

Crazy Bitch

a play about jellyfish and genealogy and rogue taxidermy
by Jennie Webb

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Crazy Bitch

Characters:

THE DISTANT WOMAN - Eva's sister. In her 30s, or perhaps her late 20s. Lives in New York.

THE INSISTENT WOMAN - Eva's mother's cousin. In her 40s, if not a bit older. Lives in another part of LA, east of here.

THE CAUGHT WOMAN - Eva's ex. In her 30s, or possibly her 40s. Not quite sure where she lives but not here. Anymore.

THE JELLYFISH - Eva's project. Immortal. Lives in a petri dish.

Setting:

Different rooms and corners of Eva's apartment, and the Los Angeles fourplex it's part of. Probably a highly stylized representation thereof

Time:

The suspended realities of each woman

Casting notes:

Only the Insistent Woman and the Distant Woman share enough genetic material to affect appearance, even in a small way. Multi-racial casting is encouraged. It's possible for the Jellyfish to be played by a male or non-binary actor, but the character identifies as female.

Pronunciation notes:

<i>Æthelred</i>	<i>Ethyl Red</i>	<i>Scyphozoa</i>	<i>Skiff a Zoe ah</i>
<i>Unræd</i>	<i>Un Red</i>	<i>Dohrnii</i>	<i>Dorn High</i>
<i>Ælfthryth</i>	<i>Elf Rith</i>	<i>Cnidarians</i>	<i>Nigh Dare ians</i>
<i>Æthelwald</i>	<i>Ethyl Wald</i>	<i>Perisarc</i>	<i>Per ee sarc</i>
<i>Turritopsis</i>	<i>Turra Topsis</i>	<i>Apoptotic</i>	<i>Ap op Tahtic</i>
<i>Mesoglea</i>	<i>Mezo Glee ah</i>	<i>Pelagic</i>	<i>Puh Lah jik</i>
<i>Hydrozoan</i>	<i>Hydro Zoe ann</i>	<i>Manubrium</i>	<i>Man Eww bree um</i>

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.*

Crazy Bitch

Synopsis:

Crazy Bitch is play about jellyfish and genealogy and rogue taxidermy. In a world where unbelievable brutality happens every day, three women in Los Angeles find themselves suspended between the extraordinary and real life expectations.

After Eva, a respected scientist, is savagely attacked late at night when walking in LA, the women in her life—her ex-lover, her sister and her cousin—try to assemble a picture they can live with: of the events surrounding Eva's attack, of the nature of Eva's work with the immortal jellyfish, and of their future, where "forever" may be a real possibility and evil really exists.

Sure, life must go on. But in this particular corner of Los Angeles, what happens next? Can a wild taxidermy creation breathe new life into tragedy? Can genealogy research create connections that really matter? And what if Eva never recovers? Who'll take care of the high-maintenance, Cheetos-eating, drama-queen Jellyfish, then?

SPECIAL THANKS

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Crazy Bitch

We see four women onstage. One is at a table working on a project, her back to us. One is holding a large stack of papers and files. Two are standing, holding hands. One of these women holds a bouquet of flowers and a card. She appears if she's trapped in a net or tied to an anchor. The other is barefoot and appears as if she's moving even if she's still.

There is a suspended moment.

JELLYFISH:

Is this supposed to be a joke?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Why would you think that?

JELLYFISH:

The card. *(grabbing it)* An ocean full of happy crustaceans?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It's a get well card.

JELLYFISH:

Clams are mollusks. They do not smile.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Right.

JELLYFISH:

And they definitely do not dance with lobsters.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You should know.

JELLYFISH:

Eva works with these people?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She... Yes. They're marine biologists. She works with them.

JELLYFISH:

Have I ever met them?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Some have been here.

JELLYFISH:

Really? I don't remember.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You wouldn't, but they remember you.

JELLYFISH:

Of course they do! I'm an immortal jellyfish!

The jellyfish breaks free of the caught woman, drops the card and stretches, spreading her fingers out; they're almost undulating.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Of course.

JELLYFISH

Ooooooooh, I can't stand it! this place has become completely stagnant lately. When's Eva coming back?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

We've told you, they don't know. *(looking at the flowers)* I should put these in water.

JELLYFISH:

Why'd you bring them here?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I thought you might like them.

JELLYFISH:

Why would I like them?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

They're flowers. Eva can't have any. In her room.

JELLYFISH:

She doesn't like flowers. They spread diseases and they die.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

That's not true.

