

WAITING FOR TREVOR

a play in five scenes

TIME:

Contemporary.

SETTING:

JUDY'S FRONT ROOM. A retired American academic's front room / workroom / home library in a small house twenty years past its last decoration.

CHARACTERS:

JUDY: *f. 70s. A theatrical, classically-educated writer and academic living alone.*

DOROTHY P. *f. 30s-40s. Pert, witty woman-about-town lifted here from the 1930s.*

WILLIAM S. *m. 40s to 60s. Poet, tragedian, scholar, lifted here from the 17th century. Somewhat snooty.*

ANNE S. *f. 30s-40s. Somber, glamorous lyric poet from the 1960s*

DOROTHY also plays a Realtor, and ANNE and WILLIAM her clients.

“WAITING FOR TREVOR”

Scene i

AT RISE:

(The ground-floor FRONT ROOM of a small home, lights OUT, MORNING. One window, curtain drawn. A room suited for snacking, reading, napping. Framed posters attest to a cosmopolitan taste. Bookshelves, and books in piles. Record player and lps. A modest plaque or two, framed clippings. Hallways lead off from each side.)

(A comfy swivel chair faces UPSTAGE. A small writing desk and chair, with papers and a laptop. On this desk are three books, as will be noted. Drink / snack cabinet at this work area, with a kettle.)

(Couch with pillows and a blanket. Coffee table, martini shaker with a glass and olives and snacks. Nuts, nutcracker. Large bowl, and popcorn on the floor.)

(WE HEAR JUDY reciting, OFF.)

JUDY (OFF)

*I would I would in meadows lie
Beneath the rude roof of the sky
And watch the ragged clouds go by
And wish for rain.*

(JUDY, 70s, ENTERS, in robe, pajamas and socks. Judy is a classicist, grandly theatrical. She's less sure of the 2nd stanza.)

JUDY (CONT'D)

*Despite no topcoat or the like,
Or hat or boots or... something about a bike.*

(She stumbles her way through the third stanza)

JUDY

*I wish I wish the rain might beat / like mallet heads upon the street,
etcetera...*

(back to a proper finishing cadence)

*For with the song of life she sings,
Ma Nature often ruin brings
And wiser leaves the sodden things
That afterward remain.*

(Judy's diction is impeccable, but we can see a considerable effort goes into this steadiness.)

JUDY

Who wrote that? Oh yes, I did. Some words long tossed aside still
cling like lint on a pantsuit.

(She surveys the room.)

JUDY

Trevor? Are you in the house? Trevor, are you here? Or did you go
out? Come, it must be one or the other!

(She ruffles the blanket on the couch in case he's there.)

JUDY

Trevor?

(The remnants on the coffee table:)

JUDY

When what to my wondering eyes did appear
But yesterday's vodka and Tuesday night's beer.

(She carries a beer bottle to a waste basket near her desk
and retrieves or repositions other small items)

JUDY

Jollity, jollity, frolic and fun. Over the carpet and through the mess, to
grandmother's house we go.

(As if observing herself for a Wellness Check:)

JUDY

Recalls where her slippers are. Left, right! Found the light switch
without fumbling. Made popcorn last night and salted it satisfactorily.
Picked up...

JUDY (CONT'D)

(looking down)

... most of the dropped bits. Wrote to, oh, what's her name. The sad girl from school. The girl. Anyway; done and dusted. *Cynthia!* Yesterday's paper into the recycling bin, crossword done, you will note, in pen.

(Dropping the newspaper in the blue bin with satisfaction, she looks around, suddenly unsure of her next move.)

JUDY

I... wanted something.

(a forced smile fails)

I am windblown, Trevor, and mine is but a little grip. You'll laugh to hear me say it, but I've been watching tee-vee, do you know why? I have been watching tee-vee because you can't do it wrong. Because it is easy as a splinter. I need the comforting, but which diminisheth me.

Trevor? Wouldst thee show thy lovely face, for I seek counsel and would commune a while.

(She arranges the three books on her desk, book-store-display style, facing the door.)

JUDY

When was it I had my call?

(checks her watch, shakes it)

Oh dammit it can't be.

(Once a teacher, she calls as to a class:)

JUDY

Correct time, someone? *Phone, phone!* Wherefore art thou, Lenoveo?

(She finds her cell and dials a Facetime call, inserting an earbud.)

JUDY

Aisha! Good morning. I am so sorry, I was collywobbling all over and what can I say. I only missed, what? - oh dear, half an hour? That's forty-five minutes in shrink time. With no more deadlines, I live in dayless weeks. I seem to have misplaced the other ear thing; you'll be in mono. I may have vacuumed it up. Oh, that's right I don't vacuum. Perhaps it's in the sink. It sleeps with the dishes.

(She clicks on an electric kettle near her desk. She'll boil water and make instant coffee during the call)

JUDY

I was looking for Trevor. As I often find myself doing, pre-coffee. Will you have a cup? Of course you won't, you're in New Jersey. I'll pour it and you can look at it in rapt admiration.

(sniffs the open jar)

Liquid optimism! Sorry about the detritus. Oh look at that – a popcorn landed in an empty walnut shell. Now and then I see something I couldn't possibly have imagined, and I realize all over again that the world is real.

So: how do I seem to a highly-paid clinical observer?

(As Aisha talks, Judy poses parodically, but is distracted by one of the three books on her desk: a colorful board book with cover art of a ladybug.)

JUDY

Oh! – *sorry* – I got a royalty check for this one! Three hundred and six dollars, woo-hoo! which close as I can tell is thirty-eight copies. I hid an obscenity in the first letter of each poem, did I tell you this? Something naughty for the parents. Acrostic terrorism! (-----) No, nothing of note. Well... Trevor suspects I'm seeing people. As distinct from "seeing other people." Seeing people walking around, I mean. This is how it goes in my family. Of course, there's also the question of whether I'm seeing Trevor. But listen to me rattling on. How *do* you put up with me for two hundred dollars an hour?

The main question is, as always, *Quo vadimus?* Where are we going, my grief and I? I need a piece of work to wrest me from my malaise. To rise me from my stinky couch. But, of course, without a car... that whole debacle. And I must buy more books. Else what's a cerebellum for?

(Alabama accent)

Where ahh come from, they are less appreciative of books. In the anti-cerebellum South. To coin a phrase. Coffee, coffee!

(She pours the kettle water over the crystals.)

JUDY

I need a project, right now. (----) "Agitated?" Not at all! The wood thrush natters in the glen, the kraken bellows in the deep, I too must rouse myself from sleep! Stirrs, replaces spoon. Wash that later. Where's the big... the, the plate thing? Not the... I put it... no, that was the other. Sorry...

Project-wise, there are, as discussed, three categories of things I do rather well.

(She picks up the colorful ladybug book)

JUDY

Number one: doggerel. Limericks about bugs: another book deal, another three hundred and six dollars, *ka-ching!*

(She returns this book facing the door and picks up the second book: a collection of scholarly essays, hardcover, formal.)

JUDY

Number Two: a formal essay. I am a Classics Ph.D *Phi Beta*, huff huff. Perhaps my long-delayed scholarly analysis of which was Starsky and which was Hutch. A tee-vee show before your time.

(She caresses her third book: a modest poetry volume.)

JUDY

Number Three, and the hardest: fish for feelings long unexamined, laid out like spoons on the lawn. When I was young I fantasized about writing the perfect poem they'd find with my body, clutched theatrically to spasmic chest. But then I thought: what if I don't die? I'd have to go to bed every night with this page pinned to my nightgown. Revise it annually, iron it, re-print it when it got jam on it...

Did you know the annual spending on the Arts in England is twenty-three dollars *per person*? In America it's forty-four cents! And that was before the giant orange turd. Compare to our military spending at twenty-four hundred dollars. Reverse those figures and we could be awash with Frankenthalsers, Nevelsons! And be invaded by Costa Rica. Which would serve us right...

(She's a little lost after this digression)

JUDY

Yesterday I stood in this room with a blank envelope in my hand. I couldn't remember what it was for. I wasn't holding pen or stamp. I finally remembered I'd found it on the floor near my bed. I would weep, but I am lachrymose intolerant.

(A curtsy as Aisha compliments the witticism)

JUDY

Why, thank you. It increasingly appears I can achieve nothing without chemical assistance. Without Chasing my Sanborn. So! I seek your wise pharmaceutical counsel.

(She returns to the three books; her three talents.)

JUDY

Choice Number one: step up my drinking – not to excess, just to the point of a credible smile, a teasing curtsy. Lovely swirly abandon, the hoisting of a backstage hem and of a fistful of decrepit penis, and be more fun, goddamn it. Go on Tinder or Tinker or whatever it is. The seniors' version, Flounder. Thus emboldened, produce another silly book or play. Please an audience, cater and canter, flash my pricey teeth. I tried a little of it last night, vodka was its name, and found myself this morning with doggerel astride the blasphemy in my stodgy heart.

(She fumbles the phone. Picks it up.)

JUDY

Oops! Sorry, sorry! Are you all right? "Earthquake in Trenton!"

Option Two: amphetamines. I know a guy who knows a swimming coach. Thus re-focused I might pen something scholarly, scalpel-sharp.

Option Three: nix the antidepressants, and instead of being this joyous hoyden you see before you, accept the tradeoff of deeper feeling. Plow that horse-dark furrow. Last night I read Sexton's Letter Written On A Ferry While Crossing Long Island Sound. "Good news, good news!" and I tell you it nearly broke me.

