

Space Available

A play about the economy and the cost of not having children

by Jennie Webb

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Characters:

A BARREN WOMAN - early/mid 30s, she's gotten used to managing with what she doesn't have, letting go of what has been taken from her, making do and rubbing up against the edges of things.

HER PRODUCTIVE FRIEND - early/mid 30s, she's almost satisfied that she's able to accomplish things, make things happen, and do for herself and others in whatever circumstances.

THE ADJUNCT HUSBAND - mid/late 30s, he's appreciative of everything he has, and that he's a part of it all; sometimes wonders what he's done to deserve it.

AN INTENSE WOMAN WHO CARES DEEPLY known as DIVINA - late 30s/40s, she's certain that she knows what's best and has faith everyone else will come to the same realization.

THE VOICE OF HOPE changes as we move forward, and is probably not what we expected.

PASSERS-BY

Setting: An empty storefront in a West Coast city

Time: The shifting, surreal present; mid-day

Casting Notes:

Characters can played by actors of any race or ethnicity.

The voice of Hope is heard from offstage, and should be played live by an actor capable of voicing the progression of a girl from age 1 to 17. Hope is only seen in shadow.

The passers-by could be projections, animations, video, puppets, silhouettes or any other representation of figures passing by the window; depending on other design elements, they do not have to be played by live actors. But they could be.

Dialogue Notes:

— Indicates a character's dialogue is interrupted, by another character speaking, an event or a character abruptly shifting gears within a line of dialogue.

... Indicates a character is searching for words, does not complete a thought or leaves a line of dialogue open.

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Synopsis

A play about the economy and the price of not having children, this new work finds two friends weighing their very different choices, and provides an absurdist look at a woman's place and her diminishing options in today's rapidly shifting reality.

The Barren Woman has nothing, except a personal litany of profound misfortunes. So her Productive Friend, a married mother of three, enters into a grand plan that involves setting up a business and making changes that will fill her single pal's life with everything she—or any woman—needs.

What happens when a woman who's survived everything that's been thrown at her by keeping her head down, marking time and doing without, finally looks up and sees that the surreal future she's being propelled into is not one she can live with? Maybe it's time to make a choice that matters in the bigger picture.

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We see two women inside of an empty storefront. It's a relatively blank slate containing only some awkward shelves and other odd furniture units. One wall is glass, or has a really big window, which is partially blocked by a large commercially manufactured banner. It's facing away from us, but through it we can see the words "Space Available," backwards. The window looks out onto a street. It's apparently a street for foot traffic only. So it's not really a street.

When we see figures through the window they are stylized suggestions of the passers-by and the action outside, perhaps using animation or projections.

The smaller and more energetic of the two women has a tape measure and is busy measuring things. She's dressed for action. The other woman, whose attire shows a definite artistic flair, stares out the window. We can't tell whether she sees something, or is looking for something, but we get the sense that something's missing.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Perfect. This couldn't be more perfectly perfect. There is totally enough room in here for standard fixtures. Counters and display cases—the usual stuff you'll need. Those thingies (*indicating the fixtures*) are... Well, I don't know what they are, or what they were, but they're not standard, that's for sure. I mean, you could probably use them for something. Someone as creative and "outside the box" as you!

The woman at the window turns around.

BARREN WOMAN:

"Outside the box?" Is that what I am?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Well, you're certainly not in it; you've never wanted to be. But what do you think?

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha ha, I think this is a very cool space.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Isn't it, though? I knew you'd love it. It's so you, and so perfect for what you were looking for.

BARREN WOMAN:

What I was—?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) Even if you didn't know it.

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh! Yeah?

PRODUCTIVE WOMAN:

Oh, yeah. It's like at this moment you've got this certain window that's wide open; it won't always be that way.

BARREN WOMAN:

What sort of window are you talking about?

PRODUCTIVE WOMAN:

What I'm saying is that that this is a great opportunity, a really great opportunity. And my friend Divina says it's a unique opportunity, because of the zoning. It's been a bunch of different things and was grandfather- mother-ed in or something—just a few buildings in this little, whatcha call it, it's not really a courtyard; it's more like a... a...

BARREN WOMAN:

Enclave. An enclave.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

That's exactly it! An enclave. A protected enclave. There's just a couple of buildings that have live-work-breathe units, or whatever like this one. But in actuality I'm thinkin' you don't really want any more. Living. Breathing. Next to you—I mean, knowing you. But you do want a sense of... of...

BARREN WOMAN:

Community.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yeah! Community. Community support, other people there for you and with you and around you but you don't want to feel like you're too... I don't know, too...

BARREN WOMAN:

Urban.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Urban, no. Urban is good. I mean an urban feel is good. But you don't want to get...

BARREN WOMAN:

Congested?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No.

BARREN WOMAN:

Claustrophobic.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No.

BARREN WOMAN:

Stuck. Trapped. Paralyzed.

PRODUCTIVE:

No. Japanese. You don't want to get too Japanese.

BARREN WOMAN:

What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I mean, like everyone on top of each other. You need your space. We all do, but especially you. And this isn't at all like that. I mean— Oh, I just got it: that is hysterical, I totally forgot this is almost in Little Tokyo! But what I meant is like *Japan* Japanese, the real Tokyo, that's what you don't want. But this is not that, even though there will be Japanese people. Just not as many.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha ha. That's good to know.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

But you'll still be a gal-on-the-go in the inner-city, open up your successful business and get written up and I'll come and hang out with you and we'll string lights and play music and be fancy and drink wine, or Mai Tais, or Daiquiris! It'll be just like when we were in college and figuring things out together except better because now we know things. Oh, I can't wait! I want to be you and sign the contract right now!

BARREN WOMAN:

It sounds great. It really does. But it's also impossible.

PRODUCTIVE WOMAN:

Why?

BARREN WOMAN:

I have no money.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Stop saying that.

BARREN WOMAN:

Because that'll change anything?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You can always get money.

BARREN WOMAN:

You can always get money.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Don't think that way. You can't let money hold you back from things.

BARREN WOMAN:

You mean the lack of money.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Exactly. Or no, having money even! Everything is changing; it can actually be a burden. Money can close as many doors as it can open. It's all about your relationship with money. Having a healthy relationship with money, not being afraid of it.

BARREN WOMAN:

I love you, but where did all this come from?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You. You brought it up.

BARREN WOMAN:

So the fact that there's no way I can afford this place, even if they'd let me have it and even if I knew what to do with it, is because I'm afraid of money?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I don't know. Not the only reason of course, but, yes. The fear is there, and I'm not sure why. You deserve money!

BARREN WOMAN:

I agree!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

And you deserve to have a healthy relationship with it. A close relationship. Maybe you're afraid of financial intimacy, have you ever thought of it that way?

BARREN WOMAN:

I have not, actually.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Hmmmm. I love you, too, but that's something to consider. Especially in this economy.

She goes back to measuring the space.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay. Well. Thank you. For thinking of me. And thank your friend for me.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Divina.

BARREN WOMAN:

Divina. Thank her for me.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

She's not really a friend. I mean, she's a friend, but more of a...

BARREN WOMAN:

Colleague?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I used to have colleagues but now I think I'm limited to friends and acquaintances. She's a professional friend. I can say that, right? As a professional parent. And "homemaker." Hilarious.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha, you're certainly not an amateur.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Like I've got a choice keeping track of a house, a husband and three kids?

Very short pause.

Don't worry; you've got time.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha. So how did you meet this Divina?

The barren woman starts to poke around the space, perhaps seeing herself in it.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

She's a mom. Her kid goes to school with Faith.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ah.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

She's done very well with commercial real estate—investing in it, even in this market—which is why she found out about this.

BARREN WOMAN:

She's going to buy it?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No, she knows the guy who just did, and knew he was looking for someone—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Hey! I just remembered this. And you know, she may be totally ahead of me, because I gave her the lowdown on you. He's newly single. She said he was a great guy, owns a lot of property around here, very smart. I think she said he was Persian.

BARREN WOMAN:

Right. That's okay.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Or maybe Korean. You're not into Persian men, I kind of am. Remember? Swarthy. Sexy. I love the Korean thing, too. Wide foreheads do something to me. Don't tell my little pointy noggin of a husband, of course.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha, no. I won't. No, it's... Never mind.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

All right, never mind about the owner. Let's get back to the space. Really. What do you think? Can you see yourself here? A new chapter of your life? Can you see this working for you, 'cause I certainly can.

BARREN WOMAN:

I... I don't know! I guess, in a different world I could certainly see myself, my... business and—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) And it'd be so easy to turn that into the cutest apartment ever up there. Honestly. We can so make that happen.

BARREN WOMAN:

Except that I just moved into the place I am now and—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) Don't tell me you signed a lease with those awful people; that's a terrible building, everyone knows that.

Short pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

What's wrong with the building? You're the one who told me about it.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Please. You needed something in a hurry and they'll rent to anyone. But there's no lease, right?

BARREN WOMAN:

The building's not terrible. It's fine.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's temporary. And I'll be honest with you: even a lease doesn't mean all that much; you can get out of a lease.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay. I appreciate you making time for me—I've really been looking forward to seeing you, getting treated to a nice lunch out—but please stop and listen to what I'm telling you: I'm not in the market for a new place to live right now, even if it were financially possible. Emotionally? I can't even my head around all that's been going on; I feel like I've lost everything and I can't find anything to grab onto, you know? So it's very hard for me to...

Short pause.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I know.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yeah.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thanks.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

But losing your house isn't everything.

Short pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

And I lost my husband.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Of course. But think about it: so you lost your home, so you lost your husband, so what? You've got so much more going for you than that!

BARREN WOMAN:

Do we have a reservation somewhere?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I'm sorry, but Chance has been dead, what, two years already?

BARREN WOMAN:

Three. Just over three.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Three! See? And now you're finally free of that house—a great house, but it never really felt like it was yours; walking away and declaring bankruptcy was the best thing you could have done and look at the possibilities opening up!

BARREN WOMAN:

All right. I have to get back to work.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You said you could take a long lunch

BARREN WOMAN:

It's already been long.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Don't be silly. I'm treating you and I've got a sitter for another hour at least. But you see why I wanted to come here first?

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay! Let's go; I don't want to lose my job, too.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You hate that job.

BARREN WOMAN:

That doesn't mean I can afford to lose it. Seriously: what are we really doing here?

Through the window we see and hear a large group of teenage Japanese girls passing by, or some colorful representation where they're all hot and dressed like school girls. They laugh, some carry cartoonish baby dolls and in their wake they leave a smiling, easygoing, rather slight man with an actual baby strapped to his chest.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What in the world...?

BARREN WOMAN:

It's your husband.

The adjunct husband sees the women looking at him and waves.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I know, I know, but he's—

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(interrupting, through the glass) Hi! Hey! *(indicating the baby)* Look who's here!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(raising her voice, to her husband) What are you doing?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Saying hi! Thought we'd stop by! *(to the barren woman)* Hey!

BARREN WOMAN:

(raising her voice, to the adjunct husband) Hey. Is that...?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Hope! Yes.

He turns in an attempt to show a piece of the bundled baby.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She's sleeping!

BARREN WOMAN:

Ahhh! She's... grown! *(to her productive friend)* Right? How long's it been?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Oh, she's grown. Believe me, she's grown.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(raising her voice) I said she has!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Yeah?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Grown!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Yeah! She really has!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman) The first two weren't like that. I mean, they got bigger, but not like her. It's like every day I've got a new, larger, hungrier child on my breast.
(raising her voice, to her husband) Crazy, huh?!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) Yeah!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Is that a new shirt?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
That shirt! Is it new?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) Yeah! You like it!?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
When did you buy it? Is it cotton?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) Thanks!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
(louder) Is it cotton!?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) Oh! I don't... *(trying to find a label)* I don't know...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
(to the barren woman) He always gets these shirts that have to be dry cleaned. In this economy. He just doesn't think.

BARREN WOMAN:
Are they joining us for lunch?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
What?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
(loudly, to her husband) She's not—! *(to the barren woman)* No, he's just stopping by.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(through the glass) Not what?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Talking to you!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Ah!

BARREN WOMAN:

Why doesn't he come inside?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You wouldn't mind?

BARREN WOMAN:

Why would I mind?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to her adjunct husband) Why don't you come inside?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Okay!

He starts to look for a way inside.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

This is actually not planned or anything. In case you thought it was.

BARREN WOMAN:

Why would—?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) He's off work this week and I told him we'd be here—I guess he wanted to see you and he knows Divina.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ah.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

He doesn't know the owner though. Or at least I don't think he does. I'm sure he would have mentioned him. Maybe he was an Arab. Like an Arabian knight. Mmmmm. He sounds fantastic, I can't wait to meet him. Or for you to meet him, because obviously I intend upon living through you!

BARREN WOMAN:

Is there something you're not telling me?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I had no idea he'd show up. He gets restless at home, but I certainly didn't expect him here with the baby. I'm sorry.

BARREN WOMAN:

No, I meant— It's fine. I love your husband.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

And he loves you!

The adjunct husband hasn't yet found a way in.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Where's the door?

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(raising her voice) To the side, go around the side!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Which—?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting, pointing) There!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(through the glass) Got it!

He moves toward the door.

BARREN WOMAN:

So, wait: He's at home for a week and you've still got a babysitter?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's a regular gig so I didn't think it was fair to take it away from her.

BARREN WOMAN:

I wish you were my boss.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Then let's make this happen.

BARREN WOMAN:

You need another babysitter?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No, what I'm saying is you can be your own boss. There's no reason why you can't! You've got to jump on this while the timing is right. You're got to stop running away and making excuses; you are ready to stake your claim!

BARREN WOMAN:

You never cease to amaze me, truly. But I don't—

The adjunct husband, with child, comes into the space.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Hey, you were right! This is great! It's a great space!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Isn't it, though? Hi. *(kissing him)* Can't you just see her opening up her business here?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Definitely!

BARREN WOMAN:

Except I don't have a business. Your wife seems to have overlooked that.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Everyone's got to start somewhere; where better than this?

BARREN WOMAN:

(to the adjunct husband) I have no clue how to start a business.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

All you need is an idea.

BARREN WOMAN:

An idea and money and credit. *(to the adjunct husband)* None of which I have.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You came up with a jillion fabulous ideas last week, that's what got me started on this whole thing!

BARREN WOMAN:

(to the adjunct husband) Your wife really needs a hobby.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Why, when she has you?

BARREN WOMAN:

Right.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You two. What about the coffee house weaving studio?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Be a good place for it, in this little... alley.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Enclave. *(to the barren woman)* Or a second-hand furniture and stationery store!

BARREN WOMAN:

(to the adjunct husband) All these flashes of inspiration in a lone, late-night phone call.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Inspiration is just the first step. I'm here to help you take the next one.

BARREN WOMAN:

Towards hand-made soaps and appliance repair.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You know how to repair appliances?

BARREN WOMAN:

No, and I don't know how to make soap, either. That's what I'm trying to tell your wife: I have no business starting a business.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You can't think that way. What if we had thought that way?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

When?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Before you started the business.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

My company?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's a business.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yes...

BARREN WOMAN:

Let's get out of here. Your wife's going to take me to lunch.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(to his wife) But it's not the same, really.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What's not the same? A company is a business.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yes, but a business is not always a company: a protected entity for the purposes of legal and financial limited liability.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yeah fine. But it all started with an idea, right? And who are you to say that your idea is better than hers?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm not saying that; I'm not saying anything like that.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(to his wife) But honey: in this economy, a small, storefront business isn't going to have an easy start, no matter how fantastic the idea.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to her adjunct husband) Why are you being so negative?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm not being negative...

BARREN WOMAN:

He's being realistic.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Which is not to say it can't be done, I'm just saying it won't be easy.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Well, that doesn't scare me away. I'm already halfway through a business plan, a full-proof business plan which takes hold of our economic downturn and puts her on top. All my friend needs is a little focus and direction, and now's the time to strike while she's still single with no kids, right?

BARREN WOMAN:

Fool-proof.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What?

BARREN WOMAN:

You said "full-proof." Isn't it "fool-proof"—even a fool can do it?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Stop being so hard on yourself. I'm going up to the apartment again, I can't remember what the closets were like. Where's that tape measure?

She grabs it and leaves.

BARREN WOMAN:

(to the adjunct husband) She's like a force of nature.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She is. She's been very excited about this, you know. She wasn't kidding about the business plan.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's so nice to have someone excited about my life, even if it is all a fantasy.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Seriously, though, is this something you're considering? What was it before?

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't know. A lot of things, I guess.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Well, that real-estate person seems very into it so if she says it's a good buy...

BARREN WOMAN:

Someone's already bought it.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Ah, gotta act fast I guess. Especially now.

BARREN WOMAN:

The idea was that I'd rent.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Oh! Right.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's zoned for mixed use, so I'd open up something down here and live upstairs.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Now I remember. Some Japanese guy? What's the apartment like?

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't— It's cool. Cute. It's actually pretty big, more room than I'd need, and it'd be a nice change, something new, different, the whole vibe here—

Very short pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

What am I talking about? I hate your wife! She's got me buying into this whole alternate reality scheme that's absolutely not going to happen.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yeah, I hate her, too.

The barren woman looks at the lump on the adjunct husband's chest.

BARREN WOMAN:

Does she always sleep like that?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

As long as she's attached to someone. On her own she hardly closes her eyes.

BARREN WOMAN:

I know how she feels.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

So how are things? You seem good. I mean, it sucked about the house. I'm really sorry about that.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah, that sucked. "Just walk away." Not as easy as it sounds.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

And she said you're living in those apartments by the freeway?

BARREN WOMAN:

Me and some boxes. I don't even know what's in them. Nothing really seems real.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Tough.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thanks.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

So... this really isn't a possibility.

BARREN WOMAN:

Not in a million years, for so many reasons.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I wasn't trying to be negative about the business angle, you know.

BARREN WOMAN:

I know! Like you said, even if I had any business skills—

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(interrupting) You have plenty of—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) —or interest!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You know you're capable of—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) Or a half viable idea, like she said—

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(interrupting) You'd be surprised what's viable, even now, if you've got the right people behind you.

BARREN WOMAN:

But I don't have anyone behind me, that's what I was trying to tell her!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You have us.

Short pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thanks.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Come here.

She does, and he holds her for a brief moment, perhaps too tightly, then remembers the baby strapped to his chest.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ah...

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Ha ha ha.

BARREN WOMAN:

She really does sleep through anything, huh?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She really does!

BARREN WOMAN:
I'm jealous.

Short pause.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
You look great. It's been too long.

BARREN WOMAN:
It has. And look at her! Kids really measure things, don't they.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
I... Yeah, I guess they do. It's a little different when they're around all the time.

BARREN WOMAN:
I guess.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
So. I know it took you awhile to deal with the estate; was that all straightened out before the whole house thing?

BARREN WOMAN:
"Estate." That makes debt sound so grand.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Well, you know. He had a son, right?

BARREN WOMAN:
And a daughter.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Oh, I didn't—

BARREN WOMAN:
(interrupting) She was older. Is older.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
You know, I think I remember that.

BARREN WOMAN:
You're kind. It wasn't a good role for me. But yeah, that's all finished. Everything got all divided up and signed off—they're all out of the picture. And with the market and everything going wonky I couldn't keep the house on my own.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Yeah.

BARREN WOMAN:

But it's fine! It's all water under the... underwater mortgage.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Ugh. It's been a couple of years now, right?

BARREN WOMAN:

Since...?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Chance.

BARREN WOMAN:

Three.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Three? Really?

BARREN WOMAN:

Really.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

And you were only married for...

BARREN WOMAN:

A year and a half.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

So that means he's been gone longer than—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) We were together almost a year before, but yes. He's been gone longer.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Wow. That's funny to think about.

BARREN WOMAN:

Strange to think about. I don't know why, but it feels like him being sick—and our whole time together—took up so much room. Everything since has been like this tiny little blip.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yeah.

BARREN WOMAN:

So it kind of feels like I'm still floating, waiting... I don't know for what. But I guess I've always been that way. Or that's what your wife says.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She admires your "buoyancy."

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha. She does, does she? Well, lately I guess I feel more "un-moored" than usual.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Bankruptcy can do that to you.

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh. She told you about that?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Well, yeah. But it's not a big deal. Everyone who's anyone goes through bankruptcy. Especially in this economy.

BARREN WOMAN:

Nice to know I'm in good company.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Definitely. How do you think a lot of businesses stay "afloat?" Ha ha ha.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha.

We see jarring images of business people through the window, interacting with their smartphones and looking at what might be proposals and blueprints and important financial reports. Their conversations are loud and proclamatory. One them involves an intense woman who obviously cares deeply about a great many things. She catches sight of the two inside, and then begins knocking on other side of the glass.

INTENSE WOMAN:

(through the glass) Hello?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Hello!

BARREN WOMAN:

Hi.

The woman looks at them both, not seeing what she wants.

INTENSE WOMAN:

(through the glass) Is...?

The adjunct husband looks to the barren woman to identify the woman outside.

BARREN WOMAN:

(lowering her voice, to the adjunct husband) I have no idea.

INTENSE WOMAN:

(through the glass) I'm coming in. I'm Divina.

She moves quickly out of sight.

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh, hi! *(to the adjunct husband)* That's the— I thought you knew her?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

No, just through— I picked up the phone the other day.

Divina sweeps into the room.

DIVINA:

(to the barren woman) Of course it's you! I don't know why I even hesitated; it couldn't be anyone else but. How marvelous to meet you. *(to the adjunct husband)* I'm Divina.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Hello. We actually spoke on the—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) Yes! We did! I didn't make the connection. So you're the husband! It's lovely that you're able to take off work to be with your wife and children.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Ha ha, well, this week, more like the adjunct husband. I feel completely useless staying home doing nothing.

DIVINA:

It's an investment, is what it is. A very smart investment.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You'd better ask my wife about that.

DIVINA:

Oh, I don't need to. And my goodness! It's like I have blinders on today. I didn't even recognize little Hope. She just keeps getting bigger and bigger.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Ah, shhhh. She's a little sensitive about that.

DIVINA:

(in a hushed voice) Oh, of course. It starts early, I'm so sorry.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I was joking.

DIVINA:

Body image and girls is not something I take lightly.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

No pun intended.

Short pause.

DIVINA:

No.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I was—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) I could not adore your wife more, can I say that?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Sure. I say it all the time.

DIVINA:

I'm so glad; it needs to be said. You're lucky to have her.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I agree.

DIVINA:

Good.

Very short pause.

Did she pick out that shirt?

BARREN WOMAN:

You know, she's upstairs. Want me to—?

DIVINA:

(interrupting) You've been up there already? Do you love it?

BARREN WOMAN:

Well, yes, I—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) How could you not? It's a very special space. As is this, of course. They both are, in different ways. You can see that. And the package, together... I'm sure you feel it: this is an incredible opportunity.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha, that's what she keeps saying.

DIVINA:

Because that's what I'm saying. Even in this economy. And I'm not making a penny here. This is all between friends.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thank you, but—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) I know, I get it, I completely understand: we've just met. But the truth is, I've heard so much about you—and everything you've been through—that I feel like I do know you. And have known you, for a long time. You may be the strongest woman I've ever had the privilege of knowing and I had to make sure you got your foot in the door before the word got out! We women have to stick together!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(to Divina) I'm going to make myself useful; go up and tell her you're here.

BARREN WOMAN:

Why don't I go be useful?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Nope, that's me all over. Serviceable towards an end or purpose.

DIVINA:

Ha ha ha. We would so appreciate that.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm so on it.

He starts out.

DIVINA:

(to the barren woman) You've had a chance to see everything. Do you have any questions? Keep in mind that I'm not representing anyone, so I have no vested interest. I have nothing to lose or gain. No attachments. Nothing at stake. The owner's not here, is he?

BARREN WOMAN:

No.

DIVINA:

You need to meet him. He's quite impressive. And very persuasive.

The adjunct husband hasn't yet found his way.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Where are the stairs?

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh...

DIVINA:

Back and around the corner, you can't miss them.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

So you say.

DIVINA:

Exactly.

He leaves.

DIVINA:

A useful man. Hmm. You've known them both awhile?

BARREN WOMAN:

Yes. And your kids go to school together.

DIVINA:

The ultimate networking.

BARREN WOMAN:

I suppose.

DIVINA:

Don't worry; you've got time.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha. That's what I keep hearing. Have you been in real estate long?

DIVINA:

I just dabble. Commercial investments. I was thinking about more of a commitment before I had Will, my son, but then there was the crash and everyone—including me—got scared away. Such an insane time, and we're all still reeling. As you're well aware.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah.

DIVINA:

But we can't stay frightened forever! No, we rise like a phoenix from the flames and start again.

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm sorry. You got burned, too?

DIVINA:

No. And I'm sorry! I'd completely forgotten about the fire and your parents. How tragic.

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh. Yeah, that's—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) I was speaking as the collective we. Because I truly feel your pain.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thank you.

DIVINA:

Thank you for allowing me to share it.

BARREN WOMAN:

You're welcome.

DIVINA:

What I would also like to share, if you'll let me, is the healing and joy that comes with creation. Planting an idea and watching it blossom into something extraordinary. Here, in this space.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay. Let me stop you there. I've already had this conversation, and—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) No, you haven't. This is new. A new conversation, a new beginning.

BARREN WOMAN:

It was absolutely great to meet you Divina, but, well, it's a little tricky right now. So even if I could afford this, yes, fabulous space, my situation means that any new doors are locked tight.

DIVINA:

Oh, I know all about the bankruptcy. But what I also know is that there are keys. There are always keys for the right person. That's why I'm here, because even if you're not able to see them, I can. And your best friend can.

BARREN WOMAN:

My best friend?

DIVINA:

(gesturing upstairs) Your—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) Oh, sure. I'm sorry.

DIVINA:

Why are you sorry?

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm not. It's just... I don't really think in terms of best friends.

DIVINA:

Your husband was your best friend.

Short pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

I guess he was.

DIVINA:

I understand. And there's an emptiness there that you've not yet filled. I can see that. I can also see that you will. In a very short time.

We hear the sounds of a jackhammer and street construction noises starting outside as the productive friend hurries into the room.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Divina! I'm so glad you could make it!

DIVINA:

Don't you look positively radiant?!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Thanks! Isn't this exciting? *(to the barren woman)* You got tons of room to expand up there, and more storage than you'll need. Especially right now. *(to Divina)* I told you about the break-in, right? How she was all packed and someone stole half her stuff?

DIVINA:

Incredible.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Right? Boxes and boxes of memories gone. Just like that! So this is more that I'd even dreamed of for her.

DIVINA:

From the moment I saw the property I could not get it out of my mind. It was bursting with potential. The owner's done some work, but it really speaks for itself.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman, taking hold of her) "Grab me! Rent me! Do it now!" *(to Divina)* And you two met.

DIVINA:

We're fast friends already. Not best friends, but fast friends.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Ha ha ha. I knew you would love each other.

DIVINA:

Yes. Can you feel the energy in this room? It's been through so many incarnations, and now it's about the synergy, really. It's going to feed me for weeks.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Right?

BARREN WOMAN:

Is that a hot dog cart?

It is, an old-fashioned hot dog cart being pushed outside the window. Workmen approach it and shout over the chaotic construction noises.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I've needed something like this. A project I can really dig my teeth into.

BARREN WOMAN:

I haven't seen one of those in ages. Why don't we just call that lunch? You're getting off cheap.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You're not serious, are you?

BARREN WOMAN:

Yes. I'm serious and I'm starving.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I'm not going to let you go near a cart like that, a food truck's one thing, but I'm sorry: even if I ate meat that's too frightening.

BARREN WOMAN:

Since when don't you eat meat?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I'm a pescetarian. For the last year or so.

BARREN WOMAN:

Really?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's for the kids, and I told you: I'm going to take you somewhere special.

BARREN WOMAN:

There's that place on the corner.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's like a lunch counter; that's not special.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's special enough; you can have a tunamelt.

DIVINA:

Don't do it. And definitely not the tuna.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Good to know.

DIVINA:

Entrepreneurial spirit has to be channeled correctly to run a restaurant.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Of course. *(to the barren woman)* Let's stay away from food.

BARREN WOMAN:
What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Take coffee house off the list, and you definitely don't want to open a café or anything.

BARREN WOMAN:
You're right, I don't.

As she watches the hurried lunch crowd disperse, we hear the patter of not-so-little feet upstairs.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(faintly, from upstairs) Hey! Where do you think you're going?!

DIVINA:
Ah! How well I remember. No more rest for the wicked once they start walking!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
You can say that again.

BARREN WOMAN:
Hope's walking already?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
She's sprinting. I can't keep up with her.

BARREN WOMAN:
That's... impressive.

DIVINA:
Can I say this? What a pleasure it is to watch the two of you, together. I can't tell you how many of my own friends dropped off the face of the earth when I became a mother.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
To be honest I haven't seen nearly enough of her lately, but we're making up for that now.

BARREN WOMAN:
So where is it that we're going, then? For lunch.

The hot dogs are history.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Wherever you want!

The footsteps grow louder.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from upstairs) You can't get away from me, missy!

We hear giggling and more footsteps, neither of which seem particularly baby-like.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to Divina) Did I tell you about this woman when we were young? I'd never met anyone like her, who'd been through what she had, even then; we were inseparable! So I was bound and determined to make this happen today. Pin her down so she can see what truly matters!

DIVINA:

Ah, remember what it was like to be childless? Free and easy, never having to look beyond ourselves?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

A distant memory! And with three of them it's next to impossible to know which way to look! Keeping track: today took a scheduling miracle.

DIVINA:

I've no idea how you manage; I'm at my wit's end and I've only got Will!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

But they have a father.

DIVINA:

Of course.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman, re Divina) She's a single mother, her husband—

DIVINA:

(interrupting, to the barren woman) You don't want to hear about that. And my little man's all I need. I would not be complete without him.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Do you know, someone actually said to me once, "Two is as easy as one!"

DIVINA:

You certainly make it look easy, accomplishing all that you do. Every day. From morning 'til night. Over and over again...

A loud commotion from upstairs ends in a grand peal of laughter.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from upstairs) Gotcha!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Or was it, “Three is as easy as two?” Geez, now I’m not sure, it may have been the third. Is that bonkers? I can’t remember. And that goes for just about everything lately. My mind is like a, a... *(to the barren woman)* what is it?

BARREN WOMAN:

(distracted the progression of sounds from upstairs) What? Oh. A sieve.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yeah. I was going to say a strainer. Which actually works, too. Stuff just leaks out and I hope none of the grey matter gets stuck in the holes. But anyway, that’s what I have a husband for, right?

DIVINA:

You are adorable. I get such a kick out of watching him with that baby. Not that I can still call her a baby.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Don’t remind me! It happens way too fast!

DIVINA:

Babies are such a blessing. I wish I could have had more!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Ooooooh... *(to the barren woman, re Divina)* It really is heart-breaking. She tried everything, and then she was going to adopt—

DIVINA:

(interrupting, to the barren woman) No, no—none of my sad tales can even begin to touch the horrifying events you’ve experienced. I stand in awe of you. And what you’ve been through.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Which is why we’re turning it all around here today! Only positive things from this point forward for my best friend. This is your space, we’re opening things up for you and making this a place to process all of the grief and sorrow and violence and betrayal... and you’ll finally be able to settle down and create.

Pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

What if I don’t want to create?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

That's ridiculous.

BARREN WOMAN:

Why is it ridiculous?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

We've been through this before. Start with creating a business. That'll give you the boost you need, to wrap your sense of self around while it heals.

BARREN WOMAN:

And if I don't see my "self" wrapped around a business?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

If that's too woo woo, even for you, think of it as a career move.

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't have a career, I have a job.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

A job you hate! Do you know how wrong that is, for someone with your free spirit!

BARREN WOMAN:

You're doing it again.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Doing what again?

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm not the person I was when we were in college. A lot has happened since then.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I'll say! *(to Divina)* Did I tell you about her car accident? *(to the barren women)*
Another selling point: this is close to public transportation.

BARREN WOMAN:

I know you're trying to help, here, but I can make my own decisions.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Of course you can! But you said it yourself: you need something to hold onto.

BARREN WOMAN:

Exactly. Right now I need time to figure out what that is. For me.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

And here's the creative outlet that'll let you do it!

BARREN WOMAN:

You are—! Okay, let me let you in on something I learned, being married to an artist. You've always thought I was, I always wanted to be, but the fact is I'm just not creative.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Oh, you're wrong, there. Look at you! *(to Divina)* Wouldn't you say she's "outside the box?"

DIVINA:

As far outside as you can get.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

She's so much more creative than I am; I was always so jealous.

BARREN WOMAN:

Except I'm not a creator. I don't create things!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What are you talking about? Of course you do.

BARREN WOMAN:

What? All the years you've known me, what have I actually created?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Your...

Short pause.

DIVINA:

Your home. Your lovely home. A place for your marriage to thrive.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha ha ha ha. Gee. Look at how well that paid off.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Don't do that to yourself.

BARREN WOMAN:

(to Divina) I'm sorry, but the reality is that it was my husband's house. I didn't contribute anything to it. And my marriage—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) You just didn't have enough time.

BARREN WOMAN:

I did not! I did not have enough time, that is true. But you think if he hadn't died I would have started... sculpting or something?

DIVINA:

We're women. We create. That's what we do.

BARREN WOMAN:

(to her productive friend) Does she know I don't even cook?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

She's talking about a family

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh.

Short pause.

Of course! "What truly matters." That's what this is all about.

We hear a child crying from upstairs.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(loudly, from upstairs to the productive friend) Honey?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(raising her voice) She's hungry.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from upstairs) What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

She's hungry. That's her "I'm hungry" cry. *(louder, to Hope)* Use your words, baby!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from upstairs) So what should I do?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Feed her!

VOICE OF HOPE:

Ba ba baaaaahhhhhh! Moooooom!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from upstairs) Uh...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You didn't bring a bottle? Or anything?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from upstairs) I knew we were meeting you, so...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the other women) Do you believe this?

She produces a bottle.

DIVINA:

Let me.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Thank you! And here!

She hands her a small bag of goldfish along with the bottle and Divina quickly leaves.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Man. Growing like she does, I can't imagine him leaving the house without—

The crying has stopped.

And the world is beautiful again! Oh! I brought this for you.

She hands the barren woman a flat package.

It's a calendar, a photo calendar. Pictures of the kids for every month. Isn't it cute? We had then made for their grandparents, and I knew you'd want one, too.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thanks.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Uh oh. I scared you before, didn't I? The one-two-three and nothing's easy and all that. You know I wouldn't trade any of it for the world, right?

She takes the calendar back.

I mean, just look at them! March is my favorite; they're all in the garden, three darling little squash blossoms: look look look how sweet are those girls!?

BARREN WOMAN:

Very sweet. Listen: I'm trying to piece together this new scheme of yours and how I fit in. Would we even be here today if I already have kids?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Of course not. Everything would be different, you'd've already accomplished something.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay! I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Stop it. I get that you're you, and you do things in your own way. First we get you the space. We get you set up and then we let nature take its course.

BARREN WOMAN:

"Mother" nature.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Ha ha. Look. I know I have to wait until you're ready, but you do have to start dealing with the, you know, elephant in the room.

BARREN WOMAN:

In this room?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yes. Your grief. I mean, Chance, too, but the thing is this: no one was more affected than me by your... earlier loss. You knew that, right? No, you couldn't know, we never talked about it. I tried to keep it from you. I didn't think it was fair to bother you with my problems; you needed to keep yourself busy and you had the wedding and his kids to deal with and I'm glad you did, but what it meant was that you never really allowed yourself to truly grieve.

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't have any idea of what you're talking about.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

The baby. When you lost the baby before you were married.

BARREN WOMAN:

When I—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) Oh, and this is bringing it all back. I'm going to start crying. It was so hard for me! Remember how excited I was when you told me you were pregnant? I had just had Faith and Prudence was starting to talk; I thought, "How wonderful, our kids will grow up together and our families will hang out together and you and I will get old together after our children are grown and live together after our husbands die off..."

BARREN WOMAN:

I certainly messed up that timeline for you.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You know what I mean. I'm sorry I'm an idiot, but that's what I was going through! Then. But I'm flexible. I can adjust, and be a doting auntie any time you want. It would be better sooner than later, though; I'm not getting any younger and neither are you, but I'll be there for you.

BARREN WOMAN:

When I lost the baby. That's how you remember it?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I see how you are, burying things deep and never looking back . But I know you. And I also know this: those things are the things that can— Or no: it's the absence, the absence of them. The things that are missing, that's what hurts later.

BARREN WOMAN:

All right. I actually do remember you were excited. But you seem to have forgotten I wasn't. I wasn't at all. I wasn't even sure I was going to get married, wasn't sure about anything, and I terminated the pregnancy.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You—

Short pause.

I know that. You did what you felt you had to at the time, but it was still a loss, wasn't it? I felt that way.

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's okay. Like we said, everything's different now. Second chances, and all that.

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm sorry you felt that way. I'm not sorry I didn't have a baby. I made the right decision.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I know! That's what I said.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

And I'm sorry you and Chance didn't have another go at it. I mean, try again.

BARREN WOMAN:

I found out I was pregnant again after we were married.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You— I didn't know that.

BARREN WOMAN:

No, you didn't.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What happened?

BARREN WOMAN:

I had an abortion.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What?

BARREN WOMAN:

I had—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) I don't understand.

BARREN WOMAN:

What didn't you understand?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Why you—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) Because we didn't want kids. He already had kids. And we'd just found out he was—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) No, why you didn't *tell* me! That's awful!

BARREN WOMAN:

What's awful?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

That he wouldn't let you—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) Wait. What do you—?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) I feel just terrible! I had no idea. I thought you guys were— Oh, sweetie, you poor, poor baby.

The adjunct husband comes into the room freed from the baby harness.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Hey, ladies. Anyone else besides Hope ready for lunch?

BARREN WOMAN:

Yes! Let's go already.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I'm not hungry.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Are you okay?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No. I'm not okay. I'm not at all okay.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Anything I can do? *(to the barren woman)* He says, knowing full well the answer.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Shut up! That's what you can— Ahhhhhhh...

She begins to sob.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

All right! I mean, come here. Shhhhhh.

She does and he holds her.

And I won't say anything else. I promise.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(through her tears) No, I'm sorry.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm sorry.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No. I'm a dope. I'm a bad friend.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Who said that?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No one. I did. I am.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(to the barren woman) Did you guys have a fight?

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting, drying her tears, to the barren woman) I'm sorry. Will you ever forgive me?

BARREN WOMAN:

For what?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

For being blind, for not being there for you, for not seeing what sort of man Chance was and how he was controlling you. I know I'm not supposed to speak ill of the dead, but what an asshole!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Honey.

BARREN WOMAN:

Hang on, he wasn't— Well, he was kind of an asshole, but he wasn't controlling me.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I wouldn't have thought so.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Me neither!

BARREN WOMAN:

Are you talking about babies? That was our decision.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You didn't have any.

BARREN WOMAN:

That's what I'm saying.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You can't tell me he didn't have undue influence on you. He was older; he'd already had kids.

BARREN WOMAN:

"Undue influence?"

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Isn't that what I meant?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Inappropriate or excessive manipulation of a vulnerable person.

BARREN WOMAN:

There was no manipulation.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

And I wouldn't describe you as vulnerable.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You don't know her like I do.

BARREN WOMAN:

We both decided not to have children. That we didn't need children in our marriage.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Because he already had them.

BARREN WOMAN:

Partly, yeah.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

And look where that decision left you. Past thirty and all alone!

BARREN WOMAN:

So you think I'd be better off with a... four-year-old kid? With all I'm going through right now? In this economy? I wouldn't even be able to survive!

Pause.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You're right.

BARREN WOMAN:

I know.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You're right and I was wrong. I'm sorry.

We hear laughter and talking from upstairs: it's Divina with a young girl.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I'd better get up there.

The productive friend tosses a small bag to the barren woman who doesn't know what to make of the voices coming from above.

Here. Have some goldfish. Are you thirsty?

She holds up a juice box.

BARREN WOMAN:

No...

The productive friend hurries upstairs and we hear her joining the conversation.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Well! This calls for a real drink. "You're right and I was wrong." I don't think I've ever heard that coming out of her mouth. Not that I can shut anyone up at home, but I'll hang onto those words forever.

BARREN WOMAN:

(re the conversation) Hang on, is that really—?

The talking from the upstairs fades.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Is what really?

BARREN WOMAN:

I— Nothing. I'm sorry. I guess I'm just— I don't know why, but I did not see this coming.

Almost unconsciously she opens the bag of goldfish and begins to eat them. Outside of the window, a small old man starts to paste up signs directly on the glass. It's a scene that's retro, if not historic.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Me neither! "I was wrong!" Hey, she gave you a calendar. Cute, huh?

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm going to say something to you and if you repeat it to your wife I'm going to kill you.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Uh, maybe you shouldn't.

BARREN WOMAN:

I definitely shouldn't, but I don't care. You have lovely children. But they're not my children. They're not my grandchildren. Why would I want to look at them every day?

Short pause.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

We should have gotten you one with cats?

BARREN WOMAN:

Fuck you.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Okay.

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm sorry. Like I said, I wasn't prepared for this today. But I should have been.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

What's "this?"

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh, everything becoming about me having kids.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Like everything... today?

BARREN WOMAN:

And apparently before that. Silly me. I was just too busy having things taken from me that I forgot to notice I was a barren woman. That's the real root of all my misery.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You're miserable?

BARREN WOMAN:

No, I'm fine! I just want a break. I need a break. I want it to stop.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I don't blame you. And if it helps, I wasn't sure about the kid thing, either. I say that as your friend.

BARREN WOMAN:

And as a man.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Thank you for noticing.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's different for women. It's always out there: "You've got time." I mean, as long as there is time.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Is there?

BARREN WOMAN:

Jesus, you too?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Sorry, I didn't know if... I don't know.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's okay. There's time. But what I don't know is how everything seems to have shifted here.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

What do you mean?

BARREN WOMAN:

It's like I went back in time and my womb's suddenly a retail opportunity.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Ha ha ha.

BARREN WOMAN:

Like I have no choice in the matter. I'm obliged because I'm woman. It's not if, it's when.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She just wants you to be happy.

BARREN WOMAN:

And what if I never have kids? Do I have to pay a penalty? I have no fucking money!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Hey.

BARREN WOMAN:

Really, though, maybe I won't. And if I'm not in the club, will your wife, like, cut me off?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

My wife would never— We would never cut you off. Kids or no kids, it doesn't matter.

BARREN WOMAN:

Do you think something's wrong with me?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

There's nothing wrong with you.

BARREN WOMAN:

I mean, I love kids. I love your kids.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You just can't bear to look at them?

He picks up the calendar.

BARREN WOMAN:

You know what I mean. Never to become a mother. Would that be the end of the world?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Why not just keep your options open?

BARREN WOMAN:

And another reason not to have a baby.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm just sayin'...

He opens the calendar.

Prudence. She's dressed as a barbeque fork for Halloween.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You don't know what you're missing!

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm missing the spectacular lunch your wife promised me that was going to take me far, far away, even if only for an hour, that's what I'm missing.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Sounds great, when do we leave?

BARREN WOMAN:

That's just what I've been—

The room brightens as Divina comes in.

DIVINA:

And what are the two of you doing alone here in the dark?

BARREN WOMAN:

Nothing.

She notices new signs pasted on the window; they've blocked some light. The old man continues to put more layers up.

But what's going on out there?

DIVINA:

Isn't it extraordinary? I saw that dear man plastering away from the windows upstairs. He's marvelous, isn't he? Takes me back to when life was simple. Back to the basics: right was right, we all knew our roles and for the rest of them, well, there's always more room in hell! Ha ha ha.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay, but—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) Oh. Don't worry! Even if a solid barricade went up down here, you've got wonderful light up there. You can go and hide from the world. Unobstructed views and privacy. Almost unheard of in a commercial property like this.

BARREN WOMAN:

Who is he, though? What's he doing?

DIVINA:

The community here is very active, and he's doing his part to spread the word, so to speak! About an individual's responsibilities and the public's obligations to give guidance and set boundaries.

BARREN WOMAN:

That sounds—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) Doesn't it? You can ask the owner more about it. That's one of the reasons he bought the building. To save it from its checkered past. This is for you.

As she hands the barren woman a juice box, we see someone walking with a picket sign outside—perhaps only the outlines, or shadow, partially obscured by the papers over the window. We can't read the sign.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Any more goldfish?

DIVINA:

You can certainly ask her. She'll be down shortly.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Fantastic. Never too many goldfish, that's what I say.

BARREN WOMAN:

(re the juice box) How do you open this?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I've got it. You just poke it in. *(he does)* Did she tell you we're pescetarians? It's been interesting, especially for the girls. A lot of fish sticks. They make organic frozen fish sticks now. They cost about five times as much as the old Van de Camps. Ain't life grand.

BARREN WOMAN:

For Pescetarians.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yeah, it feels kind of like a cult. But she loves that word.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What word do I love? *(looking up)* Nice lighting.

The productive friend has joined them. We see another picketer outside.

DIVINA:

Motion-activated dimmers. All LEED Certified, energy efficient. It'll cut the bills in half.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

"Pescetarian."

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
You love that word.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Oh. Yes. I do. We're not vegetarians.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Because we eat pesce.

He's picked up her large bag but pauses before opening it.

Do you mind? I'm hunting for goldfish.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Yeah, sure.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Or I guess I'm fishing. Here I go!

BARREN WOMAN:
Wait. Where is Hope?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
She's fine. She's busy on her iPhone.

BARREN WOMAN:
Her what?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
I know. But all her friends have them. And of course, her sisters!

DIVINA:
Do they even talk on them? My son Will, he just sends texts. It's all about the texts.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Exactly. Silent conversations around the dinner table. It's criminal, is what it is. *(to the barren woman)* Oh! I don't mean "criminal," criminal. *(to Divina)* Texting. Remember? That's how they stole her identity.

DIVINA:
Through a text. Incredible.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
But everything's so much more secure now.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Hon?

Sans goldfish, he returns his wife's bag to her.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
(to the barren woman) You should try it again. Texting really does cut corners.

BARREN WOMAN:
I have to leave. I need lunch.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
(offering her another snack-sized bag) Here.

BARREN WOMAN:
I need food. Real food.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Then...?

He reaches for the snacks.

BARREN WOMAN:
Go ahead. I'll pick something up on my way back to work.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
But you—

BARREN WOMAN:
(interrupting) I have to leave, I have to work, and I'll eat my lunch at my desk which is pretty much my stolen identity of a life right now.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
But I was going to—

BARREN WOMAN:
(interrupting) Next time. I know you're busy with your sweet kids and your fabulous friend and your adoring husband and so I'm just gonna let you get back to them.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
But this was about—

BARREN WOMAN:
(interrupting) Your grand plans for me, I know. We've been down this road before but I'm sorry that this time I'm just not able to step into my world as you imagine it. Believe me I wish I could, but I'm just going sit this one out. Okay? Next time maybe I'll be ready.

She turns to go, then turns back.

BARREN WOMAN:

But next time, I want my fancy fucking lunch first.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No. Wait.

BARREN WOMAN:

I'm sorry. I'll talk to you soon.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yeah, but sweetie: you really can't go.

BARREN WOMAN:

I have to. Did you not hear anything I just said?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Sure, sure! But don't you think it's getting little late for "next time?" I mean, sometimes windows are short, you know? Or I guess skinny, narrow, that's it, and it's always possible certain opportunities aren't gonna be there anymore! *(to Divina)* Didn't you say the owner's leaving for Southeast Asia or somewhere?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(offering his snacks) Take the goldfish.

We hear loud noises from outside. There are more picketers, apparently from opposing camps.

BARREN WOMAN:

What the—?

We hear an even louder noise from upstairs.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(shouting upstairs) Hope! Be careful!

More noises from outside and upstairs.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

"Be careful." Seriously?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I can dream, can't I?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman) She's totally a daddy's girl, but I'd still like to see how our

wild child reacts to “Be careful.” Sounds like a license for complete chaos.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(shouting louder) Do you hear me? Hope?

A really loud crash from upstairs.

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from offstage) Okay, Daddy!

The voice of Hope sounds much more mature than we might have expected.

BARREN WOMAN:

Wait. How old is she now?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Not old enough to know better, apparently. *(to Divina)* What did you do when yours was this age?

DIVINA:

I have a son. That’s an entirely different scenario.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You can say that again.

DIVINA:

It’s such a confusing time for girls in this country. The social fabric is just not there for them. Earlier and earlier, the questions they’re asking, the messages they’re getting...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

The clothes they’re wearing! *(to the barren woman)* I wish you would go shopping with us. I’m always so impressed by what you’re able to put together on your budget. *(to Divina)* Ever since I’ve known her she’s been stylish like that. I mean, her own style, I could never get away with it.

DIVINA:

It’s so hard to find the courage to be different. A young girl wants to connect with her own purity and innocence, she’s completely ostracized.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Not a problem because starting next week, I’m not letting her out of the house.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Holding her hostage? This is your plan to keep her off the streets?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You have a better one?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman) Would you talk to her?

BARREN WOMAN:

Talk to...?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Hope. I think she would listen, coming from you. Because of... you know.

An even louder crash.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to her husband) Honey?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(shouting upstairs) Young lady? I'm coming up there! I'm counting to three.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Why are you counting to three?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

A brief countdown leading to unknown yet terrifying ramifications.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Yes just go please. Before she causes some real damage. *(to Divina)* I'm so sorry about this, can you tell the owner we'll pay for anything she—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) I'm sure it's fine. He comes from a big family.

Another crash and maybe a scream.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm going.

He hurries out.

(going offstage, to Hope) Princess? You all right?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's the rest of us you should worry about! *(to the barren woman)* So can I count on you?

BARREN WOMAN:
For what?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
I'm her mom. Her highness won't listen to me, especially not when it comes to things like sex and sexuality and sensuality and physical changes and bodily urges.

BARREN WOMAN:
She's not too young for that?

DIVINA:
They're never too young these days.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
And with your history, I was thinking maybe there's a lesson there. A cautionary tale about you your uncle and his inappropriate advances when you were a child. *(to Divina)* I told you about that, right?

DIVINA:
Yes. Such a horrible, but all too common, story.

BARREN WOMAN:
"Inappropriate advances."

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
No?

BARREN WOMAN:
He molested me.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
That's not inappropriate?

DIVINA:
(to the barren woman) Your uncle abused your trust. He stole your youth. He took advantage of his power over you, but look at the good that can come out of it!

BARREN WOMAN:
What?

DIVINA:
One mistake, so many years ago, and now you can use it to let Hope know she's not doing herself any favors, acting of her own desires.

BARREN WOMAN:

Are you saying that I was— or that any girl who is victimized like that is in any way responsible?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No! God no!

DIVINA:

I'm not saying that at all.

BARREN WOMAN:

Because that would be very, very wrong.

DIVINA:

Of course it would!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman) She didn't mean anything like that. And it was all such a long time ago!

DIVINA:

What I'm saying is that when life throws something at us—whatever it is, however tragic it may seem—we can let it destroy us, or it can empower us. It can help us find our place as women and shine a light on our choices.

PRODUCTIVE WOMAN:

(to the barren woman) See? A new perspective can help take the edge off even the worst tragedies.

DIVINA:

(to the barren woman) Perhaps you, my friend, have been singled out to help spread the right message.

BARREN WOMAN:

And what message is that?

DIVINA:

Perhaps the rocky road you've traveled has led you here today, to keep others from heading in the wrong direction.

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay. It's just me here. Trying to figure my own life out. I don't want to be responsible for delivering any messages.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

That's not really what she—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) And I'm certainly not cut out to be a human directional!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

The good ones are actually are very well paid. It surprised me.

DIVINA:

(to the barren woman) Look: I know what you—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) No. You don't. You don't know me. You don't know anything about me!

DIVINA:

You're absolutely right, in one sense. But in a larger sense, a deeper sense, I do know you. I know all about you. I've known you all my life. I'll be back.

She disappears.

BARREN WOMAN:

Where did you find her again?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Oh, don't be upset, sweetie. You're not mad at me, are you?

BARREN WOMAN:

I told you this was all a ridiculous idea. Maybe I'll let you make it up to me. Maybe. Where's my purse?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No no no no no.

We hear the sound of a shrill whistle outside.

BARREN WOMAN:

What the...?

Through the visible window space we see Divina speaking to some of the protesters. Young women—perhaps among them, the Japanese girls—are pressed against the glass, looking in. Behind them are severely dressed older women in black with whistles around their necks. It's rather parochial. The old man continues to plaster up posters.

BARREN WOMAN:

What is going on out there?!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Who cares. We're about to make everything right in here, that's what's going on.

BARREN WOMAN:

After today, I don't think I'd know "right" anymore if I was looking right at it.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Which is why we're here for you!

BARREN WOMAN:

You really shoulda' told me this was some sort of whacked domestic intervention before luring me into this place.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's not like that.

BARREN WOMAN:

Good!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

And you can't tell someone about an intervention, that ruins the whole thing.

BARREN WOMAN:

Just so you realize: Every step you take I am getting farther and farther from the mommy track.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No! I— I can see you're upset. That's not what this is about.

BARREN WOMAN:

I mean, with my screwed-up family...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

But you're brother's in jail! He can't take your money again!

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't have any money!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Exactly! And despite everything, you would make a great mom.

BARREN WOMAN:

Because I've been through shit? I somehow doubt that.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You're just scared. But you are one of the best people I've ever met. Good things should happen to you!

BARREN WOMAN:

Yes! They should!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Right! You can't be afraid to let someone in, to realize what you're really here for, to invest in the relationships that give you what you need. Believe me, it'll be like: "Yes! This is it! This is what I was missing!" Just wait, sweetie! I mean, don't wait. Not too much longer!

Pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

Have you forgotten who you're talking to?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I have not.

BARREN WOMAN:

Have you forgotten the story of me meeting Chance and saying "Hey! This is it! Look! It's what I've been waiting for!"

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Oh.

BARREN WOMAN:

"Could this really be happening? That I'm finally getting what I deserve?"

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Ohh, now I'm going to cry.

BARREN WOMAN:

And then: Boom! Oh, well! Cancer! And it's all snatched away from me. Again.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Ohhhh.

BARREN WOMAN:

So does that mean I did?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Whhhhaat?

BARREN WOMAN:

Got what I deserved.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Nooooo! You have to stop talking like that.

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh, yeah. I should just bear it all in silence. I'm like a fucking nun. Except my husband doesn't come back on Easter.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Just stop stop stop stop. You're my best friend; I know what you've been through and yeah: it would have killed me, but like Divina was saying—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) I don't give a shit what—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) No, listen to me. You are an incredible woman. I am so glad to be your friend and it's not just because I feel sorry for you. I mean, no matter what, haven't I always been there for you, whenever you needed me?

Another whistle and the barren woman sees the young women desperately try to peer into the window's remaining blank spots being restrained by the older women.

BARREN WOMAN:

Look out there. What are they doing to those girls? This is insane. I've got to get out of here.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You know what? I don't blame you.

BARREN WOMAN:

Blame me? For what?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

For wanting to leave.

BARREN WOMAN:

That's good to know.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Because I'm an idiot. I am a horrible, selfish idiot and I've been lying to myself! I haven't been there for you, have I? I mean, not really. I tried, or I thought I tried or I told myself I tried? But the truth is with the girls and trying to hold my marriage together—and the then there's the company going down the tubes... I've been completely self-involved. Too caught up in our own problems to be there for you!

BARREN WOMAN:

What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I just thought I could do this one thing for you. Make this happen. But if you're not the person you used to be, neither am I. You might not even need me anymore. And if I'm completely honest, it's possible that the only reason I'm here is to make myself feel better. To look the other way and keep myself occupied while we face complete financial ruin!

BARREN WOMAN:

Wait. The company. Your husband's company?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's all a disaster. A complete disaster. Not that that's an excuse, me neglecting you and our friendship while we watch everything slip away. And you know, maybe it's all me! Maybe it's me that's not processing! My own grief. The economy. Or maybe I'm... I'm... Oh, what's the word?

BARREN WOMAN:

Projecting.

Very short pause.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

No. Pregnant. Maybe I'm pregnant! Maybe that's it!

Divina appears.

DIVINA:

Congratulations! I could tell, the instant I saw your face today.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Well this isn't what I was expecting. I mean, I didn't expect to be expecting, you know, after all this time!

DIVINA:

It's God's will!

BARREN WOMAN:

(to Divina) Who are those old women out there? What are they doing?

DIVINA:

Isn't it lovely? The community is gathering.

BARREN WOMAN:

It doesn't seem "lovely" at all to me. It looks like a scene from the Crusades. Do you know them?

DIVINA:

Only in that we have common interests. They're concerned about the changes that are happening around here and I'm just trying to help the healing. With an eye on property values.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Changes? What changes?

The barren woman moves to the window; more protesters appear to be gathering.

DIVINA:

You've seen how it is. So many businesses have had to close—family-run businesses—and that's opened things up for certain folks without the same moral underpinnings. We need to be proactive if we want to block an unsavory and unstable constituency.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Of course! *(to the barren woman)* You definitely want stability, here. And as a single woman, the last thing you need is unsavory neighbors. *(to Divina)* What can we do?

DIVINA:

You're already doing it, my friend! Let me:

She puts her hand on the productive friend's belly.

It's a boy. Hallelujah!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Really? That's wonderful! Oh, wow. I'm so thrilled! We've always wanted a boy. I mean, I love my girls to pieces, but...

DIVINA:

Oh, I know. I know.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Crazy, huh? *(to the barren woman)* So it looks like we can do this together, after all. See how things work themselves out? *(shouting upstairs)* Honey! Honey! Come down here!

We hear muted arguing upstairs, the adjunct husband and a teenage girl.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Honey!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(from offstage) Hang on!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from offstage) Noooooooooooooooooooo!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to Divina) How surprising! Her favorite word.

DIVINA:

Ha ha ha.

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from offstage, to her father) I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Do you ladies hear anything? I don't! La la la la la.

We now hear the noise of a large crowd gathering outside. We see shadows through the window, now entirely covered with posters except for the top portion above eye level.

The barren woman begins to move pieces of shelving units or other furniture next to the window in an attempt to see over the posters onto the street.

BARREN WOMAN:

(to Divina) Look, I didn't mean to lose my temper before. But there are certain things that I feel very strongly about.

DIVINA:

And so you should! So should we all!

BARREN WOMAN:

Okay. So do you know what's really happening out there? Are those girls all right?

DIVINA:

They will be, if we can do what we need to do. This is all for them, you know—the next generation! Protecting their interests. The owner's making sure of that.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

The owner. Where is he from, again?

DIVINA:

Arizona. Or maybe Arkansas. Michigan?

The adjunct husband comes into the room.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Okay. How many more years before we can run away from home?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You don't think she'll beat us to it?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She's not going anywhere. (*producing a large ring of keys*) I've got her car keys.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

So! Guess what?

He hears the commotion outside.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Sounds like trouble.

DIVINA:

Sometimes it takes a little effort to make the kind of change we need.

BARREN WOMAN:

And just what kind of change is that?

She is climbing up the stacked furniture to see outside.

DIVINA:

Doing away with laws that don't comport with God's laws, that would plunge us all into the dark abyss of rampant amorality!

She disappears.

BARREN WOMAN:

"Rampant amorality?"

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Pursuing one's own pleasure and desires before all else?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Honey. Come here.

She puts his hand on her stomach.

I'm pregnant!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

It's a boy!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Really? I thought we were...

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
I thought so, too.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Well!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Right?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Guess this means we're going to have to start tightening our belts a bit.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
We'll be fine.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
But not your belt. Not literally. Not for awhile, anyway.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Ha ha, I'm going to go tell Hope. She's going to be thrilled!

She hurries out.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Do teenagers don't get "thrilled" anymore? I thought that's been bred out of 'em.

He looks around and sees the barren woman perched precariously, looking at the crowd outside.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Ooooh! Are you okay?

He moves to her.

BARREN WOMAN:
Like I have a choice?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
What do you—?

BARREN WOMAN:
(interrupting) I'm okay. I'm always okay. Something very not okay is happening out there, though.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

What is it?

BARREN WOMAN:

I can't really tell. It's about the building across the way. A bunch of people seem pretty pissed off and there's a lot of shouting. God seems to be involved.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Where there's shouting there's usually god.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's pretty scary, actually.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Anything I can do?

BARREN WOMAN:

What can you do? What can any of us do? What difference would it even make?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Here, let me help you down.

BARREN WOMAN:

No, I'm fine.

She makes her way down.

So! Another baby!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yeah! Imagine that!

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah!

Shouting from outside.

Four kids!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Yeah!

More shouting.

BARREN WOMAN:

I know it's none of my business, but... are you happy about this?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Why wouldn't I be?

BARREN WOMAN:
"Belt tightening."

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Yeah. There's that.

BARREN WOMAN:
Yeah. I know a thing or two about being broke.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
But I'm married to a woman who fixes everything and wills things into existence!

More shouting.

BARREN WOMAN:
Seriously, though, can you afford it? What about your company?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
What about it?

BARREN WOMAN:
She said there've been problems.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Of course there've been problems. In this economy everyone's having problems.

BARREN WOMAN:
So... the company's okay?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
It's been better—layoffs, furloughs, we've closed up this week—but it's okay. And it'll be better again.

BARREN WOMAN:
Oh.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Sorry. Sorry if I said anything to worry you, it's not that bad. And if you need a few bucks, we can—

BARREN WOMAN:
(interrupting) No! No, I'm... It wasn't anything you said. It was something... Just your wife's mention of "financial ruin."

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She said that?

BARREN WOMAN:

Uh huh. And she also told me your marriage was on the rocks.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She did?

BARREN WOMAN:

Not in so many words. She intimidated it.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

The intimidating. I've warned her about that. No, we're fine. It's all fine.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah, I get that. You're fine. She's fine. You're all doing the right thing. I'm obviously deluded. I gotta go. Congratulations on your son! Good job!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Thanks! My little guys can't be penned in, apparently.

BARREN WOMAN:

Apparently not. Where's my fucking purse?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

So what are we gonna do, huh? Set another plate at the table and say grace to my manliness!

BARREN WOMAN:

"God's will!"

A sudden swell of angry noises from outside.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Hey. You really want to go out there?

BARREN WOMAN:

I... I don't know what I want. I don't know anything at all.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Come here.

She does. He holds her again for an extended period. She lets him.

BARREN WOMAN:

Thanks.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
My pleasure.

BARREN WOMAN:
Me too.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Good.

The barren woman breaks the embrace.

BARREN WOMAN:
I'm not sorry, you know.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Okay.

BARREN WOMAN:
I mean, not anymore. I was. That night was a mistake.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Oh. Yes! That night.

Very short pause.

Definitely a mistake.

BARREN WOMAN:
But it was right after I found out about Chance.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
I know.

BARREN WOMAN:
I was out of my mind. So scared, and so alone.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
You were.

BARREN WOMAN:
And you were there.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Yeah.

Pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

Does that make me sound awful? I think about it a lot. That night

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

You do?

BARREN WOMAN:

And of course I *was* sorry. For a long time. So sorry. I felt terrible. For her. And for my husband!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Of course! He was dying.

BARREN WOMAN:

Well, we didn't know that, but... yeah. He was. That whole time was so confusing, so crazy. And I wanted you to know that having that night has meant a lot to me. It was something solid, and real in a strange way, when nothing else was. I do keep thinking of it and even that feels like something I can still put my hands around. Even if it's gone it's mine. For you and me and no one else.

He starts to move toward her again.

I'm just so glad she never found out!

We hear the very faint sound of a siren from an emergency vehicle, as if in the distance outside.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Oh. I kinda thought you knew.

BARREN WOMAN:

Knew what?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

That you'd talked about it. You two.

BARREN WOMAN:

Talked about...?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

She knows. I thought you guys must have—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) How did she—?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

(interrupting) I told her.

Pause.

BARREN WOMAN:
When?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Right after it happened. I'm sorry, but I figured you knew I could never keep it from her.

BARREN WOMAN:
She's known all this time?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
It was my fault. That it happened. I told her that.

BARREN WOMAN:
Jesus.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
But she's amazing; she forgave me. And you, well, you're her best friend; she loves you.

Divina reappears, flushed.

DIVINA:
(to the barren woman) You are loved. Never forget that. And you have love to give, as well.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Chance was one lucky asshole.

DIVINA:
I'm talking about a different sort of love. Sexually libertine love with no real purpose isn't truly love at all, you must realize that now.

BARREN WOMAN:
Ha ha ha! Must I? What the fuck am I doing here? What the fuck is going on?

DIVINA:
So you've made some bad choices in your life. But the choice not to become a mother, well, that in itself comes at a cost.

BARREN WOMAN:
What?

DIVINA:
I think you heard me. And are you ready to step up and prove your worth?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Do I smell smoke?

The siren is more audible. The productive friend quickly enters the room.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Honey! Are you all right?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
The baby?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Ahhhhhhhhhhh!

She breaks down sobbing.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
It's okay! It's okay! Honey! What happened?

DIVINA:
The baby's fine.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
(to his wife) Yeah?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Yeahhhhhh.

DIVINA:
Believe me. Everything's fine.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Nooooo! It's noooooot!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
That's definitely smoke. Something's burning out there.

DIVINA:
It's only the building across the street.

BARREN WOMAN:
“Only?”

DIVINA:
And that’s the only solution for a nest of sin like that. It’s a bastion of science unchecked, taking unseemly steps that are harmful to women and unhealthy for our country. Now they’re paying the price!

BARREN WOMAN:
Are there any people inside?

DIVINA:
None that place any value on human life.

BARREN WOMAN:
What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
I don’t mean to sound callous, but can we get back to the human lives at hand, please?

DIVINA:
That’s right! You’re right! We can’t get distracted by what we’ve all been blessed with, here. Not one, but two babies!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
What?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
Yes!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
Twins?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
No!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
I don’t—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
(interrupting) It’s Hope! She’s pregnant!

DIVINA:
Isn’t that wonderful!

BARREN WOMAN:
Hope?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
My baby?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
She's not a baby. She's a young woman. And now, a mother!

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:
That's not possible. Who said she could even start dating? I'm not ready for this.
I'm not ready at all!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:
None of us are! What is she gonna do? What in the world is she gonna...
Ahhhhhh!

She throws herself into the barren woman's arms as the siren wails even louder. The adjunct husband moves to the window and climbs up to see outside.

BARREN WOMAN:
I... I'm so sorry.

DIVINA:
There's nothing to be sorry about. Nothing at all. Yes, this was brought about by unfortunate circumstances, *(to the productive friend)* but your daughter has been given a gift which transcends the event: the gift of life.

BARREN WOMAN:
What are you talking about?

DIVINA:
A child of rape is still a child of God.

The siren stops and we are aware of a commotion, male voices through a megaphone and movement along with flames and smoke.

BARREN WOMAN:
(to Divina) Okay! That's enough. I've heard enough. This does not even remotely involve you.

DIVINA:
It involves us all!

BARREN WOMAN:
It does not. You don't know the first thing about rape, what it means or what it can do to a woman's life.

DIVINA:

Well, not like you, of course.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman) I told her about the attack. But that was more of a sexual assault than a legitimate rape, right?

DIVINA:

(to the barren woman) And your personal experience—that's what allows you to speak out and reach girls who have strayed in a way that no one else can! It's your time, my friend.

BARREN WOMAN:

No, it's time for you to go.

DIVINA:

Then can I trust you to be right behind me?

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't want to be anywhere near you!

DIVINA:

But what we want, or think we want, is neither her nor there! It often keeps us from right path, our true path.

BARREN WOMAN:

You have to stop this shit! I shouldn't even be here. There is no "our" path. I hope we never cross paths again!

DIVINA:

But there's no getting around it, don't you understand? And you can't stop it, it's happening. This is where you were meant to be, this is what you were meant to do!

BARREN WOMAN:

You are crazy!

DIVINA:

Think about it: How long have you been afraid to commit to something, to take action, to create, lest misfortune strike again? What is it about you that attracts only pain and loss and suffering? Why do people always find a way in, to take what you value most, leaving you alone and empty, again and again? Because you have been chosen. Yes. You. The world has battered you and your scars have been your shield, but now you have a higher power to protect you. A higher purpose to fight for. And that, my friend, is why you're here. For only for yourself, but for all women. For our future.

She is gone.

The productive woman is clinging to the barren woman. The adjunct husband moves away from the window and from outside in the narrow visible space at the top of the window we begin to see baby dolls suspended from poles, or being raised on a string like hanging lights.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Man, it's like a riot out there. Do you think they'll stop at one building?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(to the barren woman) This has really messed up lunch, huh?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

I'm gonna go... I'm gonna see if Hope needs anything.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Okay.

He starts out.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Does she?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

What?

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Need anything. We did everything we could to protect her, right? We tried everything, gave her everything. Right?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Right. She has everything.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Right. So, what now?

Short pause.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I have no idea.

Short pause.

ADJUNCT HUSBAND:

Okay.

He is gone.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Man. I don't. I've absolutely no idea. None at all. What happens next? For the first time in my life, I am completely without a clue. This must be just how you feel, like all the time! "What now?"

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I really should have been ready for this. Even this! I mean, you have known adversity, but as a mother! Well, you learn that anything's possible. You look away one second, and poof. We'll, you said it! Like we're in the middle of a goddamn war!

BARREN WOMAN:

I think we actually are.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

But we're safe in here.

BARREN WOMAN:

We're not safe. They're burning buildings; they're destroying people to save theoretical lives.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

That's them, it's not us.

BARREN WOMAN:

Haven't you listened to what your friend has been—?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) She's not really my—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) That woman. She's dangerous. And she's not the only one.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Maybe we should talk to the owner.

BARREN WOMAN:

We should not have anything to do with—

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

(interrupting) But you haven't even met him!

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't need to! Trust me on this: they are out there saying that our rights are wrong. We have to get out of here!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

You can't leave us

BARREN WOMAN:

This is bigger than you think. Much bigger. Someone needs to do something!

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Which is why you need to stay with us! To help!

BARREN WOMAN:

But I can't help anyone! Here's what Hope needs: She needs to know she doesn't have to have this baby.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Unless she wants to. Maybe she wants to!

BARREN WOMAN:

Pretty soon what she wants won't even matter. Do you really want your daughter's life to become a foregone conclusion?

There is a woman's scream outside, and they both turn to look at the signs of chaos outside, and now the hanging effigies of babies.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

We let this happen, didn't we?

BARREN WOMAN:

I guess we did.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

But it's not too late, is it?

BARREN WOMAN:

No. It can't be.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

So you'll talk to Hope?

BARREN WOMAN:

Yes.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Good, 'cause I gotta pee.

She starts out.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I do love you!

BARREN WOMAN:

Me, too. And I am sorry. For everything.

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

I know. But you're here with us now. That's enough.

BARREN WOMAN:

Is it?

PRODUCTIVE FRIEND:

Well, it helps.

She is gone. Perhaps we hear the sound and see lights of a police helicopter outside. The barren woman moves to the window but is stopped by a small, frightened voice.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Hello?

BARREN WOMAN:

Hope! Hi!

We see the shadow of a young woman who stops before entering the room.

It's okay.

From outside, we can distinguish the sound of a woman crying.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Doesn't sound okay. I sounds messed up.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah. It kind of is.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Really messed up.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah. Wanna come in here?

VOICE OF HOPE:

Not really. That window's too big. Things could crash through that window. Even with all that paper. It's not like a wall. I don't like it. It's not very safe.

BARREN WOMAN:

No.

VOICE OF HOPE:

I like to see what's going on. It's better that way.

BARREN WOMAN:

I think you're right.

VOICE OF HOPE:

I think you're the only one.

BARREN WOMAN:

Ha ha.

VOICE OF HOPE:

So, what: you guys were my age?

BARREN WOMAN:

What?

VOICE OF HOPE:

You and my mom. When you were friends. When you met.

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah, I guess we were.

VOICE OF HOPE:

You were in college. My sisters went to college.

BARREN WOMAN:

They did?

VOICE OF HOPE:

Of course! They're like, so, "Mom, can I please just be you please?" It makes me sick sometimes. That is so not me and it never will be me and nobody gets that. I mean, it's not like I'll be going to college or anything.

BARREN WOMAN:

Why not?

VOICE OF HOPE:

In this economy?

BARREN WOMAN:

Oh. Well. With your mom, I wouldn't give up so easily.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Tell me about it. Man! Why were you guys even friends?

BARREN WOMAN:

What do you mean?

VOICE OF HOPE:

My mom is like the most—

BARREN WOMAN:

(interrupting) She's probably the most impressive person I've ever met.

VOICE OF HOPE:

What? You're kidding, right?

BARREN WOMAN:

No! As long as I've known her, it's like there's nothing she couldn't do or make happen, even out of thin air. And for her it was so easy. She's everything I could never be.

VOICE OF HOPE:

And you'd want to be?

Short pause.

BARREN WOMAN:

I sure wish something would be easy.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Yeah. It's tough, huh.

BARREN WOMAN:

It is tough. It's super tough. For some of us, right? For some of us... some of us aren't so certain about who we are or what we're supposed to do. For some of us, shit just happens.

VOICE OF HOPE:

But you never had kids. That didn't happen.

BARREN WOMAN:

No. It didn't.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Why not? That was your choice?

BARREN WOMAN:

Yes. It was.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Are you sorry?

BARREN WOMAN:

No. I'm not. And that's hard for some people to understand. Like your mom. I mean, we all don't have to be moms.

VOICE OF HOPE:

That's deep.

BARREN WOMAN:

Sorry. I'm obviously not very good at this.

VOICE OF HOPE:

What is "this?"

BARREN WOMAN:

Trying to make things better.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Oh. Well, like you said, sometimes life just messes you up. And that's all there is to it.

BARREN WOMAN:

But maybe that doesn't have to be it. Okay. Here's something I found out. Only a little while ago. Something about being pregnant. That when a woman is pregnant, cells from the fetus escape into the woman's blood.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Like, how pregnant?

BARREN WOMAN:

Pregnant at all. Even a day. A week.

VOICE OF HOPE:

That so does not make anything better.

BARREN WOMAN:

But listen to me—

VOICE OF HOPE:

(interrupting) Whose cells are they? The father's?

BARREN WOMAN:

No! They're not the father's, but they're not hers, either. They're their own DNA. Different DNA entirely. And the thing is, that even if she never has the baby, for whatever reason, these cells stay inside of her forever.

VOICE OF HOPE:

So does that mean she's still... a mom?

BARREN WOMAN:

No. But she's still a woman.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Well, yeah.

BARREN WOMAN:

People need to be reminded of that. And if she does have it, the cells are still there. She's got her baby and then there's something else that stays inside of her. So it's like the experience, whether she wants it or not, has changed her. Physically. What happened to her changed her. She will always be different because of it.

VOICE OF HOPE:

That's terrible.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's complicated. It turns out a lot of times that these cells are a good thing. They help her fight disease and things. So just because she's changed, doesn't mean she's...

VOICE OF HOPE:

Worse?

BARREN WOMAN:

Right. That doesn't mean she's worse. And no matter what it's still up to her whether she becomes a mother. It has to be.

VOICE OF HOPE:

And if she decides she wants to?

BARREN WOMAN:

If you're a mother, these cells inside you mean you're always connected to your child. Your child is always a part of you.

VOICE OF HOPE:

And what about if you're not? A mother.

BARREN WOMAN:

Well. Then, you've got something that's a part of you to prove that you've been through shit, and you survived. That you are more than what's happened to you. A lot more. And no one can take that away. Ever.

Now we hear women's voices outside. Things are heating back up. The women's voices are stronger, and more positive.

BARREN WOMAN:

So what do you think. About all of this?

VOICE OF HOPE:

I think... I'm scared.

BARREN WOMAN:

It's scary. And you know what else scares me? I'm not sure how to make it better. I'm not sure how to—

VOICE OF HOPE:

(interrupting) Fight?

BARREN WOMAN:

Yeah. I'm not sure how to fight.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Do we have to?

BARREN WOMAN:

I don't think we have a choice anymore. We can't afford not to.

VOICE OF HOPE:

That's not fair.

BARREN WOMAN:

No, it's not. But it's not over.

The women outside grow louder.

And you and I, we're not going anywhere.

There's now something we've not seen before in the barren woman's face. Maybe we hear air sirens overhead. The shadow of Hope moves into the room as the lights dim. Outside, the war rages on.

End of Play