JELLYFISH:

Flowers live forever? I don't think so.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, that's not what— So you don't want them?

JELLYFISH:

I didn't say that.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Then I'll put them in water.

She starts to move, maybe pick up the card, but stops herself.

Look, I was just trying to do a nice thing, make you happy, is all.

JELLYFISH:

Is that all?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Come on! Will you please give me a break?

JELLYFISH:

Will you please give me some space? My god! I feel like I can't even breathe! What are you all doing here? Are you even supposed to be here?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

They wouldn't let us— Do you want to go back to your room? Is that what you want? You want to just stay in there?

JELLYFISH:

No. I do not.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Okay. Because we're not going anywhere today. We don't have anywhere to go.

Short pause.

JELLYFISH:

Fine. Give me those.

She grabs the flowers.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

There should be a vase in the kitchen. Or something.

JELLYFISH:

Or something. You're not worried I'm going to catch something? These are still living organisms, you know.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It'll be okay.

As the jellyfish floats away, flowers in hand, the woman holding the papers picks up the card and adds it to her pile. She joins the caught woman.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well! That was a success, huh?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Was it?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(looking after the jellyfish and flowers) Such a lovely mix. Interesting that they're cut stems, not a real arrangement. Who brought them?

She juggles the papers to examine the card.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Secretaries, I think. From the Lab. I should have just left them with the nurses. In the ICU. That's what we've been doing.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And I'm sure they've appreciated that. But it's okay to steal a little bit of beauty for you all, here at home. Especially if it puts a smile of the face of... a jellyfish!

JELLYFISH:

(offstage) Immortal jellyfish.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ha ha ha. And what a cute card! "Best Fishes." That's so funny. Do you have a place where you're keeping them? There must be a ton, after almost a month.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I... I don't really know.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Uh huh. I get it. It can all be pretty overwhelming, day after day after day. That's why I'm glad I could finally make it over, to help out. Of course, I expected to be at the hospital, not rooting around in your apartment! But there's so much to see. It's so spacious. I've never been here!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(pointing to the stack of papers) What is all that?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh, this? It's the most fascinating material, it really is.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It's Eva's?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

No. Well, sort of. I mean, it's "of Eva." She belongs to it. Or something. I haven't had a chance to share it with her. (*re the other woman, still at the table*) But I thought she might be interested...

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't understand.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It's what I've been working on. Our history. Our family's history, our collective past.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And in a way it's yours, now, too!

The last woman stands in front of her project.

DISTANT WOMAN

Tell her about Æthelred.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

About what?

DISTANT WOMAN:

About whom.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ah! Yes! Æthelred. That was quite a find. The name means "noble counsel," and he certainly needed it! Which makes his unfortunate nickname all the more ironic.

She sets down some papers and looks for a particular file.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

"Unfortunate nickname?"

DISTANT WOMAN:

"The Unready."

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Exactly. Æthelred the Unready. Which in itself is a mis-translation. This is the Middle Ages we're talking about.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Early Middle Ages.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

A better modern translation is "Ill-advised." It's actually kind of funny, if it weren't such a shame: Æthelred "Unræd," as he was come to be called, is really "Noble-Counsel, Bad-Counsel."

DISTANT WOMAN:

Hilarious.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You don't have to be nasty.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Nasty? This is not nasty. I told you: that stuff doesn't matter to anyone.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, it's family! It should matter. Even to you. And especially at a time like this!

DISTANT WOMAN:

Why? Those people are long gone. I can't even pretend to care.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(pointing to the distant woman's project) But you care about that? You think that's appropriate?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes. I do.

She holds up her project, examining it with a clinical eye: it's an in-process taxidermy squirrel.

I think it has great potential.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

A stuffed squirrel has potential?

DISTANT WOMAN:

More so than a dead relative.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

So! Who was he?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

How should I know? Not someone's pet, I hope.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, not that. I mean...

Short pause.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh! Æthelred! Æthelred the Unready was King of England twice, the first time in 978 when he was a kid, after the untimely death of his brother. Or half-brother. Neat, huh? *(to the distant woman)* He's your thirty-eighth great grandfather.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

That's a lot of greats.

JELLYFISH:

Thirty-eight? That's a lot?

The jellyfish has floated back in.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ha ha ha. I certainly think so. And it's their closest connection to royalty. Me, I have a direct line to Henry VIII.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Really?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, it's disputed. Considered an alternate path. In some camps. But as far as I'm concerned it's solid.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Congratulations.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Thank you!

DISTANT WOMAN:

I thought you wormed your way in here today so that you could look through Eva's files. Look for any bills and policies and letters. Things we need to take care of.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(re "wormed your way in") What?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Her car registration.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Her car registration.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I know! I am looking. I'm right in the middle of looking.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And that's where you found Æthelred the Unready, in my sister's pressing papers?

Short pause.

JELLYFISH:

Great great great great...

She begins to count on her fingers as she moves around the periphery of the room while the insistent woman and the distant woman continue.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the distant woman) Don't you need to go back to your squirrel?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes, as a matter of fact, I do.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Go ahead, then. He doesn't look like he's going anywhere.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Not yet.

JELLYFISH:

Great great great great great great...

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And on that note, I have things of my own to accomplish. I don't have to stay here.

DISTANT WOMAN:

No, you don't.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But you do know that I didn't "worm" my way in. I was asked to come.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Not by me. I didn't ask you.

JELLYFISH:

Great great great...

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Really. After I came all the way across town to help?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Why would our grandmother think you could serve any purpose, all the way over here?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You are an awful person!

JELLYFISH:

Great great great great great...

DISTANT WOMAN:

And I always have been. Why are you acting surprised?

JELLYFISH:

Great great great great...

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Gee, I don't know. I just thought, given the circumstances: what happened to your only sister!

JELLYFISH:

Great great great...

DISTANT WOMAN:

Takes more than another family tragedy to soften me up.

JELLYFISH:

Great great...

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the jellyfish) Will you stop that? *(to the caught woman)* What is she doing?

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) I think she's calculating your inheritance.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the distant woman) Don't say that!

JELLYFISH WOMAN:

Great great great great great...

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the jellyfish) Stop it! Stop! *(to all)* Eva's not going to die!

Pause.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Of course she's not.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
And Eva and I aren't married.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Of course you're not. And you know I didn't mean anything. I mean, I meant to be funny. I didn't mean...

CAUGHT WOMAN:
I know. But if you'd told me about your sister's royal fortunes, I totally would have bought in.

DISTANT WOMAN:
I'll bet.

JELLYFISH:
Hah!

She floats to another part of the room.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
(to the caught woman, re the jellyfish) Oh, dear. I hope I didn't hurt her feelings. Raising my voice. As a teacher, I try to be hyper-aware when it comes to interacting with others. Unlike some of us.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
She's fine.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
She's a little thin-skinned?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
She's not used to people around, is all.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Of course. But it's fascinating stuff, don't you think? I find it fascinating.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
What's that?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Genealogy, genetics, tracing lineage back through ancient history, generation after generation.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Where I'm sure you've found the true root of my terrible nature.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Which is not an excuse.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

How are you related, again? You're cousins...

DISTANT WOMAN:

Right.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

But, second cousins?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

First cousins, once removed. We're actually a different generation. So their grandmother is my aunt.

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) Aren't you glad you asked?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I am just trying to help here. I know this is all hard for you but it's hard for me, too. Eva's almost like my sister.

DISTANT WOMAN:

In a once-removed sort of way.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Whatever. I'm sorry. But I do care. And I care about you. I'm really here more for you today, than her. And of course Aunt Margaret. So be nice.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I'm going to go look for her registration.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Thank you. I had started to go through her desk. It seems like there are papers in the bedroom as well, though, *(to the caught woman)* right?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I— Yeah, I think so. Probably.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And all the mail on the kitchen table.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

That's new; it wouldn't be there.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Remind me: Why am I looking for her car registration?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Her tags are expired.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Right.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You don't want to be driving her car with expired tags. They'll ticket you for that.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm pretty sure she paid it. And they sent them, but she hadn't put 'em on.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

They might even tow you. We are on the Westside.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I hate this city. How can you live someplace you have to drive everywhere?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Where I live I have all sorts of places close by. And a new Metro Station.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Do you ever use it? The Metro?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I would. But I have my son.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(to the distant woman) You could take the bus. The apartment's pretty centrally located.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

For this part of town.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I probably should. I keep getting lost.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But you know your way to the hospital.

DISTANT WOMAN:

In my sleep. And I still get lost. I hate LA.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You've said that.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I'll try to find those tags. They're in a regular envelope?

She starts out.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah. Will you take the jellyfish with you?

JELLYFISH:

Immortal jellyfish.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Immortal jellyfish.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ha ha ha.

JELLYFISH:

Why is that funny?

DISTANT WOMAN:

It's not.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the jellyfish) Oh. No.

Pause.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Come on.

She holds out her hand and the jellyfish takes it. They leave.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I'm sorry. But doesn't that make you angry?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Doesn't what make me angry?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

"I hate LA." All the time, "I hate LA."

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't—

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Because here's the thing: people who say that, just don't get LA. Of course you can't like something you don't get! I mean, certain people only manage to come out here under the most horrendous circumstances so how can she possibly understand LA? She doesn't get it. I'd take her around and show her if she wasn't so disagreeable. They lived all over but she was actually born here; did she tell you that? No. All she talks about is how she misses New York. Well, you know something, that pisses me off, too! New York is easy to miss. But LA? You have to put effort into missing it. People can be here for, I don't know, a day at Disneyland—which isn't even in LA—or they circle around LAX for an afternoon so they can say they've seen a palm tree and the traffic and then they roll their eyes and tell the world how awful LA is, like they have any idea. I can't stand it!

Pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Okay.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Enough about that. Let's talk about you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Me?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Yes. How are you? I mean, how are you really.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm...

Short pause.

I'm fine. As fine as any of us are. You know.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Do I?

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Well... It's all so surreal. Like we're sleepwalking. I keep thinking I'll wake up, even after all this time. That Eva's away on some sea creature conference, or giving a paper somewhere. Not just... lying there.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Sure. Stupid question. Such a brutal act of random violence must be hard to get your head around.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

How's your grandmother?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

My— Oh. My Aunt Margaret, their grandmother.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Right.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

She's having a difficult time. I check in with her; she asked me to come today, since she can't.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

She's glad to know we're here, but I don't think she really understands, fully understands, what's going on. Probably for her own protection. She's had so much loss. My father—who was her brother, of course, then her daughter—their mother. And their father. But she soldiers on. You know her. It's that generation.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't actually know her.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Of course you do.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I've never met her.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Really? But you and Eva have been together for, how many years?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

On the phone. I've talked to her on the phone.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh! Then not so much.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Right.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

They're all like that. They don't really do phone conversations on this side of the family. Or conversations at all, for that matter. They're like a bunch of absent-minded professors. My dad, on the other hand, he could talk your ear off. We used to talk for hours on the phone after I got married. Before he died. They all thought he was crazy. This side of the family. There's some irony for you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

"This side" of the family? There's only the two of them now, right?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And you. I consider you part of this side.

Very short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Thanks.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Not sure if you should thank me! Ha ha ha!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Ha ha.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But the irony I meant was my mom, who truly is crazy. I mean, insane. Certifiable.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh, that's right. I remember. I'm sorry.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Thanks. And yours? What about yours? Your family?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What about them?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

How are they doing? I'm sure they love Eva. Have they been to see her?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh. No They're in the Mid-West. They don't leave. They don't like LA.

Short pause.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I should probably go home.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Okay.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I'm sorry I wasn't able to be more help, today!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, you've been great.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It's kind of you to say so. It's nice seeing your apartment; it's lovely. But just hanging out here I bet I'm driving you both a little batty.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

We do that well enough on our own.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ha ha ha. I'll bet it's felt like a long summer.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It has.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

If we were at the hospital at least I could tell myself I'm doing something, right? My aunt was worried and since I hadn't been able to visit since everything first happened, I thought I'd spend some real time with you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Thanks.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

The thing is, I know how it is. Lots of people don't. But I went through it again and again with my mom being in and out of hospitals when I was younger. I mean, that was different. But still, everyone's around at first, and then one by one, time goes on and it's just you, alone. Or the two of you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah. We take turns. Being alone.

There is a sudden, violent shift. It could be loud and frightening. It definitely comes out of nowhere. Then we see the jellyfish lounging on a bed or chair and the distant woman, looking through papers on a bureau for the car registration.

JELLYFISH:

I like this room. I don't ever get to go into this room.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You have your own room.

JELLYFISH:

Yes, but I like this room better.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Why? Yours is set up just for you.

JELLYFISH:

But it's horrible now. I'm all by myself. All day, all night.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Hey! Who's been camping on the spare bed in there with you, squeezed in between tanks, keeping you company?

JELLYFISH:

But all you do is sleep!

DISTANT WOMAN:

Forgive me for being human.

JELLYFISH:

I miss Eva.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I know you do.

JELLYFISH:

How long has it been?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Almost four weeks.

JELLYFISH:

Four weeks? She's been gone four weeks? Really?

DISTANT WOMAN:

That doesn't seem like a blip on the forever scale?

JELLYFISH:

Is that supposed to be funny?

DISTANT WOMAN:

No. I just figured immortality skewed your timeframe a bit. Am I wrong?

She moves her search to a bedside table.

JELLYFISH:

Let me put it like this: Four weeks is a really long time when no one's around, except plankton and brine shrimp who don't count, and there are no experiments or procedures and one of you just pokes in and feeds me every so often. Actually not often enough, and certainly not regularly. I've lost weight, can you tell?

DISTANT WOMAN:

You look good.

She finds the envelope with the registration.

JELLYFISH:

Thank you. But I feel like my bell is clouded. My digestion's off. And I've been waiting for my water to be changed.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I'm sorry. We've been occupied elsewhere.

She finds a small notebook and begins to look through it.

JELLYFISH:

Do you realize how long it's been since someone's let me out? Let me explore?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Today's special. I'm not sure how much of that we're actually supposed to be doing.

JELLYFISH:

It's fine. My god. How'd you like to live in a petri dish?

DISTANT WOMAN:

One that's nice and temperature controlled, where you get everything you could possibly need?

JELLYFISH:

Forever?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes. Well. You're small. What are you, five millimeters?

JELLYFISH:

Four-and-a-half.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You can swim around to different corners for a change of scenery.

JELLYFISH:

The "corners" of my petri dish? Right.

DISTANT WOMAN:

(reading) Eva certainly kept thorough records.

JELLYFISH:

That book's supposed to be in my room

DISTANT WOMAN:

Every little detail of your every little... everything.

JELLYFISH:

You didn't realize how fascinating I am?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Now I see the attraction.

JELLYFISH:

Why can't Eva come home?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Remember? She was injured. It's going to be awhile before she's better.

JELLYFISH:

That doesn't make any sense. It's already been four weeks! How long does she take?

DISTANT WOMAN:

She's not the same as you.

JELLYFISH:

From a genome perspective, not all that different. She told me.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Except that she can't heal herself. She doesn't get to start over again after... someone hurts her.

With the notebook and registration, she moves to another bedside table.

JELLYFISH:

Can I say something? This stress is not good for me. Not at all. Trauma could start my whole re-generation process pre-maturely.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Well, I'm sorry. It's life. Trauma happens.

JELLYFISH:

But Eva's the one who always schedules it. Does it say there when I'm due? When's the next round? You don't want to face her if things do not go according to plan!

DISTANT WOMAN:

That's just it. We've already deviated. At this point, there is no plan.

JELLYFISH:

What does Eva say to that?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Not much. Not much we can understand, anyway. She says she's in the ocean sometimes. She says she's a jellyfish.

JELLYFISH:

That's ridiculous!

DISTANT WOMAN:

She is in a sort of primitive state. Pretty much just floating around in her own petri dish.

JELLYFISH:

But not forever.

Short pause.

DISTANT WOMAN:

No. Not forever.

There is another violent shift. We see the caught woman sitting on a couch with the insistent woman; papers are spread all around them.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And here's Æthelred's mother, Ælfthryth. They say King Edgar killed her first husband, Æthelwald, just so he could snag her. That's the kind of passion you don't see anymore, huh? I just can't get enough of this stuff. I mean, I only brought it with me today because I thought it'd be a way to kill time, since I'd have a captive audience at the hospital, ha ha ha. But isn't it fascinating? There are secrets hidden in every branch. They tell you so much. How everything fits together and everyone's place in it. Maybe it's different when you have kids. Oh! Remind me to tell her about Pepin the Short! If I can find a solid connection to Pepin the Short, it means both sides are members of the OCC. How's that for validation?

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm sorry?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

The OCC. Order of the Crown of Charlemagne. In the U.S.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I've got a ways to go on that one, though. This has all been a lot of work, let me tell you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It looks like it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And what's on your agenda for the rest of the day?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I have absolutely no idea. I am totally agenda free.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ooooh! Doesn't that sound nice?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It does? I don't know what to do with myself, just sitting here... waiting.

She gets up and moves to the window.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, it's so comfortable, here, but I understand: If only you had work to go to, huh? Such a shame about your job.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't think I could get my head back into work yet, anyway.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But they could have kept a spot for you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No. It was just a job. I don't blame them. It's been since the middle of July and who knows when...

Short pause.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

So what's next?

She starts to gather up her papers.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

On the job front. Anything? You going to start looking?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh. I need to. Find something. I'd better. I'm not like Eva, with a career path into the next millennium.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Who is? And with the school district going berserk here, who knows how long I'll be employed!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm sorry.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh, I'll be fine. It could always get better, of course. