RAFE

Three months?

JESSIE

Three months? Fuck! Three months?

RAFE

Three months, J. Rehab ain't a cakewalk.

A beat.

JESSIE

When do you need us to take her in?

RAFE

Tomorrow?

JESSIE

That's not enough time. I have to clean, and I have songs to prepare, I'm trying to study in -

RAFE

You owe me.

JESSIE

I owe you? I. Owe. You?

RAFE

Yeah!

JESSIE

Fuck you!

RAFE

Should I tell her you're not interested?

JESSIE

Then I'd look like a dick, wouldn't I?

Rafe shrugs. A beat.

JESSIE

I need to talk to Leo. I need to see if he'll go for it. I don't think he's gonna go for it.

RAFE

He'll do whatever you want, babe. Good pussy will do that to a weak man.

JESSIE

You're disgusting.

A beat.

JESSIE

(partially lying)

I have a student coming in, Eliza you remember her, she'll be here at any moment and she doesn't need your energy.

She opens the door as wide as possible and does a "you may leave now" gesture. As he walks toward the door he stops a little too close too comfort. The closest he's been so far. She looks up at him defiantly, but also really looks at his face. He's older, but he still looks good. When it looks like they must just kiss:

JESSIE

I'll talk to Leo and I'll call you back.

RAFE

On the landline.

JESSIE

On the landline.

He exits. She shuts the door quickly. A little too hard even. She goes to that glass of water and chugs it then exits to the kitchen,

Lights shift. About an hour or so later.

SCENE 1

Jessie's at the piano playing something by Bach. She's playing with such ferocity that she doesn't hear LEO, 38, when he enters. He's dressed in black. He drops his briefcase onto the sofa. She doesn't notice. He goes over to kiss Jessie on the forehead and she is startled.

LEO

Hey, how's my favorite human? Sorry to startle ya.

JESSIE

Your favorite human is so good and less startled now that her favorite human is here. How was school? College girls still flirting hard with you?

LEO

Yeah, I can't tell if it's harassment since I'm the authority figure but the word "no" seems foreign to them.

JESSIE

You should have taught etymology instead of art history.

LEO

Since I'm still bad with words I'll stick to drawing things. How was work?

JESSIE

The Gunther Family want me to start teaching Eliza *and* her mom how to play the harp. Which is unfortunate.

LEO

More money, isn't it?

JESSIE

Yeah, but instead of leaving work by nine I'll be done at eleven or noon!

LEO

I find it very hard to be empathetic right now.

JESSIE

Is this what it was like to be Marie Antoinette? Living in such a gilded bubble that I think my minor displeasures are true hardship?

LEO

She did lose her head!

JESSIE

Did she now?

They laugh.

LEO

We should go out for dinner, tonight. To celebrate. What do you want? I'm thinking Mexican?

JESSIE

Hmmm...I'm thinking...You?

LEO

Oooh, if I get to be your dinner for the rest of my life... I'm excited for the rest of my life.

JESSIE

Oh, sir are you trying to get into my pants?

She looks down at her outfit. She's wearing a skirt. She playfully tugs on the hem of her skirt. Leo kisses Jessie. She kisses him. After a beat, he starts pulling her skirt up and she pushes him away before he can pull it up.

LEO

What?

A pause.

JESSIE

I think I know what I want for dinner.

LEO

Ok...

JESSIE

The Gunther family told me about this glorious restaurant that they frequent-

LEO

Way out of our price range, I'm sure.

JESSIE

How long do we have to live dangerously? Let's do it tonight?

LEO

The only thing I want to do tonight is feel me in you.

JESSIE

That's not romantic sounding at all.

LEO

Sorry. The only thing I want to feel is your...uh...I'd have to secure a thesaurus to find the right words because there are no words in the English language that can describe how badly I want you right now?

Leo is hoping this works?

JESSIE

That works.

Jessie kisses Leo deeply. Leo begins pulling her skirt down and she swats his hand.

JESSIE

I can't. I'm sorry.

LEO

What is wrong with you, today?

A pause.

LEO

(concerned)

Did something happen?

A beat.

JESSIE

Rafe stopped by.

Silence.

JESSIE

I may have given him our address and the landline number.

LEO

When did you see him to give him all this information?

JESSIE

I may have seen him five months ago?

LEO

You saw Rafe five months ago and I am learning about it now?
I thought our whole deal is we tell each other everything.
That's why I tell you about the girls at school.

JESSIE

Well, maybe we shouldn't tell each other everything?

LEO

Meeting with an ex is definitely one of those things we
should tell each other about.

A beat.

LEO

Did you sleep with him?

JESSIE

Fuck off!

LEO

Then why keep it from me?

JESSIE

He was near Eliza's prep school...selling drugs to the rich
teens. And I saw him, well as much as you can see someone
when they're wearing winter gear. We spoke together so
briefly, but I was worried he was going to get locked up or
something so I gave him my number in case of emergency.

LEO

Is there an emergency?

JESSIE

He's going to rehab for three months.

LEO

Ok...?

JESSIE

And he needs...

LEO

What? What does he need?

JESSIE

He needs someone to watch...

A beat.

LEO

Annabelle?

JESSIE

Annabelle.

A pause.

JESSIE

What are you thinking? Feeling?

LEO

What did you say to him?

JESSIE

That I'd talk to you about it?

*Silence.**A beat.*

JESSIE

I wonder what's she's like.

LEO

You must know a little bit.

JESSIE

Why *must* I know?

LEO

You're telling me you've never looked her up?

JESSIE

No.

LEO

I don't understand how you wouldn't be curious about your own child?

JESSIE

I haven't spoken to my parents in twenty years. I'm very good at minding my own business.

A beat.

JESSIE

I'm guessing you looked her up.

He nods.

JESSIE

What did you discover?

LEO

She's doesn't seem to have an online presence but Rafe has a Facebook album labeled: "My Turtle's growing up!" and it's just Annabelle's graduation pictures through the years: pre-school, kindergarten, fifth grade, eighth grade. Want to see?

Jessie doesn't say yes or no, but Leo pulls out his phone anyway and hands it to Jessie. She looks at it.

JESSIE

She looks like my mom. And a little like Rafe's mom.

LEO

Yeah. But, she has your smile.

A beat.

LEO

When is she supposed to get here?

JESSIE

Tomorrow.

LEO

Leave it to Rafe to spring something this huge last minute.

JESSIE

You're okay with her staying here?

LEO

Of course. I mean...I know it's gonna be hard because she probably fucking hates our guts, but -

JESSIE

But I'm not a Fulbright scholar yet.

LEO

What?

JESSIE

I'm not part of the New York philharmonic. Or any philharmonic yet.

LEO

So what?

JESSIE

She comes here and finds I play piano for a rich family, that I eat brunch with friends every day after, and that we have subsidized trips to places like Thailand and South Africa sometimes, she'll be like, "You couldn't have stayed and done all this?" I have nothing to show for abandoning her.

LEO

You've done so many cool things: played at an opera house.

JESSIE

In Bucharest with an audience of fifteen.

LEO

You went to Berklee College.

JESSIE

After being rejected two years in a row. Now, I just get paid \$30 an hour to sometimes record the sessions of the "likely to be more successful than me" students.

LEO

You've been learning German.

JESSIE

Only to still never be accepted as a Fulbright Scholar.

LEO

This year is your year. And this year, we get to reconnect with Annabelle. I think it's a sign of all the good to come. I'm fucking excited to see this person who grew inside of you as a real human being. Maybe she has your laugh.

A beat.

JESSIE

Where is she gonna sleep?

LEO

Maybe my art studio? I'll just put some more art out here, and in our bedroom. And all my tools can stay in my office at school.

JESSIE

There's no bed in your art studio.

LEO

We'll give her ours.

JESSIE

And we sleep on the floor?

LEO

That's the kind of sacrifice parents make, right?

JESSIE

Right.

LEO

Ok. I'll start removing the things from the studio.

As Leo is about to head up to the studio:

JESSIE

You eventually forgave your father when he came back into your life, right?

LEO

Once he was on his deathbed.

JESSIE

Fuck!

LEO

But maybe Annabelle isn't like me. Maybe she won't hold it against you?

JESSIE

If she's anything like me she'll definitely hold it against me.

Leo goes to Jessie and embraces her. After a beat he let's go and then exits. Jessie goes to the landline and picks the receiver up.

SCENE 2

Jessie is seated on her stool near the harp, playing something by Shostakovich. There's more of Leo's artwork around. After a minute or so, Leo enters.

LEO

How are you?

She stops playing.

JESSIE

Grateful that you canceled your classes today.

LEO

I would never let you face this alone.

JESSIE

What if when they knock we just don't open the door?

LEO

No more running away.

There's a knock on the door. Leo and Jessie face the door. They freeze for a millisecond then look at each other. They exhale upon realizing that they were holding their breaths. Leo goes to open the door and Jessie stops him. She goes ahead of Leo so she can open the door. Just before she does, there's another more aggressive knock. Annoyed, she stops herself from turning the knob. She goes back to her harp and continues to play the Shostakovich piece. Leo looks at her like "what are you doing?" She pays him no mind. After a beat, he opens the door and lo and behold it is Rafe. He's dressed nice again, with a new brightly colored tie. Jessie continues to play but softly to hear what is happening.

RAFE

Leo.

LEO

Rafe.

A beat.

LEO

Still chasing after teenage girls?

RAFE

Still such a loser that the only way you can get a woman is if she's someone's leftover?

LEO

That's more of a sign that you're not worth holding onto.

RAFE

More like the trash took itself out.

Jessie heads over to run interference.

JESSIE

Knock it off, boys!

RAFE

(to Jessie)

May I enter?

Jessie steps out of the way so he can. He comes in and turns to face the artwork on the wall.

RAFE

These are so ugly. I hope you didn't pay for any of 'em. People who paint shitty, incomprehensible, pretentious shit should-

LEO

Where's Annabelle?

RAFE

Keep her name out of your mouth, asshole. I told her I'd scope out the place before I let her step foot. Gotta make sure she's in a safe environment, y'know?

LEO

Any environment away from a man going to rehab is safe, no?

RAFE

Kicking a man down when he's trying to better himself? That is so like you.

LEO

You were selling drugs to teenagers five months ago. Those kids probably need rehab and you need jail!

RAFE

Hey J, I miss when we use to play cops and robbers in bed.

(to Leo)

She liked being the cop.

LEO

Fuck off.

RAFE

Maybe this isn't a good place for Turtle.

LEO

Is she even here? Did you just call to toy with us? To take a look at what a life without you looks like? Are you even going to rehab?

RAFE

J leaving broke my little heart so bad, I became addicted to weed.

(to Jessie)

Weed is no you but it's a close substitute.

JESSIE

Shut the fuck up. You're not going to rehab for weed, dumbass. What are you really going in for?

RAFE

All the drugs.

Jessie and Leo roll their eyes.

RAFE

Serious. Losing you to (*points at Leo*)...that? Hard to recover from.

JESSIE

I'm sure you managed.

A beat.

RAFE

Where's her room? Not gonna have my Turtle sleeping on a sofa or some shit, are you?

JESSIE

She's got a room. That way.

Rafe exits.

A beat.

LEO

Is he more terrible than I remembered?

JESSIE

I think he's the same kind of terrible. Just clearer from a 30 something perspective. My parents knew what they were talking about.

LEO

I mean normally when an adult male convinces your teenage daughter to emancipate, you're not gonna think the best of him.

JESSIE

Do you think he let's...*Turtle* date older men?

LEO

I bet he tells her that all men are dogs because he assumes all men are like him.

JESSIE

Aren't they?

LEO

I hope not.

Rafe reenters.

RAFE

Is your home aesthetic just "shitty artwork?"

LEO

You know damn well that all the art here is mine, you can fucking stop.

JESSIE

Yeah. You came, it's safe, tell *Turtle* she can come. I hope you get well soon then rot in hell, you son of a...no! You bitch of a son.

Rafe gets close to Jessie, then attempts to caress her face. She punches him in the arm.

RAFE

Fuck!

JESSIE

Do that again and I will choke you with that ugly fucking tie you've got on.

LEO

Your daughter would be better off without you. So would the world.

Rafe flips him the bird, then gathers himself.

RAFE

You're not as spineless as I remembered.

LEO

Twenty-five was a long time ago.

A beat.

RAFE

Turtle!

"ANNABELLE", 15, enters. She's got purple or green hair. A slightly bloodied band-aid on her upper lip. She may or may not have a band-aid or bruises on her knuckles and knees. She's got a huge backpack. Like one that's meant for hiking. She's probably wearing an oversized jacket or sweater. Shorts or skirt just above the knees. Sneakers or converse.

A beat.

RAFE

(to "Annabelle")

Hey Turtle, your room is that-a-way. I'm sorry in advance for how ugly it looks, but it's the best we can do for now. Gonna miss you so much. But I'll be a lot better for you when I come back. So much better you're gonna be so pissed I didn't get help sooner. And I swear when I return - you, me, granny, grampy, we're gonna spend the whole summer together exploring the Caribbean, Ok?

"Annabelle" nods her head. She and Rafe hug tightly. After a beat, they let go. She looks at Leo and Jessie who look at her with all the welcome in the world. She walks right past them. Does not acknowledge them. Before she makes it to her room, she looks back at Rafe and gives him an "aye, aye cap'n" gesture. He returns it. She exits.

Rafe takes out a sheet of paper.

RAFE

Here's a little fact sheet about Turtle. Like what bus she takes to get to school. What kind of food she's into now that she's on a vegan kick. The date of her next dental appointment. Lots of useful stuff you would know if you were around. Anything not on there, just ask her.

He put his hand out waiting for one of them to grab the sheet. Jessie takes it and looks it over.

A beat.

RAFE

I raised a great fucking kid. Don't fuck this up.

Rafe exits. Leo and Jessie are left alone on stage. They look back to see if "Annabelle" will peek her head out. She doesn't. Leo closes the door behind Rafe. Leo returns to Jessie to give her an "everything's gonna be okay" shoulder rub.

SCENE 3

Jessie is at her piano. There is tea on a coaster on the top of it. She is playing something by Mendelssohn. After a minute or so, "Annabelle" comes down. She has a smaller backpack with her this time. Jessie looks in her direction but she does not look in Jessie's direction. Instead, she heads to the coffee table, picks up one of the graphic novels, lays down on the sofa and looks at the illustration. Jessie stops playing.

After a beat, she stands up and gets the courage to speak:

JESSIE

Hello Annabelle. I made some vegan pancakes for you. They're in the kitchen if you want some.

"Annabelle" does not say a word.

JESSIE

Would you prefer orange juice or a glass of water or milk with the pancakes?

"Annabelle" does not say a word.

JESSIE

I also have tea?

Leo enters.

JESSIE

If you don't want to take the bus to school Leo can take you.

Nada.

JESSIE

I have to be at work at exactly 7 so I can't ride with you two.

Zip!

LEO

Annabelle, your mother is speaking to you.

MYRTLE

Myrtle.

LEO

Excuse me?

MYRTLE

The name is Myrtle.

LEO

Myrtle?

MYRTLE

Changed it when I was five.

(re: graphic novels)

You illustrated these?

LEO

I did.

MYRTLE

Fuckin' bad ass work. What's the story, exactly?

LEO

Oh, um, it's about a twelve-year-old girl who goes on tours of various cemeteries and graveyards to find the best one to be buried in. Her whole family is gone. It's a comedy.

MYRTLE

A dark one. Nice. How'd you meet the writer...Carla La-va?

LEO

Carla Lavaggio. I met her wife, Gina, at a residency I did two years ago in Italy. Gina recommended me when Carla was in search of an illustrator.

MYRTLE

Gina couldn't do it?

LEO

She's a sculptor.

Myrtle puts down the novel and looks at the artwork in the apartment.

MYRTLE

You painted those?

LEO

Yeah.

MYRTLE

I wish I could draw or paint.

LEO

What's stopping you?

MYRTLE

Not my skill.

LEO

It's a craft. You can learn it. No one's born knowing how to draw or... play an instrument. You think Mozart played the piano well because of God?

MYRTLE

It must have been natural for him. Why else is he a legend?

LEO

I'd be a legend too if my parents were high status enough to get me an audience with Marie Antoinette.

MYRTLE

Is there no way to progress in life without parents who support you? Damn!

*This feels pointed towards Jessie.
She takes it as such.*

MYRTLE

How'd you learn to be an *artiste*?

LEO

My stepdad. He was into printmaking, painting, crafting, the works. Never sold anything, never wanted to. We'd just hang and make ceramics for people's birthdays, go to museums, graffiti shit.

MYRTLE

One time I graffitied the shit out of a girl's face.

*Jessie looks at Leo. He doesn't
notice.*

LEO

I'm sorry?

MYRTLE

She hooked up with my dad, then stole his watch, so I broke her nose and as the blood dripped I told a story on her face with it. I guess I am an artist, after all.

*Jessie sips her tea a bit loudly.
Leo looks over at her.*

MYRTLE

So, your stepdad never wanted to sell his art? That's weird.

LEO

No, it's cool. I don't know how to be an artist without selling myself. He did it for fun. For the love of it. I did that for awhile, but when he died, I said, "Fuck it! I gotta sell my shit so I can be immortal. My art won't die with me." Except for my paintings. I don't sell them.

MYRTLE

But, they're fuckin' weird and creepy. I'd buy 'em.

LEO

Thanks, but it's important to keep one thing just for me. To maintain a soul.

MYRTLE

I don't know. You should teach people how to draw and charge them up their ass.

LEO

I teach them art history. The Borough of Manhattan Community College charges them up their ass. Well, more than I would. If they want to learn how to draw or paint they can find someone else. Any energy I spend creating art is gonna be for me.

MYRTLE

So you wouldn't teach me how to draw?

LEO

You want to learn?

MYRTLE

I doodle and shit, but I think my zines would pop more if they had good art.

LEO

What are your zines about?

MYRTLE

Just joke poems. Sometimes they're like one liners, or haikus, or slanted rhymes. On my Emily Dickinson shit.

LEO

Would I ever be able to read any of your zines?

MYRTLE

They're for my fans.

LEO

Fans?

MYRTLE

I've got a blog. It's anonymous though. It's called "Annabelle- a name so femme it's performative."

Leo and Jessie look at one another.

LEO

Do your "fans" ever get to see your work outside of the blog?

MYRTLE

My friends have shows twice a month. They're rappers. But like the best kind: lyrically Kendrick and Common. Sonically: trap. "Expand your mind, shake your ass."

LEO

The range.

MYRTLE

Expansive. I sell merch and my zines at their shows. People always ask me if I know who "Annabelle" is and I tell 'em: "I don't know that bitch." And they eat it up. Maybe I'll invite you to one.

LEO

Maybe we should collaborate.

Jessie wipes the top of her piano.

MYRTLE

Like you'd do artwork for one of my zines?!

LEO

Yeah. I can do the cover. I can be anonymous too.

MYRTLE

That's some cool shit. I can't afford you, though.

LEO

I wouldn't make you pay.

MYRTLE

That's what's up! My next zine is gonna be about names. The ones we're given and the ones we choose.

LEO

We're gonna find out why you chose "Myrtle?"

MYRTLE

I can tell you right now.

LEO

Lucky us!

Jessie sits at the stool near her harp hoping that Myrtle notices her now that she's in a different part of the room.

MYRTLE

This is the only poem you're gonna hear before I finish the whole project, Ok?

LEO

Ok!

Myrtle stands up. She faces Leo, but finds it too awkward to look at him directly so she turns her back to him.

MYRTLE

*Birth name given to her by a bitch.
So performative it didn't feel like it fit.
New name, Turtle.
Before she walks into a room
Everyone thinks she's gonna be old.
But what a gift to walk into a room
And know you break the mold.
No one your age is gonna sound like you.
Old? Old soul.
How can you not grow old
When the one who gave you breath
Would rather you dead?
Every day is like a decay.
Every minute is like rotting.
"Turtle" is all she has
To not feel forgotten.*

*She turns around to bow. Leo claps.
Jessie also claps.*

LEO

Beautiful. Do you dream of becoming a writer?

MYRTLE

No way.

LEO

Why not?

MYRTLE

No offense to the arts but they're too... palatable? Accessible? Like, we gotta respect it even if it's bad? If I say something sucks people are all like, "that's your opinion." And I'm like, "yeah, maybe it is, but this is still shit."

LEO

It is nice that people can love something others hate. Like you still have value even if not everyone sees it.

MYRTLE

I don't know. I think some things should be good. And some things should be bad. I hate that the arts is something anybody can do. It needs to be black and white. Like the laws of the universe. That's why I want to study astrophysics.

LEO

Really?

MYRTLE

How many astrophysicists do you know?

LEO

Personally? None.

MYRTLE

Exactly. I want to be something that's really a dream. Something that's unattainable. Something that's objective. Something everyone's mom and dad can't casually be. Like if you want to fight with me about the complex nature of dark matter you gotta spend decades researching it and then prove me wrong!

LEO

The desire to be unique. To be right. I get that. Maybe you can teach me a bit of astrophysics while I work on your cover?

MYRTLE

Yes! Are you most interested in dark matter, the many women scientists who discovered shit but are not revered like their noted male counterparts, time travel, multiverses, the cannibalistic nature of the Milky Way?

LEO

All sound great, but I'm gonna go with multiverses.

MYRTLE

Marvel fan?

LEO

A fan of all things comic books but yes, of course. Anime fan?

MYRTLE

Silly question! Of course! Oh man, it's gonna be fun dreaming up what kind of life we could have in other universes. Better ones, maybe.

A beat.

MYRTLE

I'm gonna take the bus. All my friends ride it and going to school early with them is fun.

LEO

Ok.

MYRTLE

See ya.

LEO

See ya!

Myrtle takes her backpack, a graphic novel, and exits. Leo shuts the door behind her. Jessie sits on the piano bench and just stares at the keys.

LEO

What a great fucking kid! Rafe was right. He did a great fucking job! How does someone like him raise an amazing person like that? Well, I guess she has a violent streak which she definitely gets from him. Remember when he almost broke my nose after he found out we were sleeping together? Maybe she gets a little of it from you too since you did punch Rafe earlier. But, we can remedy that in three months. Of course, he wouldn't tell us she changed her name. Wanted us to start on the wrong foot, but it turned out fine. She's into fucking astrophysics? We gotta tell her that one of your dreams as a kid was to be an astronomer. That's genetics, right? How even though you two weren't a part of each other's lives she and you are made of the same stuff? And even though I'm not her dad she loves anime? And Marvel? It's like she absorbed all the shit I watched with her and read to her when she was a baby. Like, I'm part of her even though she isn't really mine. And her hair? When I met you, your hair had purple streaks. She's you! A little cooler than you were. But you know what? She does fucking have your smile. It lights up the room. Oh! I bet she'd love to come to my and Carla's mini graphic novel tour this summer. I should ask her.

*Jessie play's "Beethoven's
Symphony No. 5" famous 8 notes.*

JESSIE

I have to figure out the run order for my concert. Starting off with *Beethoven's Symphony No. 5* is sure to be a crowd pleaser. People want the familiar when they walk into a music hall. The more obscure stuff can be in the middle. You think that's a good idea? Would that excite you?

LEO

Jess?

JESSIE

Yeah?

LEO

What's up?

JESSIE

It's just between playing something different for the Gunther's every morning, while also deciding what the Fulbright people would find interesting is a delicate balance. I feel like I have to sacrifice time for my art to please the people who pay me. For Fulbright I obviously only can do German composers, but Mozart is a favorite. Austrians speak German so they should make an exception for him, right? He's a legend after all.

LEO

Jess?

JESSIE

What?

LEO

Your daughter just spoke to us for the first time and you're thinking of your set list?

JESSIE

You. She spoke to you.

*Jessie starts to play the
"Beethoven's Symphony No. 5"
intro again.*

LEO

Fuck.

Jessie stops playing.

LEO

I'm so sorry. I didn't-

JESSIE

You didn't acknowledge me.

LEO

Shit. I was so excited that she was so open that I didn't pay attention to -

Jessie starts the Beethoven piece again. As she plays:

JESSIE

I'd forget the world if I had a new best friend, too. "I love Marvel." "I wanna marry anime." "Let's collaborate."

LEO

Should I have been cold to her? I wanted to give her the space to share without forcing you on her.

Jessie continues the piece but plays it more aggressively. As she plays:

JESSIE

"Forcing me on her?" Oh, you're such a saint.

LEO

I'm sorry that she ignored you but can you blame her?

JESSIE

It's not like I fucking left her on the street. I left her with-

LEO

The substitute teacher who started fucking you when you were fourteen?

JESSIE

I was fifteen. And Ok. Maybe he wasn't a model human when I met him, but his parents were predatory landlords-

LEO

Are there any other kind?/

JESSIE

-which meant money. /No. And Rafe, he switched from subbing to working as a stagehand at Avery Fisher Hall. Much better insurance. So, at the very least, Annab...Myrtle's basic needs were covered.

LEO

Maybe some kids need more than their basic needs covered.

JESSIE

Oh my god. You left her too!

LEO

I know!

JESSIE

And you didn't say shit!

LEO

I should have!

JESSIE

Cuz you know what it's like to have a parent leave you.

LEO

I fuckin' know, Jessie. I am not blaming you.

JESSIE

It sounds like it.

LEO

Everything that sounds like I'm pointing fingers at you is also about me.

A beat.

LEO

Stop playing the fucking song!

She stops abruptly and gets up.

JESSIE

Do you want the vegan pancakes?

LEO

I'm sorry, she didn't eat them.

JESSIE

Do you want them?

LEO

No.

JESSIE

Maybe Eliza will. The Gunthers want me to be her fucking maid too so they would love it if I fed her something I made. So much for my Mozart existence, right?

LEO

You heard what Myrtle said: Hard to go far in life without parental support.

A beat.

JESSIE

Her silence hurts like a motherfucker.

Leo holds Jessie.

JESSIE

At this point, I wish she would cuss me out or cut me. Paint my face with the blood from the broken nose she gives me.

A beat.

LEO

Maybe we could play cops and robbers and I can pretend to break your nose?

JESSIE

Fuck you!

LEO

Please do.

JESSIE

We can't even have sex now that she's here.

LEO

Send nudes?

JESSIE

You send nudes first.

LEO

Only while you're at work. Deal?

JESSIE

Deal.

A beat.

LEO

I'll make sure to call out Myrtle next time. That any negativity you get from her isn't yours to bear alone.

JESSIE

Thank you.

LEO

Walk you to work?

JESSIE

Yes, please.

Jessie goes to gather her music books and such.

JESSIE

Oh! The pancakes!

Jessie puts her things down then runs into the kitchen. Leo looks at his artwork, smiles at the thought that someone likes it.

LEO

You should teach The Gunthers here instead?

He picks up Jessie's music books and purse.

Jessie runs out of the kitchen, pancakes in paper bag.

JESSIE

So they can compare the size of our apartments? And meet my kid? No thanks.

Leo opens the door.

LEO

You should ask *your kid* for some anime recs.

JESSIE

Oh, I bet she's dying to give me some.

LEO

Sometimes nerdiness is stronger than anger.

JESSIE

Yeah, ok.

They exit.

SCENE 4

Jessie plays something by Wagner on the harp. Leo is leaning by the door, waiting, checking his phone. Vegan spinach artichoke pizza on the coffee table. After a few moments, there's a knock on the door. Leo stands straight, Jessie stops playing. Leo opens the door. Myrtle enters.

MYRTLE

Hey.

LEO

Hey!

MYRTLE

My friend invited me to a science retreat over the weekend, so I'll be gone till Monday.

LEO

Oh, so you told your friend you were going without talking to us?

MYRTLE

I'm *talking* to you now.

LEO

Without *asking* us?

MYRTLE

Asking you what?

LEO

I think we're going to have set some ground rules. Have a seat.

Leo gestures to the armchair and Myrtle heads that way.

JESSIE

I made some vegan spinach artichoke pizza, if you'd like some.

Myrtle, now seated, is tempted to get some but decides not to.

Leo sits on the sofa, on the side closer to Myrtle. Jessie sits next to him.

LEO

It's past midnight.

MYRTLE

Correct.

LEO

We think that's a little late for you to be out.

MYRTLE

Ok.

LEO

And we don't think you should be out that late.

MYRTLE

My dad had no problem with it.

LEO

We're sure he didn't, but while you're with us we think -

MYRTLE

You're gonna give me a curfew or some shit?

LEO

Yeah. We think by nine -

MYRTLE

Nine? P.M.? Am I five?

LEO

We just don't think it's safe -

MYRTLE

Been coming and going whenever I wanted and I'm still here. I guess it's safe.

LEO

We have to be informed of -

MYRTLE

Hey, I've been in charge of my life for as long as I can remember and I don't think you guys can come in and try to change shit now.

JESSIE

We're not trying to change-

*Myrtle holds her hand up indicating
that Jessie can stop talking.*

LEO

Hey! Hey! You will not shut your mother up. I appreciate you responding to my texts and telling me where you were, but she also texted you and you didn't respond. Silent treatment won't be accepted here.

A beat.

LEO

Who is this friend that invited you?

MYRTLE

Patrice.

LEO

Can you tell us about Patrice? How'd you meet... Patrice? What is Patrice like? What's Patrice's last name? How old is Patrice?

MYRTLE

You've said her name enough times.

Myrtle shows her knuckles.

MYRTLE

You see these bruises? And the band-aid on my lip?

LEO

Of course.

MYRTLE

That's all Patrice.

LEO

I'm sorry, you are friends with this person?

MYRTLE

Yeah. She hooked up with my dad at some motel then stole his car for the weekend. When she came back to school I beat the shit out of her, but then she beat the shit out of me. And I was like, usually when I beat a bitch's ass they just take it. Even cry sometimes. All the time. But, Patrice put up such a good fight. It was like a boxing match.

And I was like, I gotta be friends with this bitch. She can handle herself and break some noses with me? That's the kind of female friendship that's necessary for survival.

*Leo and Jesse look at each other
unsure of how to respond for a bit.*

LEO

And she's a fan of science?

MYRTLE

Yeah! If you don't talk to people you could think they're just stupid hoes. But, my girl is into physics like me. But she's more applied physics.

LEO

What does she like about applied physics?

MYRTLE

Oh man, she also loves astrology and tarot cards and honestly that's what we talk about more.

LEO

Ok. And this science retreat -

MYRTLE

It's gonna be so fucking cool. Think comic con but for science geeks. No celebrities but some of our best minds who want to see high school femmes in STEM and shit.

LEO

Sounds very cool. How much does it cost?

MYRTLE

Patrice's mom's gonna take care of it. She thinks I'm a good influence on Patrice.

LEO

Yeah?

MYRTLE

Yeah. We go to all sorts of sciencey stuff together. And, like, Pat wasn't gonna graduate this year, but now she's excited to go to CUNY, BMCC maybe, cuz I'm gonna do dual enrollment next year.

LEO

Oh! So, you want to go to college?

MYRTLE

Yeah, unlike the arts, you actually gotta get an education to call yourself a real scientist.

LEO

Your mother and I both went to college.

A beat.

MYRTLE

Can I ask you something?

LEO

Sure.

MYRTLE

How rich are you?

LEO

Rich?

JESSIE

Rich?

Myrtle points at the piano, at the harp, at the coffee table, at their upper west side apartment.

JESSIE

Oh! We're not rich. The Gunthers, this family I play piano for every morning, when they hired me I told them I didn't have any instruments at my own home so I hoped they had them in their home. They felt sorry for me so bought me the piano and the harp so I could practice every day. As much as I hate them as people, they've done a lot for me.

LEO

Yeah. We went to Germany twice on their dime.

JESSIE

While there I got to study German and explore the schools to hopefully make some connections for my Fulbright Scholar application. As a Fulbright Scholar my education can be funded and I can get deeper training with my instruments and-

*Jessie can feel Myrtle's attention
drifting so she stops.*

JESSIE

And... this coffee table was a gift from?

She looks over to Leo.

LEO

This couple who came to an art show I curated. The Lomans.

JESSIE

The Lomans, right. I met the Gunthers at the one before? Or after?

LEO

I think after.

JESSIE

Right.

LEO

Yeah, this couple - The Lomans - they wanted to buy my works, but I told them they're just for show, cuz I don't sell my paintings, as you know. They asked how they could support me and I made a joke about needing a coffee table and here we are.

JESSIE

And this apartment actually belongs to a family called The Wilsons. I met their daughter Shelby at one of Leo's residencies.

LEO

The one at Governor's Island.

JESSIE

Yeah. They moved to Europe and let us have this space until they return. Which is open-ended at the moment.

LEO

Yeah, we were living in Riverdale, Bronx just before.

JESSIE

Bay Ridge even before that.

LEO

That's why I have a car.

LEO

So fucking far.

JESSIE

So fucking far.

JESSIE

I hate everyone in the Upper West Side but it's nice not to spend most of your life going to and from places.

A beat.

MYRTLE

So, the wealth is an illusion?

JESSIE

I mean we're not poor.

LEO

I've been getting freelance work pretty consistently the last two years. Not quite Marvel, but I feel comfortable calling myself a working artist: picture books, book covers.

JESSIE

And the Gunthers is the first steady job I've had, and I've been with them for a few years now.

Myrtle gives Jessie a look that says something like "You've been struggling or something before?"

JESSIE

Before them, I was just living very young, wild, and free. Turning pages for some Chamber Music Society musicians, ushering at concert halls, conducting at churches, touring with local heavy metal bands, doing studio sessions. Very artistic, but inconsistent and not always high paying.

A beat.

MYRTLE

I have a multiverse question for ya, Leo.

LEO

Go for it?

Jessie picks up a slice of pizza and takes a bite.

MYRTLE

If you could live in another universe would you have kids?

Jessie chokes on the pizza.

LEO

I would.

MYRTLE

How many?

LEO

Um...two maybe.

MYRTLE

I feel like everyone wants two cuz they want one boy and one girl. But what if you get two girls? What if you get two girls and they grow up and they don't wanna be girls anymore?

LEO

I think I'd be happy with whatever.

MYRTLE

What's stopping you?

JESSIE

It's so late.

A beat.

LEO

Is Patrice and her mom going to pick you up for the science con?

MYRTLE

Nah, I'm gonna take an uber and meet them. They live in deep Queens. Then we're gonna go upstate.

LEO

Yeah, you should definitely tell us when you're going upstate.

MYRTLE

Any other ground rules?

LEO

I'll think of some on our ride to their house tomorrow.

MYRTLE

Ok, cool, but I gotta meet 'em by 10am, though.

LEO

Then we'll get there before 10am.

MYRTLE

Sweet.

Myrtle gets up.

JESSIE

Hey Myrtle, I've been meaning to start getting into anime. Any recommendations?

Myrtle wants so badly to not respond but how can she give up on the opportunity to make recs?

MYRTLE

Kotaro Lives Alone if you wanna cry. *Fruits Basket* if you want to see incredible compassion. *Puella Magica*, if you want to see someone meditate on being the chosen one. Cuz why does everyone go along with it y'know? Like, you should be able to choose if you wanna be chosen!

Myrtle takes a slice of pizza. She is about to head up to her room but stops and turns:

MYRTLE

Erased. There's a line in it that's something like, "there's no difference between the way a good deed or a bad deed feels" and with that line everything you feared is confirmed.

She exits.

JESSIE

"Sometimes nerdiness is stronger than anger." Hell yeah. After I practice some pieces tomorrow, I'm going to spend the day watching as many episodes of each I can stomach.

Leo doesn't say anything.

JESSIE

Wanna watch with me?

LEO

I'm gonna sleep here tonight. But I'll go take a shower first.

JESSIE

Oh. Ok.

LEO

Goodnight.

JESSIE

Goodnight.

Jessie waits for a kiss on the cheek but Leo exits.

After a beat, Jessie takes the pizza and heads to the kitchen.

SCENE 5

Jessie is seated at the piano playing something by Clara Schumann. After a minute or so, the landline begins to ring. She rolls her eyes at the interruption. She gets up and picks up the receiver.

JESSIE

Ich glaub mein Schwein pfeift! Das ist mir Wurscht!

A beat.

JESSIE

Oh, sorry. I sometimes use foreign languages to try to scare spammers off. They hang up every time. Is everything okay?

She looks back at the door, puts the phone receiver down then goes to open the door. It's Rafe.

JESSIE

Hi...

RAFE

Hey, good lookin'.

JESSIE

Remind me again: is your rehab outpatient?

RAFE

Nope.

JESSIE

Then why are you here?

RAFE

Is lover boy around?

JESSIE

No.

RAFE

Weee!

He enters in a twirl. He's drunk or under the influence of something.

RAFE

Now you don't have to pretend to be so mean anymore!

He touches the part of his arm she last punched.

JESSIE

There's no pretense. I am mean.

He makes his way to the sofa, drops himself onto it. His phone falls out of his hand.

RAFE

It's an android. All good.

He laughs.

JESSIE

How did you get here?

RAFE

Took The PATH Train. Or the NJ Transit? No. LIRR? I know I took the subway at some point. Then I walked? Or did I take the bus?

JESSIE

How are you out of a rehabilitation center that is not outpatient?

RAFE

Oh! Some really lonely nurses are willing to do lots of favors if you're willing to do them lots of favors, if you know what I mean.

JESSIE

So you're selling yourself to get out of recovery? Brilliant!

RAFE

I am not sellin' my self. I give myself freely to anyone who asks!

JESSIE

You need to go back now.

RAFE

Ok. Mom.

JESSIE

Look, I have work to do and don't have time for whatever this is.

RAFE

Your work ethic was always impressive. I love how you are still you. Am I still me?

*Police sirens in the background.
Rafe jumps off the sofa, and hides
underneath the coffee table.*

RAFE

They're out to get me!

Rafe starts laughing.

JESSIE

Yep. You're still you. It's good Myrtle is away on her little science trip. She'd be embarrassed to see you like this.

RAFE

She's seen me like this plenty of times.

JESSIE

I hope you're joking.

Rafe laughs.

JESSIE

You're fucking joking, right?

RAFE

You know what I love about rehab? The fucking losers who talk about why they became addicts. "Oh my dad died and I couldn't handle it." "I feel so sad and pills help me feel numb which is an upgrade from being sad." Dipshits.

JESSIE

Why did *you* become an addict?

RAFE

I'm not an addict.

JESSIE

Ok.

RAFE

You know, Myrtle says she likes it here now.

JESSIE

That's good to hear. Oh, and you know what?

RAFE

What?

JESSIE

Fuck you for not telling us that her name changed.

RAFE

She's old enough to tell you herself.

JESSIE

You fed her the name Myrtle, didn't you! It was one of the names I thought no kid should ever be named and you fucking fed it to her.

RAFE

Actually, I told her you didn't love the name and she said she wanted to love a name that someone thought was unlovable.

Rafe tries to pull himself back onto the sofa. He's failing. After a beat, Jessie gets down to help him. He's a bit heavy, but he eventually stops acting like dead weight and helps her lift him up onto the sofa. Once he's up, he puts his legs on her lap and laughs. Jessie shakes her head (at him like he's a silly). Their eyes catch each other. After a beat, Rafe touches Jessie's hair. She doesn't stop him. He touches the side of her face. She doesn't stop him. Then her bottom lip. She doesn't stop him. His arms go down her neck. She doesn't stop him. He unbuttons the top button of her shirt. She doesn't stop him. He unbuttons the second button on her shirt and just as he's about to unbutton the third she jumps up.

JESSIE

I have coffee, do you want some?

RAFE

I preferred it when we would take cold showers to sober up. Made drinking the night before even more rewarding.

JESSIE

Do you still like your coffee black?

RAFE

What do you say we take a cold shower together for old time's sake?

JESSIE

Ok. I'll add milk.

Jessie turns to go to the kitchen.

RAFE

No!

She turns back to him.

RAFE

I'm a real man. Of course I want my coffee black.

JESSIE

Leo made some this morning.

RAFE

I don't want it then.

Jessie exits to the kitchen.

Rafe puts both his legs onto the couch. His feet over the edge. He kicks off one shoe with his foot. Kicks off the other shoe with his shoeless foot. He stretches his legs and wiggles his toes.

Jessie reenters.

JESSIE

Sit up.

*With great effort, he sits up.
There's now enough room for her to
sit, with a bit of space between
them. She sits and hands him the
coffee. He sips.*

RAFE

How can someone do a bad job with black coffee? It's in its natural state.

JESSIE

You'll survive.

*He takes another sip. There's
disgust on his face, but he takes
another sip.*

RAFE

How's the sex?

JESSIE

You can't be a gentleman for one minute?

RAFE

I didn't think gentlemanliness is what you wanted of me? Is that where I went wrong? Prince Charming Leo, the most gentlemanly of men, swept you off your feet? Is that it?

JESSIE

Yeah. When you're young you think "I want a bad boy with a heart of gold." And when you get older you realize there are good boys with hearts of gold who also know how to fuck.

RAFE

Whatever helps you sleep at night.

He takes another sip.

JESSIE

You're too much of a playboy to be pining this hard for me.

RAFE

Pining? Ha! More like a fool staying faithful all through our relationship when you could not. So.

He takes another sip.

JESSIE

What happens if the center finds out you've gone missing?

RAFE

Maybe I'll lose Myrtle for good.

JESSIE

We don't want that. Need a ride? Leo gets back in about an hour so it should be no problem at all.

RAFE

We could do so much in an hour.

He boops her nose. She gets up.

JESSIE

You're right. In another hour, I can perfect this piece.

Jessie goes back to the piano.

JESSIE

Been so focused on all the great male German composers I've neglected the women! But not today!

She continues playing where she left off earlier. After a few moments, Rafe dances a bit from his seat. He puts the coffee down on the table then gets up and starts twirling. He picks up one of Leo's graphic novel and throws it. He picks up another, tries ripping it in half, he can't so he tosses it over his shoulder. He picks another one and wipes it on his butt. Jessie is none the wiser.

He eventually gets within her eyeline. She shakes her head and tries to hold in a laugh, but his silliness is too much for her to contain her laughter. He sits beside her on the bench, and they look at each other. She continues to play but more softly.

RAFE

We should run away together.

JESSIE

I'm too old for you.

RAFE

I would love to see the difference between 22 and 35 year old, J.

JESSIE

Chubbier and saggier.

RAFE

Chubby just means more to love. Saggy just means easier to grab a hold of. Can I see?

He unbuttons her third button then goes to touch her chest. She slaps his hand then continues to play. As he's rubbing where she slapped:

RAFE

Do you ever imagine what our lives would have been like if you stayed? If Prince Charming never showed up?

JESSIE

Yeah, we'd be divorced and I would have slept with a lot more people.

RAFE

Nah. We were always fun together. You would have been saved from all this -

He points at the art.

RAFE

Newer, uglier, boring ass art.

*She stops playing, gets up and away
from him.*

JESSIE

He wouldn't have gotten accepted to four residencies, two fellowships, and have consistent freelance work if his art work was boring or ugly.

RAFE

You know his wins so specifically. You jealous?

JESSIE

We're not in the same field. There's nothing to be jealous of. More like proud.

RAFE

I didn't mean to hit a nerve. Sit back down.

*She goes over to the sofa and sits
there. He stays at the piano bench.
They sit in a brief silence. He
gets up and gets the coffee from
the coffee table and takes a sip.*

RAFE

This coffee really is shit.

He pours it, on the coffee table.

JESSIE

Fuck! He was gonna give these out at his mini tour. Fuck!
You're gonna fucking clean this up!

*She tries to air dry the novels.
She throws one at him, then
continues her attempt to air dry.*

Rafe picks up his phone, puts it in his pocket, then plops down on the sofa.

RAFE

Ok. Here's a good thing about rehab: you realize your life is a disappointment and how your priorities need to shift.

JESSIE

I bet you have so much that needs shifting.

RAFE

Well, I wanted to be a court officer.

JESSIE

A bailiff?

RAFE

Court officer.

JESSIE

Ok.

RAFE

And then as I got to talking to the rehabees I realized, it's because I wanted a job that had fucking good insurance so I could take care of Turtle.

JESSIE

That's good. You should give up dealing drugs and do something that is respectable.

RAFE

God, yeah. I mean a forty six year old dealing drugs? To kids? That's so stunted. But dreaming of a job so I could get insurance? That's sadder.

JESSIE

Nothing sad about wanting to take care of someone you love.

RAFE

No. The sadness comes from realizing that everything I do is for someone I love.

JESSIE

Is that not what life is about?

A beat.

RAFE

I...want to give up my parental rights.

JESSIE

The fuck?

RAFE

God, seeing you five months ago I was livid. There you were: beautiful, in the fanciest of winter coats, without a care in the world. And I was fucking jealous.

JESSIE

You are not giving up parental rights. You're just not. Even I didn't give up my parental rights.

RAFE

If you did I wouldn't have asked you to take Turtle in.

JESSIE

She's gonna be eighteen in a couple of years. You can't fucking wait?

RAFE

I just don't have the capacity anymore.

JESSIE

She's old enough to basically raise herself. What capacity do you need?

RAFE

You got so many years to do whatever the fuck you wanted. I want to do whatever the fuck I want. In Cancun. Or Fiji. Or -

JESSIE

Ok. Wait till she's eighteen.

RAFE

I don't want to spend the final few years of my forties trying to be good.

JESSIE

You were never good. No one's asked it of you. No one expects it of you.

RAFE

The debaucherous side of myself can no longer be contained and, you know what, I don't want to contain it.

JESSIE

Do you want to fucking kill yourself? Is that it?

RAFE

I want the freedom to.

JESSIE

Ok. Tell your daughter that suicide is more ideal than raising her! Obviously, you fucking belong in rehab.

RAFE

Rehab was for her. But what about me?

JESSIE

You're being selfish!

RAFE

I thought you of all people would understand.

JESSIE

I don't understand shit! I had specific dreams I wanted to achieve and a child didn't fit into that. We are not the same.

RAFE

I have a specific dream to live the next few years with such fearless abandon it might just kill me.

JESSIE

Fuck off! Fuck off! Your dreams are frivolous.

RAFE

And yours were serious?

JESSIE

Yes!

RAFE

Where are your Grammys then?

JESSIE

Excuse me?

RAFE

Tony's? Whatever else fucking important music awards you don't have? If you were serious you'd have something to show for it.

JESSIE

This was supposed to be short term!

RAFE

Ah! There it is.

She looks at him like she's been caught-red handed.

RAFE

You're pissed because of how me leaving is gonna affect you. Well, you didn't think about how your leaving was gonna affect me.

He stands up and points up and down at himself.

RAFE

This is how it affected me. Being a parent is fucking hard. It's fucking hard when you're doing it alone. It's fucking hard when your kid's mom is alive but doesn't even fucking visit. It's fucking hard having to explain that shit to an eight-year-old. I had to deal with her crying herself to sleep. I had to deal with the kids who made fun of her.

I had to deal with the aftermath of the fucking fights that came with the relentless bullying. Because you are a fucking deadbeat. It's my turn.

JESSIE

You are not thinking straight. Once you sober up -

RAFE

I'm not fucking sobering up, J!

JESSIE

I'll take you back right now. We can take the subway. NJ Transit. Or a ferry. Or a carriage. Whatever the fuck you prefer. I'll pay. I'll pay for it all.

RAFE

I'm not going back.

JESSIE

This will kill her.

RAFE

It won't. She's the toughest person I know.

JESSIE

She shouldn't have to be.

RAFE

You taught her how to be.

A beat.

JESSIE

Well, I'm not telling her. She won't know if I don't tell her.

RAFE

She'll be back on Monday. You have until Tuesday to tell her. By then I'll tell her myself.

He takes out a piece of paper from his pocket.

RAFE

It's a petition to relinquish parental rights.

JESSIE

No.

RAFE

I didn't sign it or anything. Just want you -

JESSIE

No.

RAFE

You and lover boy can look it over and think about it.

He puts it down on the table.

RAFE

If he's willing to adopt Turtle then it can be a done deal. Though you might have to get married? Why aren't you married? That's another thing that pisses me off. We were fucking engaged and you leave me for a guy you're not even willing to marry?

*Jessie picks up the petition and
throws it on the coffee spill.*

RAFE

I'm trying to be official but paper or no paper I'm gonna do what I want.

JESSIE

Will that cold shower help you change your mind?

RAFE

Ooooh! Using sex to get me to do what you want? Classic J!

JESSIE

It always worked, didn't it?

RAFE

Sure did.

JESSIE

Why should now be any different? Unbutton the rest of my shirt.

She gets close to him.

JESSIE

Take off my bra. Do whatever you want.

She gets even closer to Rafe. Their foreheads touch. He unbuttons one more button on her shirt. Then another. He reaches into her shirt, unclasps her bra, takes a good look, then takes off her bra and holds it up.

RAFE

It only works when it's fun for you too. Now you're just...desperate.

She starts unbuttoning his shirt.

JESSIE

I have this concert in two weeks. And hopefully Germany in the fall. If not this fall, then next fall. And there's Switzerland in the summer. And I just don't have the capacity. I don't have the-

He kisses her in between each sentence below.

RAFE

I'm going to keep in touch with Turtle. I'm going to call. And text her.

He stops kissing her, stops her from unbuttoning his shirt, holds her chin and looks her in the eyes.

RAFE

My goal is not to remove myself from her life. I just don't want to be responsible for it.

He buttons up her shirt, kisses her hands then walks toward the door. He turns back to her then holds the bra up.

RAFE

You owe me.

He sniffs the bra then exits.

After a beat, she picks up the drenched petition, crumples it into a ball (as best as she can) and throws it in the direction of the door (as best as she can). After a moment, she goes over to her piano. She touches one key. She walks away as if grossed out by it then lays down on the floor.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO**SCENE 6**

About a week later. Myrtle is laying on the floor. Perhaps, in the same exact spot where Jessie was laying in the previous scene. She is alone.

MYRTLE

A world unseen
I exist but I am unnoticed
I exist but I am undesired
Do I exist then?
Mother, had you kept me from leaving your womb
would that have been kinder?
Mother, had you stayed
would that have been kinder?
A world unseen
I am alive but no one knows
I am alive so the story goes
Am I alive? If no one cares...
Ah! I am a black hole
No light can escape me
Come near me and you will only see
Darkness
Sadness
Nothingness
I am... unsurvivable
I understand why you leave
Father, you got bored of me, didn't you?
Father, former friend of mine,
I lost you for good, didn't I?
A world unseen?
Perhaps, there's a world invisible to me
where I am preferred.
Where I am highly favored.
Where I am worth
sticking around for.
Where I am worth keeping.

Where I am loved.
 Where I am lovely.
 Love me.
 Anybody.
 Somebody?
 Want me.
 Please?

*Jessie comes from the kitchen
 holding a bowl of vegan mac and
 cheese.*

JESSIE

Hey, I made some vegan mac and cheese.

*Jessie goes over to Myrtle and puts
 the bowl in front of her. Myrtle
 doesn't move an inch.*

JESSIE

Um, over the weekend, I watched quite a few episodes of the shows you mentioned. *Erased* was deeply upsetting. And you were right - *Kotaro Lives Alone* just had me sobbing.

*She waits to see if Myrtle will
 respond. She doesn't.*

JESSIE

Um... have you heard of studio giblee? Gablee? Zhiblee? Leo talks about it all the time, but I never paid attention. I feel like you must've heard of it. Maybe you and Leo talked about it already? Um...I looked into their filmography and wanted to know if there's a particular movie you'd recommend I watch first?

No response from Myrtle.

JESSIE

There's so many that I don't know where I should begin. And should I watch them in the original Japanese with subtitles or dubbed versions? Are there sacred rules?

Jessie laughs hoping it encourages Myrtle to laugh too. It doesn't.

JESSIE

Um...I know what will cheer you up.

Jessie goes toward her piano, sits at the bench.

JESSIE

A little Fanny Mendelsohn. When I think of an invisible woman being seen, even if it's years after her death, it cheers me up to know that even if I am only valued as an artist after I'm gone, then all my labor wasn't in vain.

She plays something by Fanny Mendelsohn for a bit. She looks over to Myrtle to see if she's intrigued in any way. She still hasn't moved. Jessie plays more emphatically to make it seem as if she's playing the most energetic, fun song one could dream of. Nothing. She stops playing to think about what else she could play.

MYRTLE

Spirited Away.

JESSIE

Did you... just speak? What did you say?

Myrtle moves from facing the audience, to lying on her back, staring up at the ceiling.

MYRTLE

Spirited Away.

JESSIE

What are you saying?

MYRTLE

It's a good Studio Ghibli movie to watch.

JESSIE

Oh! You're making a rec. Ok. *Spirited Away*. Got it.

MYRTLE

Clichéd answer but I can relate to a girl with pig parents.

*Jessie goes over to where Myrtle is
and sits at her head.*

JESSIE

Pig parents, huh? Maybe we can watch it together, soon? Will I learn something about how to be a better parent?

Myrtle shrugs.

JESSIE

Come on, eat some mac and cheese. It's pretty good.

*Jessie picks up the bowl and hovers
it over Myrtle's face. Myrtle
pushes it out of her way.*

MYRTLE

Not hungry.

A beat.

MYRTLE

You should definitely watch it in Japanese, first. With no subtitles, just to feel it. And then watch it in dubbed. Just to understand. Then watch it

JESSIE

Ok!

MYRTLE

I think you'd like the score for the movie.

JESSIE

Yeah?

MYRTLE

Yeah. No offense but those German composers you keep playing ain't got nothin' on Joe Hisaishi. Real name: Mamoru Fujisawa.

JESSIE

I mean those German composers are legendary.

MYRTLE

They are but so is Joe.

JESSIE

Well, I look forward to hearing his music. Does he do the music for every Studio Ghi...Studio G movie?

MYRTLE

Not all, but some classics like *Princess Mononoke*. *Kiki's Delivery Service*. *My Neighbor Totoro*. Oh! And *Howl's Moving Castle*.

JESSIE

Excited to see all of them.

A beat.

MYRTLE

Why don't you ever play your own music?

JESSIE

Oh, I don't have any unique takes.

MYRTLE

I don't think you need to be unique to make your own music.

JESSIE

Maybe not but to be a part of an orchestra you have to play the greats.

MYRTLE

But, don't the greats become greats by creating their own stuff? Don't you want to be the one people play instead of being the one playing someone else?

JESSIE

I think it's too late for me to be a great anyway.

Jessie puts the mac and cheese in front of Myrtle again.

Myrtle sits up and takes the bowl. Doesn't eat the food though, just looks at it.

JESSIE

How did you get into this anime stuff?

MYRTLE

My dad hated Disney cuz he felt it was manipulative. Like, he thought their movies didn't earn your tears, but forced 'em out of you. So he looked up popular non Disney animated movies and we just watched 'em together.

A beat.

JESSIE

I'm sorry about him. I'm sorry he texted you on Sunday. He said he was going to text on Tuesday. I planned to tell Leo first, and when you got back on Monday we were gonna tell you together. In person.

A beat.

JESSIE

Has he reached out to you since he told you?

Myrtle shakes her head no.

JESSIE

Well, I'm glad you're speaking today. He shouldn't take your voice with him, y'know?

Myrtle nods.

A beat.

JESSIE

Do you mind if I ask...if I just ask some questions about you and him?

MYRTLE

What kind of questions?

JESSIE

Just...you know...what it was like...what your life was like with him? I mean no worries if it's not a good time.

MYRTLE

Ask whatever you want. I don't give a fuck.

MYRTLE

Um...did he...the drinking. Did he...

MYRTLE

I mean... he drank, smoked pot, tripped on shrooms. Not all the time, but usually with his friends. But, it was chill. The drinking only got bad a few months ago.

JESSIE

What do you think happened?

Myrtle looks at Jessie like she asked the stupidest question ever.

JESSIE

What?

MYRTLE

Guess after he saw you, he fucking snapped?

JESSIE

When he saw me? You mean five months ago?

Myrtle nods.

JESSIE

He told you about that?

MYRTLE

Yeah.

A beat.

MYRTLE

You gave him your goodies or something?

JESSIE

What? No! Is that what he told you?

MYRTLE

No. Sorry. Not my business.

JESSIE

Nothing happened five months ago. We were outside! In front of a school!

JESSIE

Ok. Ok. He just got weirder and sadder after. It was like, life got real heavy for him all of a sudden. I had to miss some shows last month to sober up that motherfucker.

JESSIE

I'm sorry.

MYRTLE

He's fucked in the head, what can you do?

JESSIE

I thought you two were close?

MYRTLE

If you can't call the person you're closest with "a fucked in the head, motherfucker" are you really close?

JESSIE

I guess not.

A beat.

JESSIE

Um...did you give him an intervention?

MYRTLE

Yep. Snitched on him. Told granny and grampy, and Patrice and her mom, and some of my friends, and some of his friends. He was crying and shit. Never seen that man cry. Like from laughing, or being silly, but not like sad old man shit. It was kind of embarrassing, but I guess he needed his ass embarrassed. Always embarrassing me and shit.

JESSIE

How?

MYRTLE

By fucking my friends!

JESSIE

Oh.

MYRTLE

I have the reputation of being the kid of the local pied paper. Everyone's all like, "your dad's such a fuckin loser he can't get a bitch his own age?" They think adult women know he isn't shit, so, he goes after dumb teenagers who don't know.

JESSIE

I don't know if they're dumb.

MYRTLE

You would know. What did you see in him?

JESSIE

Well, he's charismatic. I mean he was. Was charismatic. And good looking. Was. And he was very funny. Kind of a dick -

MYRTLE

Still a dick.

JESSIE

Yeah. In a way that felt dangerous or thrilling. When you're young. But he loved taking care of people.

MYRTLE

Exactly! Like a dumb teenage girl is gonna worship a dude who buys her all the shit she wants and takes her wherever she wants to go and has a job. And he'll love her cuz she never says no. And she wears what he wants her to wear. And is available whenever he needs her to be. No fucking teenage boy can compare.

*Jessie is kind of embarrassed,
thinking how true this was of her.*

JESSIE

Um...did he...let you date older people?

MYRTLE

No. He was like, "no dating until you're 30!" Doesn't matter though. I'm never gonna date anybody.

JESSIE

Why not?

MYRTLE

Cuz motherfuckers lose their minds over it. Like, everyone I know is all, "I hope he likes me." "Do I look pretty enough today?" "I gotta lose my virginity so no one thinks I'm a square." Like, everything you do is for someone else? Every fucking conversation is "they love me, they love me not?" And I'm like, there's gotta be fucking more to a person than suckin' dick, and talking about it, you know?

JESSIE

I mean there is. Like, having someone to say goodnight to. And wake up to.

MYRTLE

Is that why Leo sleeps on the couch and you sleep in your room?

*Jessie feels called out. Myrtle
cringes over being too forthright
about something so personal.*

MYRTLE

Look, I didn't mean to cause friction or nothing.

JESSIE

Despite any friction, there is and always will be love. And partnership. And it's such a gift. I think it might be lonely not to have that.

MYRTLE

I don't know. Maybe there's more to you and to him than each other.

JESSIE

Yeah, there is more, like music, art, travel, brunch, but we also have each other. And that's the nice thing.

Jessie picks up the spoon from the mac and cheese and tries to feed Myrtle like a baby. Myrtle stops Jessie before she reaches her mouth.

MYRTLE

What if I was fucking older people? Would you be mad about it? Like, how old is too old?

JESSIE

Eighteen?

MYRTLE

You're joking?

JESSIE

There's no reason someone who can go to war should be with someone who can't even drive without a legal guardian.

MYRTLE

Wait. Weren't you my age when you started fucking my dad?

JESSIE

Sure. Obviously, at the time, I didn't feel like a victim. I mean... I still don't.

I met him a year earlier, and I pursued him relentlessly. So, it was consensual. But, now that I think about it, kind of stalkerish on my end. But, I don't regret it. Even though Leo always likes to say, "just because it was a fun time doesn't mean it wasn't a crime." But it didn't feel like a crime then.

MYRTLE

But if an eighteen year old came up me to you'd -

JESSIE

Waterboard him.

Myrtle shakes her head and laughs.

MYRTLE

What?

JESSIE

Yeah. I'd waterboard him within an inch of his life then I'd stop and he'd be relieved. But just when he thought he was safe, I'd throw him out the window.

Myrtle laughs.

JESSIE

Yeah! Because we'd be on the twentieth floor. High enough that if it doesn't kill him it would cause permanent damage. But, it'd kill him. I'd make sure of it.

MYRTLE

You make no fucking sense.

JESSIE

I can't even imagine being with a twenty-five year old now. I look at them and think, "aww, where's your guardian, sweet little baby?" I just don't take them seriously as people. But, I'm sure they don't see themselves as babies. Even if I do.

MYRTLE

So...

JESSIE

So, as a fifteen year old I didn't feel like I was manipulated or anything by your father. I mean you're fifteen, do you feel like a kid?

MYRTLE

Sometimes. Like I want to be tucked into bed, fed, carried have my hair brushed. But, I don't want a curfew. So, it's like a mixed bag.

JESSIE

Same.

MYRTLE

So, if you feel like you were in your power, then why did you run away?

JESSIE

What. I...I didn't run away.

MYRTLE

Didn't you stop talking to your parents?

JESSIE

Not because of him. I mean, because of him, since they didn't want us to be together, but also because they were trying to control my life. Fuck them.

MYRTLE

Ok. Fuck them. But you also said "fuck these hoes" to us. Like, no calls, or texts. Not even on birthdays, or holidays. Nothing. Like it was all something you had to escape.

JESSIE

No. I wasn't escaping anything. I was determined to have a life of my own, be my own person, by any means necessary. I didn't care who I left behind. Who I had to forget to make sure my life went my way.

Myrtle does an "I see" nod. Jessie brushes Myrtle's hair behind her ears.

JESSIE

Kinda fucked up, huh?

Myrtle nods. They sit in a silence.

Keys in the door. It's Leo.

LEO

Myrtle?

MYRTLE

Hey!

LEO

You're here and up. In the living room. Among us!

MYRTLE

I am.

LEO

After what? Five days of silence?

MYRTLE

Maybe a little bit longer.

LEO

Well, I am so glad to hear your voice.

MYRTLE

Yeah, it's nice to share it.

LEO

Keep sharing it. Uh...Patrice and her mom are waiting outside! You ready?

MYRTLE

Yeah.

She gets up.

JESSIE

It's good to be among friends.

MYRTLE

Yeah. I'll see you guys tomorrow morning.

She heads toward the door.

LEO

Aren't you gonna pack?

MYRTLE

Nah. For sleepovers, Patrice and her mom always have what I need.

LEO

Well, I hope spending time outside of the apartment lifts your spirit.

MYRTLE

Yeah.

JESSIE

Take this mac and cheese to go, will ya?

Jessie gets up to give it to Myrtle. She takes it. There's this moment where everyone feels like they're supposed to hug each other, but aren't sure if that's where they are in their relationships yet. So everyone high fives Myrtle.

MYRTLE

Bye.

JESSIE

Bye.

LEO

Bye.

She waves at them as she exits. They wave back. Leo shuts the door behind her. He turns back and looks at Jessie.

SCENE 7

LEO

Hey.

JESSIE

Hey.

He goes to sit on the sofa, takes off his shoes, then takes out his sketch book and a pencil. After:

JESSIE

What are you working on?

LEO

Possible characters for a graphic novel I might ask Myrtle to collaborate on. Maybe she can write it and I can illustrate. It can be a coy companion to her zine about names.

JESSIE

I think she'd love that.

Jessie sits right next to him. She looks over at what he's doing, then sits in a moment of silence before she speaks:

JESSIE

Myrtle recommended this movie called *Spirited Away*. She's gonna watch it with me.

LEO

That's a good one.

JESSIE

She told me to watch it entirely in Japanese first so I can just feel it.

LEO

Brilliant. Glad, you two are bonding.

JESSIE

Yeah.

LEO

Having her here has been electric, hasn't it?

JESSIE

Like an electric rollercoaster, for sure.

LEO

I didn't realize how empty things felt until she arrived.

JESSIE

Empty?

LEO

Empty is the wrong word. I didn't realize how painful it was to not have... what happens if you go to Germany in the fall? What are we gonna do? Ask her to tag along for two years?

JESSIE

I...don't know how to answer that.

LEO

I think...I want to stay here with her.

Silence.

LEO

I'm not gonna ask you to give up on your dream. I hope you get chosen for The Fulbright. I just think with all the changes in Myrtle's life right now, I want to be that stability for her. And here she also has Patrice. And dual enrollment.

A beat.

JESSIE

I don't think she should have to choose either.

LEO

Oh. Ok. Right! We'd visit you.

JESSIE

How often?

LEO

One weekend a month maybe? I know we always follow each other wherever we travel, but without me there as a distraction, you'd be able to focus on your studies. And network.

A beat.

LEO

Here, Myrtle can meet all the people who love her that she doesn't know yet. Like my mom.

JESSIE

She hates my guts.

LEO

(playfully)

I mean you abandoned your child.

JESSIE

(playfully)

Fuck off.

LEO

Myrtle should also meet her grandparents.

Jessie groans.

LEO

I want to meet your parents.

JESSIE

I don't think I can casually reenter their life.

LEO

You should. Call them tomorrow morning.

JESSIE

And tell them I dumped Rafe ages ago, and oh we had a child, and oh I left her, and oh my current partner is the man I had an affair with, and no we aren't married and no we don't have any babies?

*The "we don't have babies" pains
Leo. Jessie takes note of this and
decides to finally bring up the
elephant in the room.*

JESSIE

If I don't have any babies, are we through?

PAUSE

LEO

I understood not wanting to have any when Myrtle was not in our lives - to quietly justify our choice. But she's here. So, what's our justification now?

JESSIE

A New York Philharmonic harpist has to die. A Chamber Music Society pianist has to lose their fingers. Studio Gablee -

LEO

Ghibli.

JESSIE

- might decide they need an American female composer.

A beat.

JESSIE

I have to make it. I need a win. But I don't think any of these are a possibility without The Fulbright. That would be a big win.

LEO

Aren't you tired of having to do one thing after another after another in the hopes that some gatekeeper sees you and says, "you are enough."

JESSIE

I am tired, but I don't know how to do it any other way.

A beat.

JESSIE

Ok. How about this? I'll freeze my eggs. If by forty I'm still a nobody-

LEO

You're not a nobody to me.

JESSIE

You're so cute.

She boops his nose.

JESSIE

If I'm not where I want to be, or I guess, If I am, we'll do the baby thing then.

His phone dings. He takes out his pocket and looks at it.

JESSIE

Who's that? Your lil girlfriend?

LEO

An email about an interview to be a professor at Columbia.

JESSIE

University?

LEO

Yeah.

JESSIE

Who? What? When? How?

LEO

Two of those flirty college girls have parents who work there.

JESSIE

And they asked you to do salacious things to get the interview?

LEO

They did, but I declined, of course.

JESSIE

You have to do something salacious so we're even.

LEO

Maybe, I'll ask my ex to blow me and we'll be even.

A beat. Leo and Jessie look at each other. They're not having fun with these jokes.

JESSIE

Why are girls who have parents at Columbia going to school at Borough of Manhattan Community College anyway?

LEO

To cosplay commoners.

JESSIE

How very Marie Antoinette.

A beat.

JESSIE

Oh my God. If you get the gig, Myrtle can go there for free, yeah?

LEO

Yeah.

JESSIE

An Ivy Leaguer! And she'll thrive. And I'll get a job there after Germany because you'll make that happen and they'll want me, of course. And I'll tell tales of how I had my first child at twenty and my second one at forty. Poetic.

LEO

Shakespearean levels of poetic.

JESSIE

Exactly! I'm not doing a vaginal birth this time, though.

LEO

C- section then?

JESSIE

Fuck that! We're gonna pay some twenty-five year old to gestate that baby in her womb! Or are only women who push their babies out their vags real mothers?

Leo shakes his head at the silliness. Jessie punches his shoulder, playfully.

LEO

Ok. Kids are potentially in our future.

JESSIE

If neither of us die.

LEO

If neither of us die.

PAUSE

JESSIE

What?

LEO

We should get married.

JESSIE

Too many traditionalist themes in one conversation!

LEO

It doesn't have to be big. We get your parents there. My mom. Myrtle.

And you don't have to think of it as taking part of an archaic institution, but more as a good business investment.

JESSIE

I wouldn't want to miss out on that Marvel money.

LEO

And I wouldn't want to miss out on that Studio Ghibli money.

PAUSE.

JESSIE

The concert is in one week. Let's plan the rest of our lives the Tuesday after? Deal?

LEO

Deal.

They shake hands. Leo pulls Jessie close to him. He kisses her. She kisses him back.

JESSIE

Never go a whole week without kissing me again, ok?

LEO

Ok..

They continue to kiss for a bit then Jessie pulls off Leo's shirt. She tries to pull off his pants too, but it isn't as easy as she'd like.

JESSIE

Oh my god. I'm rusty. Help me.

He helps her pull off his pants. Don't worry he has boxers on! They succeed and cheer then kiss even more! Deeper! Longer! He begins to pull her pants (or skirt) down!

He does so successfully. Don't worry she has her underwear on!

JESSIE

That was so much easier.

He's slightly above her as they kiss. He is about to take her undies off when she stops him.

LEO

What?

JESSIE

I let Rafe kiss me.

LEO

What?

JESSIE

And I let him take off my bra.

LEO

What?

During this monologue he makes his way to the opposite side of the sofa, taking in what is being said.

JESSIE

It's just when he said he was going to abandon Myrtle I wanted to change his mind. And sex always worked in the past and I thought it would work this time, because he made it seem that he was still into me and I thought I could get my way. He took off my bra but then he said it didn't look like I was having any fun so he said he wasn't interested. But he sniffed my bra, then took it with him when he left. I think he's just never seen thirty five year old breasts and was scared away, but he pretended it was about my enjoyment in an effort to be respectful which is both nice and pathetic. Nothing happened beyond that though. No groping, or mouths being used beyond the kissing. No tongue even.

Leo is still processing what he's hearing.

JESSIE

What are you thinking? What are you feeling?

He's still thinking and feeling.

JESSIE

Changing your mind about wanting to marry me and the whole surrogacy thing?

He still doesn't say anything.

JESSIE

Are you mad? Disappointed? Disgusted?

LEO

Angry. Sad. Relieved.

JESSIE

Relieved?

LEO

Relieved that this isn't a story of how he fucked you raw on top of your piano and now you're gonna have his second kid before you have my first.

JESSIE

Oh God!

LEO

Angry that anything happened at all.

JESSIE

I'm sorry.

LEO

Sad that you're still under his spell.

JESSIE

Under his spell?

LEO

Yeah, I guess when someone grooms you it doesn't just go away.

JESSIE

I'm 35. I cannot be groomed.

LEO

Maybe the effects don't disappear because you're older.

SILENCE.

LEO

I think...before we start a family...we should go to therapy to figure out the last twenty years of life so we aren't unaware of how we've been harmed and unaware of the harm we could cause.

JESSIE

Yeah!

LEO

Maybe we'll find out our relationship is nothing more than trauma bonding and that the healthiest thing to do is let go.

JESSIE

Our relationship isn't trauma bonding. Don't say shit like that.

LEO

We're not even real, if you think about it.

JESSIE

What are you talking about?

LEO

You and I were a secret for years until we told Rafe the truth. Then we left. And none of our friends know about Myrtle. We've always had a part of us hidden away from the people we know. And anyone who knew the truth were mostly kept out of our lives. Who would we be as a couple if everything was out in the open?

JESSIE

If you're mad about Rafe say that, but don't fucking say we aren't real.

LEO

I am fucking mad about Rafe. I fucking did say that, but a lot of shit is about to change. A lot of truths are gonna come out. A lot of ugly things in our past are gonna have to be talked about and when faced with it all are we even worth fighting for?

JESSIE

Ok! So what if we find out our relationship is "trauma bonding?" Is there no place to grow from it? Can we find out something like that and say, "Alright, now that we know this, we want to move forward in a newer, healthier way!" Not just say, "Whoops, this was a mistake and there's nothing salvageable!"

Leo shrugs.

JESSIE

Look, I don't know how many guys could find out I let my ex touch my tits and somehow see me as the victim. You're a get. I don't want to lose you.

LEO

Yeah, well. What did Rafe say? That I'm a "simp" for you.

JESSIE

Yeah you are. And I'm a "simp" for you, asshole.

She punches his shoulder. As she pulls her hand away, he takes it.

LEO

I haven't seen your tits in a week. I should see them now.

JESSIE

Yes! But, in our room.

LEO

Oh, you mean, the one without a bed? Pass.

JESSIE

Don't you remember when we were young we had sex on all the surfaces? Didn't matter how hard or small or tight?

LEO

Key word being "young." Nowadays, I'd break my back.

JESSIE

You can be on top and break my back.

LEO

I don't want to hurt you.

JESSIE

But, sometimes I like the way it hurts.

She gets up and holds out her hand.

JESSIE

Come on. *Post-coitus* we can plan a fundraiser for a new bed. A "secret" show for your impending graphic novel/zine with Myrtle and I can play music?

LEO

No one's gonna come to a fundraiser for our new bed.

JESSIE

We'll sell it as recreation of how we met: the music girl looking to branch out. The art boy wanting to create a soundscape for his art installation. Romantic! They don't need to know the real reason.

LEO

How about Rafe pays me back for all the novels he spilled coffee on and we use that money to buy an air mattress instead?

The mention of Rafe's name gives Jessie an idea. She looks at the piano. She nods her head in its direction. He gets what she means.

He takes the hand she has held out this whole time and she leads him to the piano. She steps on the bench and sits on the top of the piano. He steps on the bench and they begin to kiss. Lights go dark. They exit.

SCENE 8

This scene is more stylized. Jessie will be in the background playing a Joe Hisaishi piece from Spirited Away on the harp. She'll reenter in the dark, or as close to dark a place can be while someone is playing an instrument. As she plays, the landline will ring. Spotlight will be on Myrtle as she enters. She'll pick it up. Another spotlight will be on Rafe who'll be on another side of the stage/theatre. Maybe he's smoking a cigarette/spliff/cigar/sipping on a Capri Sun, or nothing at all.

MYRTLE

Dad!

RAFE

Turtle.

MYRTLE

You said you were gonna call and text everyday, but you only did that the one day you told me you were gonna fucking leave? Then you never fucking reached out to me? What the fuck?

RAFE

Don't fucking talking to me like that, Turtle.

MYRTLE

Sorry.

RAFE

I didn't feel good.

MYRTLE

I didn't either!

RAFE

I mean I drank so much I got alcohol poisoning, can you believe that? And then because I wasn't drinking I went through withdrawal. And let me tell you going through withdrawal doesn't feel worth it just to see the other side, but I wanted to see the other side so I could call you in good health.

MYRTLE

Are you okay, now?

RAFE

One of my nurses stayed with me the whole time. She took such good care of me.

MYRTLE

How old is she?

RAFE

You'll be happy to know she's 22.

MYRTLE

Still too young for you.

RAFE

But legal. Progress, huh?

MYRTLE

Why are you so scared of women your own age, dad?

RAFE

Your dad said he was ill and this is what you ask him?

MYRTLE

I don't know. If I never see you again I want to know how to describe you in my writing. In your own words.

SILENCE.

RAFE

Women my age will never fucking see the good in me. They'll look at my past and they'll say, "He's a creep. A drunk. A broken man. A loser." But when women are young. Younger. They always think I could be something. And it's hard to be excited about people who can't see any hope in you.

MYRTLE

I see hope in you.

Rafe doesn't say anything.

MYRTLE

I'm so sorry for all the trouble I caused you. I promise I won't fight any girls anymore. I promise I won't get kicked out of any more schools. I promise if you come back I will make your life so much easier.

RAFE

Don't. Your mom does this begging thing too and I fucking hate it. Don't fucking beg for shit. You're life is gonna be so good now. You're gonna have a two parent home. That's what all the statistics say is best, right?

MYRTLE

Why can't I have a three parent home?

RAFE

I don't think I could stand to see your mom and her loverboy...happy. I'd rather be disemboweled.

A beat.

RAFE

Look, I know she said she didn't have the capacity to take care of you, but she fucking has the capacity.

MYRTLE

She said that?

Rafe realizes he slipped up.

MYRTLE

I just make everyone's life harder?

RAFE

No one's life is harder because you're in it.

MYRTLE

No one tries to escape people who make their lives easy.

RAFE

Forget what I said. It was stupid. I just...I gotta figure out where I fit in the world. If I fit in at all. It won't make sense to you yet, and it seems cruel to you now, for me to leave, but if I don't figure out that shit, I don't think I'll survive. And I think that's crueller to you.

SILENCE

MYRTLE

Don't fucking kill yourself, ok?

RAFE

Ok.

MYRTLE

Whenever you're ready, you're gonna come back to me in one piece, ok?

RAFE

Ok.

MYRTLE

I love you, ok?

RAFE

I love you.

MYRTLE

Ok.

SCENE 9

The living room door is slightly open. Leo is sweeping the floor. After a beat, Jessie enters.

LEO

How did the phone call with your parents go?

JESSIE

There was a lot of crying.

LEO

Good crying?

JESSIE

Yeah! I told them everything and they said they loved me. I thought they'd hate me or be mad, but they said they were excited to meet you and Myrtle. What the fuck?

LEO

What?

JESSIE

Were they not as terrible as I remembered? Did I cut people out of my life for two decades who weren't fucking terrible? What the fuck?

LEO

Hey! Hey!

He takes Jessie and seats her on the sofa then sits next to her.

LEO

Hey, your parents might end up being fucking terrible. But this time, if you have to cut them out of your life, it'll be on your terms. And from an adult perspective, ok?

JESSIE

Ok.

LEO

We're not gonna waste time regretting shit. We're gonna start the rest of our lives with truth. And love. And maybe there'll be a lot of pain along the way. And maybe we'll lose a lot of people along the way. But, we'll be free.

JESSIE

The Gunthers are not gonna fund my German experience once they find out I'm a fucking liar.

LEO

We can wait a little to tell them truth.

JESSIE

The Wilson's are gonna come back to NYC so fast to reclaim their apartment once they found out I'm a fucking liar.

LEO

Maybe we can move somewhere affordable? Get a real house?

JESSIE

Johannesburg?

LEO

Connecticut?

JESSIE

Prague?

LEO

Atlanta? Or maybe somewhere where people frequently get hired for astrophysics related jobs, so we can be near Myrtle once she graduates?

JESSIE

I hope that's Tokyo.

Myrtle opens the door and comes in.

JESSIE

(to Leo)

Speaking of science related things!

(to Myrtle)

You didn't tell us how the science retreat was, M?

MYRTLE

Oh. I learned... that I don't want to study astrophysics or any form of science anymore.

JESSIE

What?

LEO

What?

She walks toward her room.

JESSIE

Myrtle, come back here.

She stops and turns to face them.

JESSIE

What's up?

LEO

Yeah, what happened?

MYRTLE

Science isn't as black and white as I assumed it was. It's just another thing that people think they understand and then someone else finds out that it was understood all wrong. And then there's a new way to understand it. Until the next guy.

LEO

Isn't that the beauty of science? That something can grow and shift and become something new?

JESSIE

Yeah! You said that you liked that people had to put in the work to disprove the work!

MYRTLE

It's just that you can put in so much labor and it's just...undone. Like even the laws of the universe are limited to what we know. Even multiverses have multiple ways they can exist and we don't even know if they exist! How can we have convictions if nothing in life is steady, solid, safe?

LEO

But change means that anything is possible.

MYRTLE

Yeah, even bad things.

Myrtle goes to her room.

LEO

She spends the night at Patrice's and she loses her dream?

JESSIE

She can't fucking lose her dream.

LEO

Maybe Patrice is a bad influence?

JESSIE

Dreams make being alive worthwhile.

Myrtle reenters with the huge backpack she first appeared in.

JESSIE

Where are you going?

MYRTLE

To live with Patrice.

JESSIE

What?

LEO

What?

MYRTLE

I don't want to be somewhere where someone doesn't have the capacity for me.

Jessie immediately knows that Rafe told Myrtle she said that.

JESSIE

Sit.

Myrtle doesn't budge.

JESSIE

Sit down.

Myrtle reluctantly walks over to the sofa. Leo goes take off her backpack for her. When he does she plops down on the sofa. Jessie sits next to her. Leo sits on the armchair.

JESSIE

When I told your dad I didn't have the capacity it was more like I didn't have the capacity for his bullshit. He is who I don't have capacity for. I have capacity for you.

MYRTLE

Nobody has the capacity for me. Everyone fucking leaves. And it's so fucking embarrassing to be so unwanted by so many people.

JESSIE

You're not unwanted-

MYRTLE

I don't think I have it in me anymore to pretend that it doesn't hurt so bad. Shoulda had an abortion or got your tubes tied or a vasectomy if you didn't fucking want to be parents.

JESSIE

It's not that I didn't want to be a mom, ok. I just wasn't prepared by how much I was defined by being your mother, as if that was all there was to me as if...

MYRTLE

Escape. Escape. Escape. I didn't ask to be born. I didn't ask to be a burden to you, to my dad, to Leo. I didn't ask for any of this and I fucking hate it.

LEO

Hey, you're not a burden, ok.

He sits on the side of the sofa.

LEO

I'm so fucking excited to be your step dad. I'm so fucking excited to love you for the rest of my life. It's hard to understand, but your mother and I leaving? Your dad leaving? It has nothing to do with you. I blamed myself for my dad walking out on me but I was fucking four. You were fucking two when your mom and I left.

MYRTLE

I'm not two now!

LEO

Yeah, ok, but you're still a kid. Rafe's the adult.

He looks at Jessie.

LEO

He was the adult.

Jessie nods at him. He looks back at Myrtle.

LEO

We are the adults. Until, you're eighteen, the adults are to blame.

JESSIE

And even then, sometimes it's still the older adults who are to blame.

A beat.

JESSIE

You are wanted here. We...love you, kiddo.

LEO

Ditto, kiddo.

MYRTLE

Are you sure?

JESSIE

I think it's the only thing I'm sure of.

LEO

Whenever I love someone, I know that if nothing else is honest about me *that* feeling is.

A beat.

MYRTLE

If you guys leave me again, I swear -

LEO

Never.

JESSIE

I mean you're going on you're mini graphic novel tour, this summer right?

LEO

Right.

(to Myrtle)

I forgot if I told you about it already, but I hope you can tag along.

JESSIE

And you have that residency in Switzerland in August, right?

LEO

Right.

JESSIE

And we were gonna visit Germany after that, right?

LEO

Ok. We get your point.

MYRTLE

The point is you had a life before me and I am in the way.
I'll call Patrice back.

LEO

No. No. That's not what we're saying. Right, Jessie?

JESSIE

Right. We're just saying that sometimes people leave but they
come back.

LEO

And sometimes people make plans but plans can be adjusted.

JESSIE

Adjusted not thrown away.

LEO

Delayed maybe.

JESSIE

Worked around maybe.

MYRTLE

Unwanted girl/Crawling through the hole like the worm she is/
Step on her/ to make her soft/or call her by her name to let
her know she is bonafide.

*Jessie and Leo look at her like,
"what's going on?"*

MYRTLE

It's a mini poem. Sometimes, I recite them when my dad and
his parents would fight just as a distraction.

JESSIE

We're not fighting. We're just -

LEO

Figuring out how to make you fit into our lives in a way
that's good for -

LEO

You.

JESSIE

All of us.

LEO

All of us.

MYRTLE

What if there is no way?

JESSIE

We will find a way.

MYRTLE

Promise?

JESSIE

Pinky promise.

*Jessie holds out her pinky. So does
Leo. Myrtle thinks this is silly
but she holds their pinkies with
her pinkies.*

JESSIE

So tell Patrice to fuck off cuz you're gonna stay with us.
Where's your phone?

*She takes her phone out of her
pocket, shows it to Jessie.*

JESSIE

Call her and tell her.

She calls Patrice.

MYRTLE

Hey bitch. Yeah, it's ok. I'm gonna stay. Yeah. I'm ok.
They're ok. For real for real.

And they told me to tell you to "fuck off."

(to Jessie and Leo)

She said, "Eat my dick, cocksuckers."

They laugh.

MYRTLE

(to Patrice)

Love you too. See you soon? Ok. Bye.

*She ends the call. They sit in a
bit of silence.*

*In an effort to lighten up the
mood:*

JESSIE

Hey. Did you know Leo and I are probably gonna get married soon?

LEO

We are?

JESSIE

And we're gonna have kids in a few years?

LEO

Oh yeah?

JESSIE

How many siblings do you want?

MYRTLE

Five.

JESSIE

Within reason.

LEO

Sounds reasonable to me.

JESSIE

(to Leo)

Shut the fuck up!

(to Myrtle)

Within reason.

MYRTLE

Two?

JESSIE

Two? Two is reasonable.

LEO

It's so reasonable.

MYRTLE

Can I name them? I should name one of them. Come on, you owe me that much.

JESSIE

I do owe you. But you know what you owe me?

MYRTLE

Nothing. No, I'm kidding. What?

JESSIE

Not giving up on science.

LEO

Unless you really want to.

JESSIE

You'll only really want to if you find something you love more. Not because you're afraid of something being malleable.

LEO

Right. The sciences, like the arts, are beautiful because of their mystery.

JESSIE

And mystery means there's so much to discover. A life of discovery is full one.

LEO

Like how you're about to discover that they're gonna be some ground rules now that you're staying with us.

JESSIE

Uh oh.

MYRTLE

Oh no.

LEO

Ground rules, like we're gonna watch a fuckton of anime. And read a fuckton of manga. And we're gonna go to a fuckton of museums.

JESSIE

Except the fucking MoMA. What a shit museum.

LEO

To the uncultured the MoMA is a shit museum.

JESSIE

Oh, I'm uncultured? Spell Dvořák.

LEO

You know I can't.

JESSIE

Ok, then fuck off.

(to Myrtle)

Anytime anyone invites you to MoMA you go inside, see how it's just third grade art, and then walk the fuck out and go to Lincoln Center instead.

LEO

Oh the place where classism is so evident? The place with all the entitled assholes?

JESSIE

And MoMA is the beacon of what? The working class?

LEO

More affordable than anything Lincoln Center has to offer.

JESSIE

They have a lot of free shows! Anyway, we're also gonna have lots of dinners.

MYRTLE

Oh yeah. Why does you always cook?

LEO

She took some classes a few months ago and all of sudden thinks she's a better cook than me.

JESSIE

I am better than you.

LEO

I've been cooking for us for years, I am the better cook.

JESSIE

Doing something for a long time, doesn't automatically make you better at it.

LEO

It absolutely fucking does when you've done it well. You loved my cooking.

JESSIE

I loved it when I didn't know better. Now, I know better. You've had my cooking, Myrtle. Tell him how good it is?

MYRTLE

It is good. A little unhealthy. My cooking might be best though.

JESSIE

Oh.

LEO

Oh.

MYRTLE

Just saying maybe we should have a cook off. All three of us.

LEO

Alright, sounds like another thing to add to our ground rules: Monday night cook offs.

MYRTLE

Can another ground rule be that you pay for me to take guitar lessons? I always wanted to learn but my dad said wanting to play the guitar was too conformist.

JESSIE

I can teach you how to play guitar.

MYRTLE

You know how to play?

LEO

And the violin.

JESSIE

I haven't played either since I was your age, but yeah I think if I practiced a bit, it'll be like I never stopped.

MYRTLE

Why did you stop?

Jessie and Leo look at each other.

JESSIE

Because those were the instruments my parents wanted me to play. Since I wanted to rebel against them I dropped what they wanted for me and picked up the piano and the harp instead.

MYRTLE

A little nerd rebellion.

JESSIE

Yeah.

A beat.

MYRTLE

Will I get to meet your parents someday?

JESSIE

Yeah. They're gonna be at my concert this Sunday.

LEO

And my mom will be there.

MYRTLE

Never thought I'd have a step grandma. You think she's gonna be weirded out if I call her step grandma?

LEO

You can call her grandma. She will love it. And you.

JESSIE

You're gonna be sick to your stomach with all the love that's gonna come your way.

MYRTLE

I have one page of tiny poems that I don't know exactly where I'm gonna put - about all the love I wish would come for me. They're not funny enough for my zine.

JESSIE

Read 'em.

MYRTLE

I don't know.

LEO

Yeah. Jess can play some music and I can draw something up while you're reading. Let's make this a new ground rule. We art together.

JESSIE

Like Friday Mornings?

MYRTLE

How about weekend afternoons?

JESSIE

Makes more sense. Yeah.

Myrtle gets up and goes to her backpack to find her journal with the poems. Jessie makes her way to the piano.

LEO

Maybe you can put your poems in a graphic novel we create together?

MYRTLE

Poems in a graphic novel? I don't know.

LEO

Graphic novels can be anything we want them to be. And maybe you can write the dialogue and I illustrate?

MYRTLE

Or we write it. And we illustrate it.

LEO

As a companion piece to your zine, maybe?

MYRTLE

It's gonna be it's own cool thing. And it's gonna be dark and funny. And I'm gonna be on the cover.

LEO

Damn right!

At some point during the exchange below she finds her poems and make her way toward center.

LEO

Can I draw you while you're reading? Maybe this'll be the cover of the zine?

MYRTLE

I'm not gonna be on that cover.

JESSIE

You should be.

MYRTLE

I don't want people to know it's me.

JESSIE

No more hiding young lady. We will not be living our lives in secret anymore.

LEO

Damn right.

MYRTLE

Um...we'll see.

JESSIE

What should I play?

MYRTLE

Improvise something?

JESSIE

Oh. Ok.

*Jessie's hands are over the keys.
She's kind of nervous to play
something that isn't someone else's
but she goes for it.*

MYRTLE

I'm just gonna read a series of poems that might be good for the novel or nothing or something else and everyone just keep doing their thing until I say stop, ok?

JESSIE

Ok!

LEO

Ok!

Myrtles faces forward then exhales.

MYRTLE

Sobbing in the darkness/Or darkness is the only place she knows/ It is her comfort/Turn on the light/Show her that brightness lives in and around her too/She will open her eyes and see she wasn't alone after all.

Myrtle looks over and Leo is nodding his head to the music. Jessie is playing while trying to figure out what her next note will be.

MYRTLE

Violence is the only way she knows how to speak/It's the only way she will get your attention/You're scared but you see her/You're disturbed but you see her/A sort of hero/A sort of chaos/Someone who will die just to hear you say, "I love you."

JESSIE

We love you!

LEO

We love you!

Everyone laughs.

MYRTLE

I have no sweetness to share/so I give you my hand/to read/to open/to high-five/to never let go of. If you never remember anything else about me don't forget my name and the way I felt when you said it: warm, tingling, soft, always in motion.

She looks at Leo. Then at Jessie. They look at her. She smiles at both of them then at the audience.

MYRTLE

Stop!

END OF PLAY