These three alt-Judys correspond to my three paths in the woods. Frost only had two. Two is easy; toss a coin.

(an imaginary-coin toss)

"Path less traveled!"

So! Booze and humor? Adderall and scholarship? Or skip the Prozac and *feel*. What say you? (-----) Now, Aisha, I want the truth. But I want it to be encouraging. Truthful and encouraging... that's too much to ask, isn't it?

Really? I have reached the end of my mope? Thank you for listening, kind Aisha. Pray, ponder my quandary. Your co-pay is in the mail.

(She waves goodbye, pulls out the earbud and puts the phone down. She looks around, then in her hand: the earbud.)

JUDY

I am holding a thing. Is it the lost thing or the already-found thing?
(feels her ears)
Already-found thing.

(She puts it by the phone)

JUDY

Perhaps genre will suggest a course. To the Box of Projects, Batman!

(Her desk has a box of 3" x 5" index cards, subdivided by larger tabbed cards. She flips through the heading tabs.)

JUDY

"Appliance Warrantees." "Family Birthdays..."
(tosses some:)
Dead. Dead. Blind. Florida. Ah, "Potential Writing Projects."

(She pulls an index card and trombones it)

JUDY

God, even my typing is illegible. Trevor, she's sending someone in less than a week, what do I do?

(Pillows and blankets stir. DOROTHY climbs out from beneath the couch. DOROTHY is demure, acerbic, dressed cute 1930s/40s. She pats at her hair, picks up the martini shaker and pours. JUDY is charmed and uplifted. She pours herself a martini)

JUDY

Dorothy. May I call you Dorothy? You always made your preference clear.

DOROTHY

Some say the night will end in hooch
Some say in sex
From what I've tasted of the blues
I side with those who favor booze,
Though I must say that cock on ice
Is also nice
And will suffice.

JUDY

Lovely! I'm keen to start a new project but the question is, what kind?

DOROTHY

Don't ask me.

Men seldom make verses

When girls look like nurses.

JUDY

Did you see Trevor down there? Where you were? I'm toying with the idea of throwing dull care to the wind and being more sparkly, more jolly-go-lightly, and you were the first person who came to mind.

DOROTHY

I'm flattered.

(hoists her chest)

Thus the Kleenex. At Bryn Mawr I was voted Miss Convertible because it was so easy to get my top down.

JUDY

Ha! Tell me, what do you find most conducive to wit?

DOROTHY

Abandonment and miscarriages.

Wit and whisky gild the tongues

Of those who've oft despaired –

What was thought but never uttered

Until with vodka paired.

JUDY

I was tipsy and witty and gay through my teens... and some of my twenties that I remember. I sold funny articles to magazines and columnists, I was toasted! Invited to parties, carried to taxis. Wild oats were sowed. How do I get that back?

DOROTHY

Follow the Yellow Bird rum.

JUDY

An evil drink. But I've kept my hand in, as the Vicar said to the choirboy. What was that thing I wrote about the path from alcohol to sex?

DOROTHY

"Liquory daquiri, dick."

JUDY

Yes! But did all that wit add up to anything? *Ou sont les bon mots d'antan?* They melt like snow. Benchley, Kaufman, Coward. You should all have lived forever.

DOROTHY

We do.

JUDY

No, I mean *lived*. Posterity is like reincarnation, as comforting as the thought that if I cut off my hand someone else might grow an extra one. I need something *now*. I've decided I can be morose and poetic, amped-up and scholarly, or inebriated and funny. Let's hear your pitch.

DOROTHY

You have, they say, four-score years, give or take
To separate the Fabergé from fake.
To pluck with human bait and lure
From all the flowing rivers of manure
What will endure:
A verbal catch that can be cleaned to represent
Your best: to say, "Here: *this* is what I meant."
Why spend the paltry seconds we're allowed
And bore the crowd?
The bone and skin and brain you are will rot
And leave behind the few things they begot.

JUDY

The thing they chisel o'er your plot.

DOROTHY

Do we really fancy wrestling to the fore
"Big thoughts" more crisply thought before
By Lispector?

JUDY

Or Rabindranath Tagore!

DOROTHY

Does it serve man or God to rend one's trousseau
Writing essays on what Hazlitt thought of Rousseau?
Or facing *Sturm und Drang* from Dienstag to Montag
Defending Interpretation from Sontag?
Agonizing at a desk...
Or a giggly arabesque?

JUDY

Monograph on Don Quixote
Or a screwdriver with Capote?

DOROTHY

Type footnotes day to tedious day
Or enchant like Nash, Milne, Millay?
Gritty weights
Or witty greats?
She also serves who only stanzas awaits.

JUDY

That's the stuff! Yes and *yes*!

DOROTHY

Here's one from when you were drinking:

JUDY

Goody! Go!

DOROTHY

"I own an ancient manual typewriter..."

JUDY

I remember this!

DOROTHY

"... a device that has, alas, seen better days
As I perch it on my knees
I have found that several keys
Are malfunctioning in irritating ways..."

(MUSIC HALL PIANO UP as Dorothy sings / dances, and
Judy talk-sings.)

DOROTHY + JUDY

"Ohhhh I haven't had a P since Friday!
I think that it got stuck behind my I
I tried bending it with pliers,
Even poking it with wires
But it won't come out no matter how I try."

JUDY

Yee-HA!

DOROTHY + JUDY

"My I pops out each time I use my colon!
It startled me the first time it occurred
So I hit it double-fisted,
But my asterisk got twisted
And I screamed so loud the next-door neighbors heard.

"My big S has been sticking out since Sunday.
I did try to disguise it, but it's rough.
I oiled it in the week
Now all it does it squeak
And its ancient wrinkled crack is full of fluff.

"The typist I was using quit on Monday
When he caught me pulling out my double-Ds.
I took one from my Brother
Cos I knew he had another
In a little sack he dangled 'tween his knees."

DOROTHY

"So that's the situation I am stuck with:
No P, no I, no S and now no D
There's a simple word, I find,
To describe my state of mind..."

DOROTHY + JUDY

"But you'll never see it typed by me!"

(PIANO OUT)

JUDY

Ba-dum, ba-DING! Oh the glory! Why didn't I keep doing that forever?

DOROTHY

You graduated college.

JUDY

And learned to be serious. Serious tragic me! I could write another
play with loveable fools who tumble into bed and off balconies but
there's no money in theater, and with a stage piece one must endure
actors.

DOROTHY

You liked actors.

JUDY

I slept with actors, it's not the same thing.

DOROTHY

The lonely are always hardest on themselves.

(Coming from Dorothy, this has extra impact.)

JUDY

I'm not lonely. I'm selective.

(DOROTHY sees something at her feet and picks it up.)

DOROTHY

Popcorn!

(Bending, she sees the index cards).

DOROTHY

What are these?

JUDY

Death and Florida.

DOROTHY

To festive rejuvenation!

JUDY

Yes! Drinking and doggerel it is!

(As Judy takes a glass... the swivel chair turns. WILLIAM rises from it. British, a touch of the 17th century in his dress – waisted frock coat, leggings. William is Richard-Burton-declamatory, serious as an EKG)

WILLIAM

That wine named Wit you sedulously pressed,
And all you said, ingesting, and in jest –
Of all that sweet intoxicant sublime,
So witching to the senses in its time,
What scent remains?

JUDY

I have my memories.

WILLIAM

As has the ass its bray.

JUDY

You are rigor. My dull side.

WILLIAM

Dull, madam, as the hard-earned coin. Dull as the shelt'ring roof.
Does one of rigor's merit need a proof?
As dull as Euclid, say you. Dismal-grey
As Milton, Pushkin, Virgil in their day...

JUDY

The ones who endure.

WILLIAM

... who not just last but stand above the mire;
Who carved the oars that row the world entire
And of a garbled firmament made sense:
The closest one may come to permanence.
(to Dorothy)

No offence.

JUDY

William, if I may so address you. You speak of posterity, but what about my life right now?

WILLIAM

Madam, thou didst once see the bright world clear.
Hast thou forgot?
Thy scholarship and insight garnered praise
In not-so-very-distant yesterdays.
Why climb empyrean peaks with Thales, Plutarch, Sophocles
If not to carry forth the torches lit by such as these?
Should a rapier whetted to a Samurai's decree,
That can separate the whisker from the flea,
Be used to chop a tree?

JUDY

You flatter me.

WILLIAM

... says Phi Beta Kappa, Ph.D? *Philos sophos*, from the Greek:
"Lover of knowledge." Daily thou didst seek
To know not just the seeming but the true
In every quiddity presented you.

WILLIAM (CONT'D)

And D for *Doctor*, judged so by your peers...
 An honor stretching back nine hundred years.
 Thou art fitted for the sternest task, tensed as the stoutest bow,
 An arrow on the string, its aim and passion keen to show.

JUDY

That's true. I am up to it! I may lose a slipper or a house key now and then, but who doesn't? And the best classicists often do their finest work in their seventies.

DOROTHY

Should the horse that's earned her oats
 On field and trail, in rain and sun,
 Get apples, or the whipping post
 When day and duty both are done?

WILLIAM

"Whipping post"?
 'Tis not at some cruel wagoner milady takes offense
 But at her own petitions on her realm of competence.
 Not from quick lash or training-bit that spikes the tender tongue
 It's talents of her own she anguishes to choose among.

JUDY

I'm not sure a tired horse is the metaphor here, but you both have a point. The four stages of the adjunct professor are Studying, Teaching, Writing, Nothing. With tenure, all your peculiarities are forgiven, while the improvidently mad are carried off like a snake on a hockey stick. My thesis on Blake still sells, God knows to who. I still suspect he was eating his paints.

(to Dorothy)

I am quoted in reference books on the Romantics. Couldn't there be a middle ground? Might I not make light poetry about classic subjects?

DOROTHY

While you're making that, why not a codpiece for a skunk?
 And they call *me* drunk.

(WILLIAM gestures at Dorothy's outfit)

WILLIAM

Unlike tawdry vestments, some things fall not out of season,
 Being called *the Classics* for a reason.

JUDY

Here's a third option. Before I started the antidepressants, I wrote lyric poetry. Not funny, not Homeric...

DOROTHY

Cheerless.

WILLIAM

Wallowing.

DOROTHY

Morbid, cryptic and whiny.

WILLIAM

Seeming to carry water, but never rightly putting the bucket in the well.

JUDY

Okay you won't be my first readers.

DOROTHY

Bad enough a shitty world
That makes you want to puke
Without the urge to catalogue each insult and rebuke.

JUDY

But there can be beauty in it! Plath. Bishop. Whitman.

WILLIAM

(snorts)

Keats?

JUDY

Why not Keats?

WILLIAM

That muttering and mewling with besweated brow
On things ne'er seen from Day One until now...
Nymphs and sprites disporting endlessly on Grecian urns!
Could anything be further from man's apposite concerns?
You strive to climb to Zeus's realm like vain Bellerophon,
But all ambition needs a Pegasus to ride upon...
More Obi-Wan, less woebegone.

DOROTHY

Ha! Exhibit A of he who calls frivolity a sin is
A horse with wings, and Alec Guinness.

WILLIAM

Quoth Miss Pink Gin.

DOROTHY

Don't play joust-a-word with me, boy.
I already am all cuts.

JUDY

Stop it! I don't need you two dusting it up along with the noise already
in my head! What was I saying?

DOROTHY

(to William)

And what's with the skirt? Are you having a pelvic exam later?

JUDY

Stop that and listen to me! I have the problem, me. Neither of you takes
into account how difficult this is. I'm not just a classicist, I am a
sensitive modern person. I cut my six-pack rings apart! But I am
unmoored!

WILLIAM

Then fault not the rope but the capstan.

JUDY

Sorry, don't get that.

DOROTHY

Me neither.

WILLIAM

It ne'er sufficed a cable stout one's ship to bring to shore:
The strength of those who turn the screw the outcome alters more.
Put to the windlass of your slumb'ring wits a fierce campaign;
Thy will shall open to it, as the rose to rain.

(ANNE ENTERS the room through a seemingly-solid
bookcase. Anne is beautiful, self-contained.)

ANNE

Flowers are *my* domain,
as are the hard pots they stoop in,
scabbing their tender green knees
as a one-day Jesus on an Oberammergau street,
the flowers and I carrying the cross of our busted thrills just
above the ground, just around
this last foot-blooded corner.

(WILLIAM is smitten by Anne, and his performance from
this point is subtly angled to impress her.)

JUDY

I half-expected you to fall out of the drinks cabinet.

DOROTHY

Or the oven.

JUDY

So. Anne. I've heard from booze and uppers. How would I profit from
stopping my happy pills?

ANNE

The question's wrong.
To really clean my house
down to its grimy bathtub caulk
and budge its sticky thermostat
I need to find the tiny coachman
who used to whip my heart
when I was called on to recite in school,
and make him promise this:
that he'll hide when they cry Shame!
and when I say
his Rumpelstiltskin name
will stay his little hand,
sheathe his whip fine as a grasshopper antenna,
and let me breathe out free, saying,
smooth as a Christmas paper tube
what the churchy boys with
mustard stains and aces high
did in their laps to make me cry.
(whispers)
Miss Penny Ante.

WILLIAM

And thou didst think *I* was no fun.

DOROTHY

Cousin Anne, might you be a tad less... morose?

ANNE

And swing my plastic purse
high overhead and
repaint all my yellow
bruises cheery red?
You speak of rigor. You, of jokes.
I hid in both for thirty years.
At ten I was potent as a hydrant,
tight as a golf ball,
starting-block keen,
when someone tossed a ruler through my spokes.

JUDY

Of the specters who have visited me this morn, I fear you most.

WILLIAM

Who hasn't sorrow tasted, justice proper been denied?
We're built of stuff designed to be hard-tumbled, scarified.
What lord or peon has not felt fate's withering disdain?
Is that our text? Or heav'n and earth and all that they contain?
We are *the light that itself sees*. A sow feels sleet and sun!
A grub will writhe and scurry its pursuer to outrun.
A barrowful of sorrows from some wretched long-off day
Ne'er did a speck of insight from Thucydides outweigh.
Man stands on man. And what the best before us found of worth
Scaffolding is, for all that we may hope to know on earth.

JUDY

I've felt that! Upon first reading Aristophanes, I wrote half a play in his style!

DOROTHY

Half a play's like half a shit:
It must come out before you're done with it.
And what do we take from Pythagoras
And pals, the vaunted thinkers of antiquity?
"Here's how you make a triangle,
And oh, lean not toward iniquity."
Everything we gather from the so-called "greats"
The toga'd *wunderkinder* on the vases and the plates
Cicero and Socrates, Plato and Polycrates...

JUDY

It's "Po-li-CRAY-teez."

DOROTHY

What-*ever*.

(counts on two fingers)

... is how to please nonexistent gods,

And lists of wars.

That's it.

"Don't steal sheeps,"

And Greeks in heaps.

Or, as later scribes encapsulate:

Commandments Six and Eight.

(DOROTHY drinks. ANNE is amused, WILLIAM disdainful)

WILLIAM

Out with all! the Philistine has ever cried

Thumb to nose, torch to scroll, from

Alexandria to Sevastopol:

"What can I from ancients profit? Raze them whole!"

The fundamentals of moral thought, in Greek and Latin dressed

Are not for everyone. Perhaps the vulgar suits you best.

Something later, Continental, in the common tongue.

DOROTHY

Like Monsieur Montaigne? Whose celebrated Essays

On all things French and weighty,

Circa 1580,

Quote endlessly from every Greek that laurels wore

From sixteen hundred years before,

On how a man may live the perfect life?

But oh, without ever mentioning his mother,

His six daughters, or his wife!

Monsieur le genius *littéraire*

Can kiss my Brooklyn derriere.

WILLIAM

It's all shit and ass with you, isn't it?

JUDY

I'd actually pictured this more in the way of helpful advice than successive rounds of character assassination.

ANNE

I've lived in the house that
genius draws, there are no chairs.
I sat on the floor
like misdelivered mail
and prayed for mayhem, ruin, *yum!*
Only a child can draw
my house,
the street where I
spun bottles, lost boomerangs in kelpy gutters.
I'll draw an attic for the child upstairs!
- with open window for the stick girl to
climb out and flap her pencil arms
and proclaim that
every day is Daughter's Day
and all God's children find what they deserve.

(WILLIAM, entranced by Anne, checks Judy's reaction)

WILLIAM

You flinch.

JUDY

I do not.

WILLIAM

I saw you start.
Not at what the lady spoke, but what's implied.
One may as well attempt that sign to hide
As a maiden's cheek unblush.

DOROTHY

All you know of maidens could be put in an olive and not bruise the
pimiento.

JUDY

Look, you three, it's simple. I'm trying to decide whether to drink, stop
my anti-glum pills, or get jacked up on Adderall. Do we need Meet The
Press to get to the bottom of this?

WILLIAM

We can but guide according to our lights;
Pull a rein, whip a rump.
As the horse draws near the bars,
'Tis to the mare to decide
If she should stall or jump.

JUDY

Horses again. Why couldn't I have imagined a pharmacist?

ANNE

There's another ending,
certain as a bruise
which the worried hare knows, seeking his hole –
surely it was right here!
the fox razor-tongued in shadow-length pursuit.

(JUDY is entranced by the dark lyricism of this but
WILLIAM cautions her:)

WILLIAM

Prettily said, but thou art neither fox nor hare.
To wrest the mud we are into a thinking shape needs firmness,
not despair.
The world is large, with science rich, and all our grievance but a scrape.

JUDY

But William I want encouragement! Anne, tell him! You know the
need. Your throat has cried out for God and bravery.

ANNE

Too often, and without an answering echo.

JUDY

But I mean there's art and truth in lots of things besides death and
bleeding rabbits and a conscience out of joint.

DOROTHY

(mockingly)

Like motel art and needlepoint!

WILLIAM

Soft! Why "conscience out of joint"?

(JUDY pleads to Anne:)

JUDY

Like *nature*!

ANNE

All right.
On the way home one day from deciding
not after all to change my hair
or drink a dainty tea among
other girls with too much youth to spare,
I wondered if everything we first
Notice is in the *trees*.

JUDY

Yes! Noticing things in trees!

(DOROTHY mimes a finger down the throat)

ANNE

Abandonment, of course, in leaves.

JUDY

No, that's not (*/what I meant*)...

ANNE

But also Chaos, first seen in bare twigs, spelling out
their jigsaw shapes against that blue:
look darling, there's a monkey with a pram, no it's a cherubim!
(But mother, what if it's nothing, just a mess?)
Waste of course in sap, moist as a toy bear's eye.
And Temptation in a bough
as I estimate the weight it might hold,
and realize with a thrill that
there is a last time for everything.

(Dorothy shoots William a look – *what was that about?* –
but he's hypnotized by Anne)

JUDY

You know what? Let's just have a party! I've got refreshments. Vodka
for Dorothy. Salt water and dry hardtack for William...

(But the three figments stand still, staring at her.)

JUDY

What?

DOROTHY

One wields a net to land a fish,
A swatter for a fly...

JUDY

You never fished in your life.

WILLIAM

... why summon fitting tools,
Then those utensils not apply?

JUDY

What, now you're in sudden weird alignment?

WILLIAM

Wherefore are we summoned? Be precise.

JUDY

I told you! I need to write something, *now*, but I can't do it hopper-
skittery, jumping from one unfinished thing to another. Half-finished
essay, half-finished poem...

DOROTHY

Then why write at all?

JUDY

(horrified)

What do you mean, "why write"?

DOROTHY

If typing is so painful and frustrating,
Why not ballroom dancing? Ikebana?
Or online masturbating? "Mature females await your call...
Six seniors, no waiting!"

JUDY

Don't be inane. Writing is how I process, and of course it's painful.

WILLIAM

More the reason to examine what and how
You feel this need to "process." And why now?

JUDY

You're rigor, not empathy! I will not write about myself. My Box of
Index-spisation doesn't even have a card for Autobiography.

DOROTHY

Just before my last detox,
A friend declared there's nothing
I would not put in my box.

JUDY

You are the worst excuses for imaginary advisors anyone ever had. I'm going back to bed. Let yourselves out – or back through the couch and the chair and wherever *you* came from. Don't eat all the crackers.

(JUDY EXITS. ANNE sits cross-legged and contemplative on the floor, hands in lap. DOROTHY returns to the couch, gets her drink and puts her feet up.)

JUDY (OFF)

Trevor? Trevor are you there?

WILLIAM

Might we three
Pool our curiosity
And yoke our pleadings to a single cogent tongue?

DOROTHY

It doesn't work that way.
We just give her arguments to choose among.
Still, plainly there is something she's not telling us.
What say you, Anne?

ANNE

In Scene Two there is always more to come.

LIGHTS OUT.

Scene ii

(FRONT ROOM, THAT AFTERNOON. DOROTHY reads aloud from Judy's ladybug book. As she reads, camping a bit, WILLIAM enters, eating a chicken leg.)

DOROTHY

*"If you will always love me
As long as square is square
Then who'll be here to love me
Whenever you're not there?"*

WILLIAM

A bodkin for my ears!

DOROTHY

*"My dear, I'll paint a picture
And put it in a square
And you can look upon it
Whenever I'm not there." Aww.*

(ANNE ENTERS. She knows the poem)

ANNE

*"If you will always love me
As long as round is round
Then who'll be here to love me
When you are not around?"*

DOROTHY

(faux ardor)

*"My love, I'll plant an apricot
And grow it in the ground
And you can sit beneath it
When I am not around!"*

(WILLIAM picks up one of Judy's other books from the desk and examines it)

WILLIAM

Were her pantry as spare in nourishment as that in thought,
The mice would starve.

DOROTHY

Oh Bill, she wrote it for children. Don't you ever feel like tossing aside dull care? And maybe with it, that blouse?

WILLIAM

It's not a blouse.

And care is not a fringe, a flounce.

It undergirds the sinew, steers the will.

Care guides the mason's hand, the glazier's torch,

And seats the builder's window in the sill.

Care precedes all ministrations, coarse or otherwise

The nursemaid's calming hand...

DOROTHY

The prosecutor's lies?

WILLIAM

A thing worth doing needs be done entire.

They warm no bones who build but half a fire.

One does not vaunt o'er half of an abyss,

Nor lovers tryst to relish half a kiss.

DOROTHY

I am rebuked!

She "has to write," what an annoying habit.

Why not prow! the bars, where's the harm?

Whine, if she must whine,

Into a sailor's arm?

This is why I recommend

Light verses, and a whisky blend.

(to Anne)

Somehow I don't picture you hitting the taverns for company.

ANNE

I never had enough sun in me

to light the moon of men's favor.

DOROTHY

You seriously need to get laid like about ninety-five times.

WILLIAM

Language!

(For some reason this reminds DOROTHY of another, more serious affinity with Anne)

DOROTHY

You and I... we both tried "the sad thing." You succeeded, I failed.

ANNE

Cuts heal.

DOROTHY

Not all.

WILLIAM

A question! How is't we exist when she's not here?

DOROTHY

Mojito ergo sum.

I drink, therefore I am.

WILLIAM

You're meant to be Wit, but have yet to find my funny bone.

DOROTHY

Oh Bill, one can't frost a nonexistent cake.

Flip that scowl and chance an Elizabethan frolic.

WILLIAM

Quoth the nympho pixie alcoholic. Again: why are we here?

ANNE

Not everything's a punchline, or a proof.

You hike your skirts and drag

your bust of Zeno across the lawn

I'll count my careful stitches back up the knitting needle

to the casting-off,

and make razor wire with the loops of yarn.

DOROTHY

Still not getting it.

WILLIAM

What know we of her raising?

Progenitors and playmates, all that folderol?

DOROTHY

Shouldn't we, between us, know it all?

(WILLIAM studies framed photos)

WILLIAM

Academic parents. Doted on ere she was born.

DOROTHY

College, marriage: *yawn*.

WILLIAM

No church or creed. Adulates the classics, now as ever.

DOROTHY

And pines for somebody named Trevor.

(WILLIAM holds up two framed photos to Anne)

WILLIAM

Thou appearest closer to her mind. Who are these boys?

(ANNE declines to answer. WILLIAM knows there's a game being played here and doesn't entirely resent it.)

WILLIAM

The lady is inside the Trojan horse but won't unstring the flap.

DOROTHY

Horses again!

ANNE

Some learn early the trick of throwing their hints
far from the body,
like a child feeding ducks. Or, like
an almoner, thrifty with his shillings.

(WILLIAM again prompts Anne with the photos)

WILLIAM

This later boy's her son? I say thou know'st.

(ANNE declines to answer. WILLIAM gazes at Anne.
DOROTHY is annoyed by her)

DOROTHY

Oh come on! *You* needn't speak pentameter,
Or rhyme, or play the clown.
You're like the teacher's pet with all the answers written down.
Spill!

(WILLIAM is tackling this like Sherlock Holmes)

WILLIAM

... or why summon you, as't seems despite heavy qualms she must,
To remind her of discordances she does not wish discussed? *Hm?*

ANNE

Some books in the family room are high-shelved,
to keep crisp pages from
sticky fingers.
As to participation,
group projects in school taught me
things sit heavier on some shoulders,
as a coffin lists toward the older, weaker lovers
on one side,
tilting the body-box like a see-saw
on its way to the grave.

DOROTHY

This is like playing Charades with armless idiots.
(a new worry:)
She's been a long time. Do we think she's coming back?
There are pills in the bathroom. Scarves on the rack.

WILLIAM

Rope in the attic...

ANNE

Belts in the closet.

DOROTHY

If she drinks cleaning fluid, who gets the deposit?

WILLIAM

The world, true, doth kneel hard upon her.

DOROTHY

Hey – if she dies, what happens to us?

(DOROTHY tosses out this thought and sips her cocktail,
but WILLIAM is hit hard by it)

WILLIAM

We would falter, then scratch to nothing as an inkless pen.

ANNE

Not right away. I think we'd trail a while,
a yo-yo with its string cut, wobbling off
between startled children's legs.

WILLIAM

The light departing a dead star...

ANNE

Yes.

WILLIAM

Eight and one third minutes to darkness,
And we sucking the dregs of sun...

ANNE

... or the last of the IV, the fatal bubble unseen
but coming.

(JUDY ENTERS, dressed to go out, with a list and with her
cell phone. She retrieves two neatly-folded shopping bags
from a nook near the front door.)

JUDY

Aaaaand it's Round Two and they come out swinging! William leads
with a perfectly constructed syllogism and Dorothy farts in his face!
Now it's Anne with a one-two combination that nobody understands,
and William's on the ropes, which he can prove with absolute logic are
joined by congruent right angles. I'm going out. Anything I should add
to my shopping list?

DOROTHY

Vermouth.

WILLIAM

A decent thesaurus.

ANNE

Grapefruit juice?

JUDY

Ha! Grapefruit, which counteracts antidepressants.

DOROTHY

We'll come with you.

JUDY

Not to the supermarket you won't.

WILLIAM

No one will see us.

JUDY

I don't want you rhapsodizing about Aeschylus while I'm trying to pick a sausage. *Stop!*

(JUDY CLAPS her hands and the ADVISORS FREEZE. Judy re-arranges the three books of hers that they disturbed, carefully placing them all upright on the desk with their covers facing the front door: a display of her talents.)

JUDY

Is not hallucinating, merely imagining. Whimsically crafting. Count backwards from a hundred by sevens, doctor? No problem! Ninety-three, eighty-six... seventy-nine...

(regards her phone)

"Your ride is approaching." Trevor, there *was* someone at the door.

(then:)

Describe me! Go!

(JUDY CLAPS her hands. They UNFREEZE.)

ANNE

Hurt.

DOROTHY

Funny!

WILLIAM

Brilliant.

(JUDY CLAPS again. They FREEZE)

JUDY

Then why after forty years of academia and regional theater and literary magazines that are always a week from going under, why is creating anything suddenly so hard? *Why can't I do it??*

(She CLAPS. They're UNFROZEN but disoriented.)

DOROTHY

Pardon?

(WILLIAM bangs one ear as if it had water in it)

JUDY

You've all been delightful but I think I'll stick with the devil in my head I already know. You may vamoose. Scatter. What do I have to do, throw millet? I wish for confidence and you're giving me none.

WILLIAM

Day by day the confident their brassy bugles blow,
As sages struggle word-on-word the simplest truths to show.

JUDY

You needn't always rhyme, you know.

WILLIAM

I needn't?

JUDY

It is a bit annoying.

DOROTHY

How about me?

JUDY

At ease, wise-ass. Go over there with a drink and sit alluringly sideways like the sea.

(She has an inspiration)

JUDY

"The sideways sea..."!

(She CLAPS them into a FREEZE and runs to her desk, opens her laptop and types, energized.)

JUDY

"Why does the hill sit sideways to the sea?"

Sea, me, agree, flee... Robert McKee...

(fast, before the idea's lost)

"Why does the hill sit sideways to the sea..."

Like lovers who..."

(no, that's not it)

Like, like, like she who... like salty... like coffee...

(Where'd that word come from? She shoves her mug further away so she can't smell it. Back to the laptop.)

JUDY

"Why does the sea...?" Why doth the hill..." Perch. Lie? *Sit sideways! – sit sideways to the sea..."*

"Like lovers who..." No – hill, singular. A lover, feigning sleep, who...

(no)

"Why does?" Why... *must?*

(Her phone BUZZES. She slams it down as if to snooze it)

JUDY

"Why sits the hill so sideways..."

(okay, take a breath...)

"Why sits the.... cliff! so sideways to the sea?" Better!

"A lover, scorning... whitecap's broad caress..."

"As if to scorn..." "As if to spurn... his lover's broad caress..."

"And coldly spurn..."

(losing it)

"This summons such a..." Such a fear of death. Such a wish to... swim.

(Her phone BUZZES again. She checks it, annoyed at the phone, herself, and the process)

JUDY

Cos if it didn't sit sideways it wouldn't be a cliff, it'd be a peninsula.

(Phone BUZZ. She closes her laptop, CLAPS, and picks up her phone. The figments are re-animated but look disoriented)

JUDY

My ride's here. Stand aside.

(DOROTHY sniffs Judy's breath as she passes.)

DOROTHY

She took something.

JUDY

I did not. Back! Don't poke through my things. And don't answer the door.

(As JUDY goes to EXIT with her shopping bags, WILLIAM stops her.)

WILLIAM

When thou wast without this room but we three here, didst thou all that time imagine us?

JUDY

Why do you ask?

WILLIAM

I am unsure if I may rightly say that I am.

JUDY

Join the freaking club.

(JUDY takes her shopping bags and LEAVES.)

(DOROTHY shakes out a trash can near the desk: beer bottle, papers. She opens the desk drawer. There's a 7-segment Pills By The Day box, and some pill bottles.)

DOROTHY

Aha! Pills!

(to Anne)

Look these up. "*Huperzine A*"...

(As ANNE sits at the laptop and types, checking the bottles' labels for spelling, WILLIAM picks up a hand-written sheet from the desk.)

DOROTHY

"*Bacopa monnieri*." Sounds like an STD. "CDP-choline"?

(As ANNE checks the bottles for spelling and types, WILLIAM reads from Judy's hand-written page. As he reads, ANNE and DOROTHY are drawn from the pills / laptop to the grim tone of the poem.)

WILLIAM

*The grave's there to remind us
We're ignored by those behind us
As we with vital passions hurried
Rush by those before us buried,
Pushing out of mind this truth:
'Tis Time unwalks the paths of youth,
Suffers sweetly some to come without a fuss
And gristles up the rest of us.*

DOROTHY

If she comes back with hydrofluoric acid and Jesse Pinkman, we blockade the bathroom.

LIGHTS OUT

Scene iii

(JUDY'S FRONT ROOM, LATER, DAY. Judy enters from the kitchen in a light mood, folding the empty shopping bags. She packs the bags into the nook near the front door that they came from, calling out.)

JUDY

Yoo-hoo, figments! I'm home! The soldier returns from the war. The hungry woman returns from Ralphs.

(DOROTHY, WILLIAM and ANNE appear – perhaps each in a novel way, e.g. through a solid wall. They've been consolidating their research and opinions, and are more united.)

JUDY

I shopped, I couponed, I conquered. Examine the pantry if you don't believe me.

DOROTHY

We snooped through your things.

JUDY

I knew you might.

DOROTHY

We found old literary magazines, and a vibrator in a style not made since 1991. Did anyone ever think of making dildos with a ruler printed on one side?

WILLIAM

Blessed God.

DOROTHY

I always say, measure twice, fuck once.

WILLIAM

Do you never tire of ringing the whore's bell?

DOROTHY

I may be an intellectual dwarf but I stand on the shoulders of smaller dwarfs.

(JUDY goes to her laptop.)

JUDY

Having breathed some sky and been transported by *YASIM*, *four stars for clean vehicle*. I am open for business. So what do I write? Funny poem? Devastating critique of a literary trend? Mournful ode? Come vasty ideas into mine head and outrace my rowing fingers!

(The advisors stand still. Judy registers their joint
hesitance)

JUDY

What?

DOROTHY

We tiptoed through your computer, sorry, not sorry. Anne guessed your password.

JUDY

Not possible.

ANNE

"FuckTrump."

JUDY

Okay, possible.

DOROTHY

You've written nothing but emails in three years.

JUDY

Writing entails thinking. I greatly enjoy not thinking. With the aid of British cooking shows I manage to not do it for weeks at a time. Then it arises in me like curd. Or is it whey that rises? This is why I'm not a cheesemaker.

WILLIAM

Again, Madame: why so urgent and why *now*?

DOROTHY

You don't need the money. Social Security, teaching pension, cheap shoes...

(ANNE laughs. WILLIAM is delighted by Anne)

JUDY

Oh screw you.

(JUDY leaves the desk to get away from them. Dorothy stares at ANNE.)

DOROTHY

There's something you and this one aren't telling us.

JUDY

I have to put the shopping bags away. I had them...

(She looks for the bags that she already shelved.)

DOROTHY

We found photos...

WILLIAM

... testifying thou hath a brother.

JUDY

Let's not. I'm kinworn, I've spoken of this.

WILLIAM

Not to us. Mayhaps to *lady Anne*.

(ANNE stays out of it)

DOROTHY

An older brother. Handsome. Cocky-looking, pardon the phrase.

JUDY

This is none of your business.

(JUDY returns to her laptop screen. Dismay.)

JUDY

You moved my things! I was writing something important. It was, I had... I *started* something! I was making... a list? It was important.

(teary)

It was important and it's gone.

(WILLIAM hands Judy a small framed photo. She's drawn by the photo and by the figments' insistent looks from her current distress into an old pain.)

JUDY

Golden, do-no-wrong Daniel. Who one day – forty years ago? – after a brief career as a public nuisance, decided he was a subway car. My brother fell or leaped off a platform. In an era with nothing so Dickensian as asylums, he died thrillingly on metal rails.

(DOROTHY quotes something Anne said.)

DOROTHY

And... “Miss Penny Ante”?

ANNE

The hounds find the scent.

(JUDY is annoyed, then simply tired.)

JUDY

When I was little, New York City interrogated over a thousand teachers under the Feinberg Law: “No Commies in the schools.” My socialist parents moved to the South for work. Imagine: pinkoes, fleeing Brooklyn for Birmingham! – where Father had a sister.

My brilliant older brother was headstrong and petulant and of course always right. The scion, the namesake! Our parents were publicly circumspect, but with Daniel so permissive. He held card games with his friends in our basement.

ANNE

A penny a hand.

JUDY

To buy herself some peace, my mother sent me down with him. One week my big brother made an announcement. His friends may not have realized it, but I was the luckiest girl in all of Alabama. I’d scored straight As. My brother had received one B. Daniel said anyone who wished to ante an extra penny a hand could play with lucky me sitting in his lap.

ANNE

Up and down and around and around.

JUDY

In my cotton dress.

(beat)

My father was in his own world. I told my mother, who said...

ANNE + JUDY

"It must be such fun being liked."

JUDY

The nickname followed me. It was not the only cruel thing he did. Daniel began seeing things, and was free-range for years. I wrote about him. If mother read what I wrote she never said. Thursday's such a difficult day to remember, don't you find? Thursday is the Zeppo of weekdays. When was she coming? I need to clean...

(JUDY begins picking thing up, tidying, folding things away)

DOROTHY

"Coming"?

JUDY

On Thursday. No... this is Thursday. No one phones any more, you need an app for everything. *Would you like to save this foot-long password?*

DOROTHY

We found your herbs and supplements for "mental renewal."

JUDY

I need all the brainpower I can get if I'm to try my hand at a Shout or a Murmur, or a scholarly essay, or... the third, what was the third? The third was... damn me, the third!

WILLIAM

Why in all of these is brevity so requisite?

JUDY

"Brevity"?

WILLIAM

Thou once penned ten thousand words on "ellipsis in Restoration drama." Now, snips and dribs. Why so short?

JUDY

Oh for God's sake, not short, something quick! Something next week! I need it now, to prove I have this! These! My marbles! She's sending someone for a "check." I need something to establish my *current competence*, all while fighting the Great Eraser: oh! there goes your balance, oh dear, was that your keys and the memories of your husband?

WILLIAM

You had a husband.

JUDY

And a lot of good that did me.

WILLIAM

Trevor.

(ANNE and JUDY laugh.)

JUDY

Lord no. Trevor is my love, my keening companion. My sweet, handsome, domestic longhair. Help me tidy. This wretched person wants to interview me and I failed to download the app. "General Washington, please take a moment to rate your ride across the Delaware Wednesday and Thursday last, to help us further improve our service." Then you try to open it and, "Download did not complete! Why not use the convenient Despair app to update or reschedule your despair? Join now for 2,000 free Grievance points." Why do we put up with it? Why don't we drive to where they make these things and bang their doors down and pull them into the parking lot and beat their heads on the parking bollards?

(She beats a pillow against a chair)

JUDY

"I'm sorry, you don't seem to have the Placate Furious Customer app! It's an easy download, just follow these seventy-five instructions!"

WILLIAM

Who's sending someone?

JUDY

My daughter! My daughter is sending her.

DOROTHY

We thought you had a son.

JUDY

Oh, baby, so did I. She's thirty-nine now, or – ? Yes, thirty-nine. In Santa Fe. We don't communicate. Often. I'm the past, you see. The dead name. Michelle isn't good with crises. She displays... well, I'm not one to diagnose. Welcome to the gene pool. My husband didn't take well to the "adjustment." And I didn't help her. Enough. I was thrown. I didn't help my child. Progeny recapitulates ontology.

(JUDY tidies some things, tries to change the subject.)

JUDY

Did you know we don't actually touch or see anything? We see what's left of some light that saw the thing. All our eyes get is rumors. Don't touch this, it's Trevor's medicine. Though frankly I suspect he's in the placebo group. When he didn't reappear, I called Michelle. I wanted someone to cry to. But she remembers all the wrong things. And reminds me I had my mother put away. But mother was old and confused. She lost her wig and put her teeth in upside-down. She looked like the Futurama robot. So now, this ugly "competence interview."

DOROTHY

We can prepare you! Rehearse you, ask all the likely questions.

JUDY

You'd do that?

WILLIAM

What manner of figments would we be otherwise?

JUDY

That would be ideal. Yes! Good! Let's do that!

(As DOROTHY and ANNE move some furniture, putting chairs in a two-person interview format at CENTER, WILLIAM, worried, moves to ask Judy, aside:)

WILLIAM

Pray, a word. We first appeared to thee only now, this day?

JUDY

Unless you were Abe Lincoln on the toilet yesterday. I'm joking.

WILLIAM

And if thou should "decline"? Will we still... *be*?

JUDY

An odd question from one who praises seeing the "bright world clear."

WILLIAM

I do not scruple to say I fear a stopping as keenly as were I solid flesh.

JUDY

So did Hamlet, rather famously, and he didn't exist either.

(WILLIAM takes this hard.)

(DOROTHY sits in one of the two chairs she and Anne have placed at CENTER, and produces two notepads – one large – and two pens. She clicks one pen, playing the too-cheery Case Worker.)

(SPOTLIGHT DOROTHY and JUDY. ANNE and WILLIAM remain visible just outside the spotlight.)

DOROTHY

Hi Judy. I'm Kristen. I must say what a lovely, cottage-y place you have here. It's so *personal*.

(JUDY sits warily in the facing chair.)

JUDY

Thank you. Twenty-five years have given me time to personalize it.

DOROTHY

How fun! And today is Thursday the... I forget, what day of the month is this?

(DOROTHY clicks her pen and waits.)

JUDY

Isn't that always the question.

DOROTHY

I'm sure you know.

JUDY

I have yesterday's paper. You could look at the front page and add one.

DOROTHY

I'm such a scatterhead! The date...?

JUDY

I have a one-in-thirty-one chance. Like roulette. I think I'll put it all on black.

DOROTHY

Ah, the seventeenth. Before we begin – I hope you don't mind me asking, but I have this hobby I suppose you'd call it. You'll say it's silly...

JUDY

(frozen smile)

I'm sure I'll say worse than that.

(DOROTHY hands Judy the large pad and a marker)

DOROTHY

I collect sketches from people I meet. Would you mind drawing me a clock showing ten minutes before ten?

JUDY

The date, now the time. Quite the temporal confusion you have.

(JUDY draws)

DOROTHY

"Tempura"?

JUDY

Temporal. Temporality, as in time.

DOROTHY

Hate to be a noodge, but Judy, I don't think you're using your words right.

JUDY

I use all my words right, Christie.

DOROTHY

Kristen.

(JUDY hands the sketchpad back. Dorothy looks at the pad. Judy has drawn a box with **9:50** inside.)

DOROTHY

A digital clock. How clever. No flies on you, ha ha!

JUDY

Not yet, ha ha.

(DOROTHY sniffs)

DOROTHY

Do you... smell a burn-y smell coming from the kitchen?

WILLIAM

Patent misdirection!

DOROTHY

Do you ever leave the stove on? I know I do.

JUDY

Perhaps someone should drive out to interview you.

DOROTHY

I see on the form that you taught, and you wrote.

JUDY

Writing, teaching, despairing: a woman for all seasons.

DOROTHY

I'm sorry, I don't understand that.

WILLIAM

A jest! Surely thou dost see it plain!

JUDY

An attempt at self-deprecation.

(DOROTHY writes something. Judy tries to see but
Dorothy re-angles her notepad)

DOROTHY

Were you saying you bought groceries?

JUDY

I did.

DOROTHY

What did you buy today?

WILLIAM

Objection! Irrelevant!

(WILLIAM runs OFF to the kitchen)

JUDY

You can look. It's stocked. Soy sauce, was one thing. Six eggs...

DOROTHY

What other things did you buy today?

JUDY

I'm sure you'd rather ask about my work. I just started a new project... a major work.

DOROTHY

I'd like to know about your day-to-day life. What groceries did you just buy, only an hour ago?

(JUDY looks towards Anne, but she's expressionless)

JUDY

I... usually get pasta. But I have pasta, so I didn't need that today. Fruit...

DOROTHY

What fresh fruit will I find in your kitchen?

JUDY

They had plums...

DOROTHY

You bought plums.

(WILLIAM runs back in, shaking his head vigorously to Judy)

JUDY

No. Too high a stone-to-fruit ratio. I prefer food where after you've eaten it you're not still looking at most of it. Also how I prefer my men. Why I mention that, there was a handsome man in the meat section... Sorry, off topic. My mind chases rabbits. Isaac Newton once stepped away from a dinner party at his own home to fetch wine and he never came back. Should he have been locked away?

DOROTHY

Nobody's talking about locking anyone away. So; what fruit?

JUDY

You can look at my list.

DOROTHY

I'd rather you told me.

(JUDY looks helplessly to WILLIAM, who bends his body backward into a curve)

JUDY

Bananas! And I got...

(WILLIAM mimes holding a clump of something over his head, then lowering and eating from it.)

JUDY

... something high. Up, tall. Not tall, hanging, with... lips... no, they were... grapes!

DOROTHY

Delicious! Let me ask you, and I hope this isn't too distressing. I understand there was a mishap with Trevor. An unfortunate boo-boo that upset you.

JUDY

Well, he's...

DOROTHY

He got out.

JUDY

No – well, yes, but he's nearby. His food's here. He's smart. He knows where his food is. And I've seen him in here so many times.

WILLIAM

No!

DOROTHY

After he ran away you saw him?

JUDY

No, in, I mean, in... thoughts. I wanted to see him.

DOROTHY

Do you see anyone else here now?

(ANNE and WILLIAM back out of the light.)

JUDY

Nope.

DOROTHY

It says you wrote for scholarly journals, and published books of poetry. That's wonderful. And you wrote for television!

JUDY

Children's television. Which is to television as prostitution is to ballet. Don't write that, that's a joke.

DOROTHY

But it wasn't funny, was it? And I know funny; I'm a very good-humored person.

JUDY

I sense that from how you're dressed.

DOROTHY

Writing for television sounds exciting. Why do you think you stopped doing that?

JUDY

Well Kristen, I think I stopped doing that because my agent said they were uninterested in hiring anyone who remembered using a dial phone.

DOROTHY

And you didn't feel capable of adopting to that requirement?

JUDY

The word's adapting, not adopting, and that's not a requirement, it's a prejudice.

DOROTHY

Do you always have to concentrate hard to understand what people are saying?

WILLIAM

She baits you like a bear. Rear not!

(With difficulty, JUDY smiles and holds her tongue.)

DOROTHY

And why don't you teach any more?

JUDY

Why doesn't the Ninth Avenue El still run to Columbus Circle? "I'm sorry, we can't teach Hamlet any more; it doesn't empower Ophelia..." and we are all so sorry for Ophelia, who was neurodivergent and – what's the thing without a home? Un-homed?

(DOROTHY writes, ominously. JUDY rues speaking.)

DOROTHY

And you still try to write?

JUDY

Every writer *tries* to write. I know – I *knew* editors. Now I feed things into the Rejectionizer – I'm sorry, *Submittables-dot-com*...

DOROTHY

How's your mobility?

JUDY

I have catlike reflexes.

DOROTHY

Then we must be careful you don't escape out the front door, ha ha!

JUDY

Ha ha.

DOROTHY

No falls getting into or out of bed?

JUDY

No. Just ask anyone I got into or out of bed with.

DOROTHY

I meant falling at bedtime.

JUDY

I understand what you meant.

DOROTHY

But you seemed confused.

(JUDY rises, prepared to pounce on her)

WILLIAM

Do not!

(JUDY sits)

DOROTHY

I'll have to take a look around to make sure there are no hazards in your living space.

JUDY

Of course. Big boxes of open poison, covered pits with spikes at the bottom. Unguarded theme park rides.

DOROTHY

I see you have a daughter. When was the last time you saw her?

JUDY

Not for a while. A while ago. I can't say.

DOROTHY

More than six months?

JUDY

I don't know. Michelle is in Santa Fe.

DOROTHY

In what state?

JUDY

Disapproval, usually. *I know*, you want New Mexico.

DOROTHY

Does she perhaps feel less than welcome here? Judy? Does she not feel welcome here? Can you hear me all right?

JUDY

I hear perfectly.

(DOROTHY begins speaking louder, insultingly clearly)

DOROTHY

Might anything have happened to make Michelle feel unwelcome? Would someone have maybe said something insensitive?

(ANNE feels she has to speak up)

ANNE

Would someone maybe have found a bump on the front of my car and drove it off to have it tested for human blood, then wouldn't bring it back, and lied about it?

JUDY

She thinks I drive onto sidewalks and wipe out squadrons of pedestrians.

DOROTHY

Do you really believe she thinks that?

JUDY

It was a joke! Irony!

DOROTHY

That's not irony, Judy. Irony is rain on your wedding day.

(With great effort, Judy remains in her chair)

DOROTHY

Were you ever morose or difficult in Michelle's presence?

(JUDY tries to smile this away, wave it off, but she can't.)

WILLIAM

Do not.

JUDY

Morose and difficult.

WILLIAM

Refrain!

JUDY

With a kid who didn't leave the bedroom for two years and refused to consume anything but protein drinks and listen to the Smiths twenty-four hours a day, and then, after four sessions with a gender affirmation specialist – while scoring high on the Schizo Clinical Assessment Scale – decided I had never existed?

DOROTHY

A person has the right to choose their own life.

JUDY

For five years she refused to admit I'd been her mother. I'd been the mother to a boy. We'd never according to her and her shrink gone on vacation together, never corrected homework, never celebrated a birthday. No gifts, no goodnight kisses. Nothing, nothing, all erased. And you're fretful that twenty-some-odd years later, I may at times seem *morose*? I cried my eyes out, Kristen. I called her father, who hung up on me. It was my problem, you see, from my family. I tried to be supportive and understanding. But! That's me. I remember dial phones.

(DOROTHY writes)

DOROTHY

Afterwards you wrote poems and other literary attempts... that minimized her pain and degraded and Othered her?

(ANNE steps into the light)

ANNE

*You must, it seems,
be discerning as a mirror.*

*If it bobs always in the same place
it is sea kelp not a seal*

*If it moves up and down not to-and-fro
it is a branch not a bird*

*If it stalks you only under streetlights
it is your shadow not a blue-eyed wolf*

*And if after a long voyage to a strange place
it tells you, no, that is not its name,
then it is death not your child,
and you
like the bird the seal the wolf
are recognized at last.*

DOROTHY

Do you call that sympathetic?

JUDY

To me? Do you hear how it's unsympathetic to *me*? That it's death coming for *me*?

DOROTHY

I don't.

JUDY

Then that is your incapacity. Do I see things that aren't there? I see William Blake and he isn't there. I see the nineteenth century, lost but right here, under my breastbone! So I opened the front door too wide! I don't remember what type of fruit I bought because – as you'll learn – the mind empties out the trinket drawers before it starts on the storage chests. The nonessentials flee but you remember what you wore to camp and everyone who made you cry.

What happened to love in our lives?

I'm like a failing business trying to stay afloat, and I've tried Saturday discounts and online advertising but all things taken into account there's nothing left to do but kill the customers. It's crazy, but the only thing left to do is the mad thing. There are wolves ahead of me and a cliff behind. If no one cares what I create, that is the cliff. Do you understand what it means to be less afraid of wolves?

We're though here.

(JUDY walks OFF. Her apparitions watch her go. ANNE looks on the verge of tears. WILLIAM tenderly puts an arm around her.)

LIGHTS DIM OUT

Scene iv

(FRONT ROOM, LATER IN THE DAY. JUDY sits on the couch with her Index Card Box and a pen. Her cell phone and a clear plastic bag lie on the coffee table. She pulls a Divider card from the box.)

JUDY

"Auto Insurance." Won't be needing that one.

(She turns it over to write on the back.)

JUDY

What's-his-name, the Russian, *Lolita*, wrote all his novels on index cards. Bokarov. Luminov.... Nov-Nov...

(She clicks and tries to write on the index card. The pen is dry. She throws it, bustles to her desk, opens the laptop. She doesn't know where to look on the device.)

JUDY

Where's the button that records? I can imagine scornful poets, why not working machinery?

(She rolls the index card into a tube and holds it before her mouth like a microphone.)

JUDY

Testing...

(FEEDBACK! She winces and pulls the "mic" away, then reacts at having summoned such an odd auditory hallucination. She continues, into the rolled-up "microphone.")

JUDY

Dear World. You blew it. Look at the chance you had. You of all the Worlds had first shot at me and what did you do with it? Piddled me away on family drama and grant applications.

(remembers, bitterly)

"Hate to be a noodge, but Judy, I don't think you're using your words right."

Well gosh, Christie, I'm sorry.

JUDY (CONT'D)

(with an Alabama accent)

So, when I was, you know, younger and whatever? I was all, like, teachin' and stuff? And before that, I wrote a bunch of things. Oh, you know, books and like that? Why, Ma, what do you mean? This is how everyone in school talks. Well, we're not in New York now and whose idea was that?

I was awful. Such a brat. And oh the older boys were into that.

(back "on-mic" with the accent)

After that *awful* attempted bombing of Congregation Beth-El, Daddy took the mezuzah off the door, here honey put this in your jewelry box. Such weak men, all of them. Return those empty bottles, Judy, get a penny each, don't talk to anyone. A lady four blocks up won Queen For A Day. Dead son and a daughter with polio. What a heart this country has! Endure biblical misfortune and win a fridge.

Political? No thank you! We left political, we fled all complications.

(confidentially)

We are – hiding – out.

(DOROTHY enters, looking bored)

JUDY

Just you? Where's Anne?

DOROTHY

Probably somewhere watching the cold sea dash against heartless rocks.

JUDY

"Break break, break, on thy cold grey stones, o Sea..."

DOROTHY

"And I would that my tongue could utter / The thoughts that arise in me."

JUDY

He could have found a better scan.

DOROTHY

Do not impugn Lord Alfred!

JUDY

"And I would my tongue could utter / All the thoughts that rise in me."
Ah well, he's the Poet Laureate.

(WILLIAM enters, examining a hinged brass desktop book-stand. Judy returns to the couch.)

JUDY

I wonder if you two would consider doing me a favor.

DOROTHY

It doesn't involve a threesome, does it?

JUDY

Nothing so exertive. I wonder if you would consider tying this plastic bag around my neck.

DOROTHY

So you can spit cherry pits into it?

JUDY

Over my head and around my neck.

(DOROTHY gets it. WILLIAM is horrified.)

DOROTHY

We had no plastic in my day. And paper bags just went...

(DOROTHY makes sucking / blowing sounds. WILLIAM takes the proposition far more seriously)

WILLIAM

Thou biddest us commit deicide.

JUDY

William, I am a gutshot god. We'd go together.

DOROTHY

I'm in my mid-thirties?

JUDY

Or so.

DOROTHY

Do I die young?

JUDY

No. In fact, you die an admired old lady.

DOROTHY

With chin spittle and pouches beneath my eyes. Could I return to twenty-one?

JUDY

I'm sure.

WILLIAM

And I?

JUDY

You are a composite of several severe Elizabethans and an admired professor. Whom I married, as a matter of fact.

WILLIAM

So, no nest to fly to?
Aloft a while, then gone?
Less enduring or of moment than this throw I tread upon?
Less than this mark I make, here?

(He strikes the doorframe hard with the brass bookstand.)

WILLIAM

A decade hence, though that scuff remain,
No register or stone will mouth my name?
This crack, this grinning dent my every molecule outstay?
No coverlet of earth define my shape and place
Not e'en that vain premonitory solace.
Unseeing and unseen, as had I never been?

DOROTHY

Thus religion, pot, and Bailey's Irish Cream.

JUDY

I think it not overbold to say we do none of us our imaginer outlast.

WILLIAM

Mine own hand cancelling the hand that my hand made?
Thought o'ertops thought, playing out the giddy reel --
To be not a wisp that comes then goes, but less; a wisp that never was?
A reverie's at least recalled. If I my recaller unmake,
What infinity of souls must bud and wilt before another my form take?
And so men weep.

JUDY

Or write poems for ladybugs. There is a comfort, no? in written posterity?

WILLIAM

Comfort?

JUDY

King Lear lives.

WILLIAM

Lives? Madam!

If he lives, who chews his cigar?

Whose fingers ring the coins in his purse?

What privy maids remake his bed or drain his slops?

In what field dents the grass on which he of a summer lay, and

When come the trumpeters to bugle him away?

No cofferer need make your Lear a chest

To stow the surplus velvet of his crowning vest.

Consubstantial with the air, or with a drunkard's smirk

Not e'en a farthing's worth of busywork.

He has not – I have not – the deepness of a shirtpin's shadow,

The color of a window,

A phrase writ by an empty pen:

I am not, at end, of any solitary thing a specimen.

JUDY

I'm sorry, William. I might, if I tried very hard, give you faith – but it would be a hard bread. Faith is a bedside lamp hurled at an armed intruder. "Take that, villain, for I believe certain things!"

(notices)

You're sad. I'm sorry. I was thinking only of how things affect me.

WILLIAM

More distant than the stars is another's toothache.

JUDY

Not for everyone! I understand that 48.3 percent of us have empathy.

DOROTHY

Well! If neither of you is going to say anything funny, I shall make my ungainly departure. "Exits, pursued by a bear of a hangover..."

(DOROTHY EXITS, drinking)

JUDY

It is not just how long you last. It's also who'll remember you, and how.

WILLIAM

Tell that to the mayfly in his bog.

(miserable)

Even a cheap melody lingers a season. What right have I, who am on no one's tongue, to pursue or even imagine the affection of another?

JUDY

"Affection?" Oh. *Anne!* You've been discreet.

WILLIAM

A beggar must couch his plea. How demeaning for me to feel something for her.

JUDY

Affection should never be embarrassing.

WILLIAM

And wine shouldn't cloud the judgment, nor sugar ache the tooth.

JUDY

Are you perhaps looking at the matter too *mechanically*?

WILLIAM

Is not the apter question whose mechanism I am? And who governs – nay, dictates – my winding-down?

JUDY

I'm unwinding myself, as you may have noticed. William, you have no grounds for this self-criticism.

WILLIAM

Or a self with which to criticize.

JUDY

Stop thinking like that. We all doubt ourselves. Well, nearly all. You're a caring, worthy person.

WILLIAM

Every Pygmalion praises his Galatea. Have I in truth even this worry, or is it but a pebble rubbing in your own shoe?

JUDY

All of us are eventually gone.

WILLIAM

But we are not all fictional!

(JUDY considers the AUDIENCE for a beat)

JUDY

Let me tell you something. You may repeat this to anyone you like, because it's not at all obvious. Here it is. It feels the same. Made or maker, we weep. Exult, despair. Made or maker, we love. Please let me persuade you of this, because there is so little time and it is awful not to know it. Bestower of life or the bestowed, *it feels the same*.

(JUDY uncurls the plastic store bag and reads the writing on it:)

JUDY

"Come Back Soon."

(She puts the bag down on the table)

JUDY

You needn't do this, of course. I shouldn't have asked. I'm not even certain I want you to. My phone could ring at any moment. Do you remember when we had answering machines? No of course you don't. I used to come home to that flashing light and I'd sit and look at it, thinking, "Someone wants me!"

My agent could still find my number, under an old couch cushion. A commission, a reprint, a late, rapturous review!

(They both look at her phone. A long beat)

SLOW DIM OUT

Scene v

(JUDY'S HOME, BRIGHT MORNING. The room is empty, the curtain open, showing trees and sky. There's a fumble with the lock and a REALTOR and two clients enter at the front door, leaving it open. The REALTOR is DOROTHY. The clients are ANNE and WILLIAM in modern dress, still new-relationship enamored.)

DOROTHY

Et voila! This of course is the front room. Spacious yet private for entertaining. Eastern light, so it's cool on warm evenings. The kitchen and master bedroom are through there, second bedroom that way. Ground floor, no steps, means easy access for anything you want delivered...

ANNE

You said the last owner was here twenty years?

DOROTHY

It may have been longer. All the large appliances are new except for her stove which they said was "classic."

WILLIAM

Lots of bookshelves.

DOROTHY

Yes. They've cleaned and re-stained the shelves. I feel this would be an excellent place to put a big TV.

WILLIAM

That's what I was gonna say.

ANNE

Plumbing's good?

DOROTHY

How do you mean?

ANNE

I'm just thinking, with an older person living here twenty years...

(JUDY ENTERS, carrying her ladybug book and the slim poetry book. As she appears, the three people in her living room FREEZE.)

JUDY

Dear God, I wasn't flushing my diseased facial skin down the drains.

(the ladybug book:)

*If I could choose three weapons
To keep me safe and sound
And take to Beaster Island
Where monsters roam around,
I think I'd pack a hockey stick,
A jar of dragon tears,
And a bottle of Invisible
To dab behind my ears.
I'd drip the tears beside the shore
To burn a deeply hole
Through rugged rock a thousand feet
To darkest blacky coal
And when the beasters gathered
With poisoned fang and fin
I'd make myself invisible
And slap the fuckers in.*

(from memory:)

Editor's Note: "Trust you have alternate last line for page 16."

Trevor, she never came. I would rejoice but I have worry on me like the ripple on a chip. Tell me I didn't imagine her call.

(She opens the poetry book at random)

JUDY

A tree that wants a summer rain / Though seeming dead, may green again. O! I would green again. I can't reconcile having this life with its picnic wasps and red wine and sex and taxes and melanomas and discount coupons, with being gone. If after all that we're just gone, what were bath oil beads for?

There are still good things. Ice cubes, I mean, God, what a miracle. Twenty-year-old boys, still! still! they keep making them. *Good news, good news!*

(She looks at the Realtor and her Clients. She CLAPS and they UN-FREEZE. They speak without seeing her.)

DOROTHY

The property manager says everything's in tip-top, move-in shape.

(ANNE walks to the desk and points at the floor beneath it)

ANNE

What are these marks?

DOROTHY

Oh I believe the former owner had a desk here for her writing and whatnot.

JUDY

Mostly my whatnot.

DOROTHY

Without it you see how the room opens up.

ANNE

Yes!

WILLIAM

Honey, I'm just gonna take a peek in the back.

(WILLIAM goes OFF to inspect the adjoining room. DOROTHY examines where William struck the doorframe)

ANNE

What's this dent from, do you suppose?

DOROTHY

Well, it is an old house. Who knows?

ANNE

This may take us a little while... I mean, deciding.

DOROTHY

That's fine.

(ANNE seems to look at Judy. Can she see her?)

ANNE

We met fairly recently. Through a mutual friend.

DOROTHY

That's nice.

ANNE

At first we didn't think we had anything in common. We're each still discovering what the other is like.

DOROTHY

That must be so much fun.

ANNE

(calls off)

Chaz, do you want to take pictures? Or shall I? Chaz? Are you there?
Chaz?

(to Anne)

Would that be okay?

DOROTHY

Of course! There are even more bookshelves in the back hall – perfect for storage if you wanted to close them off. Plus, there's a pantry I guess you'd call it, off the kitchen. In case you like to cook. You could turn that into a cozy wine cellar.

(DOROTHY takes cell phone pictures. WILLIAM returns)

WILLIAM

The master bedroom's roomy. Not that Millie and me take up much space.

DOROTHY

And that room gives off a lovely Southern light.

JUDY

"Admits." Atlanta, on fire, *gave off* a lovely Southern light.

WILLIAM

I've gotta say, before even seeing the rest of it, just based on the neighborhood we're interested. Something I wanted to ask, to help us get a feel. The lady you said lived here, what happened to her?

DOROTHY

Well...

(JUDY CLAPS. The trio FREEZES. Judy inspects them closer. She CLAPS again. Each of the trio "rewinds" their motion slightly. She CLAPS and they go FORWARD again.)

WILLIAM

The lady you said lived here, what happened to her?

DOROTHY

Well! She was a lot sharper than anyone thought. She hotwired a police car and drove it through two sets of barricades at the airport, somehow talked her way onto an off-the-books CIA flight to the Hindu Kush, and the last anyone heard she was teaching ekphrastic poetry to Sherpas in Kathmandu.

(JUDY CLAPS. They rewind slightly and FREEZE. JUDY CLAPS, and they RESTART.)

WILLIAM

... what happened to her?

DOROTHY

Well! After her investigation of a nosy neighbor turned up a clandestine pottery-smuggling ring run under cover of a Mahjong club? she took her reward money to Las Vegas, put it on 31, and bought a cottage on twenty hectares in the Orkneys, where she's raising purebred Corgis for the royal family and re-interpreting 12th century Viking carvings for a private Scottish think tank.

(JUDY CLAPS. The trio "rewinds." She CLAPS and they start again)

WILLIAM

... what happened to her?

DOROTHY

Well! A Mountie with a radar gun clocking long-haul truckers outside Kitwanga Junction in British Columbia? got a weird signal on his equipment and pulled over an 18-wheeler headed up Highway 16 to the Yukon.

(JUDY EXITS to the other room as Anne continues.)

DOROTHY

The Mountie used his radar gun to locate a domestic cat that had stowed away in a load of mackerel headed to Whitehorse. The kitty's shoulder chip led them here...

ANNE

No!

DOROTHY

Yes! ...where he was reunited with his owner, who used the GPS recorder in his collar to confirm he'd apparently been someone's companion on an Arctic expedition to find the lost depots of the 1847 Franklin Expedition.

WILLIAM

You don't say!

DOROTHY

Strange but true!

ANNE

That is somehow at the same time funny, rigorously explained, and solemnly poetic. What a tale! What a history this place has had! I hope the two of us can be as lucky.

DOROTHY

I'm sure you can. The right home has a way of making the impossible come true. Shall we explore some more? Follow me!

(DOROTHY leads WILLIAM and ANNE off, through the side hall.)

(Beat. JUDY RE-ENTERS through the same door, carrying and stroking a longhair cat, TREVOR)

JUDY

See? I knew you knew the way. My handsome boy. My beautiful boy.

(She carries Trevor to the open front door, and looks back into the room. She recites.)

JUDY

*"In a crowd,
On a beach,
By my side
Or out of reach,
Gone for minutes
Or for weeks,
Yours is the face
That my face seeks."*

Who wrote that? Oh, that's right.

(JUDY EXITS with Trevor.)

LIGHTS DIM.

CURTAIN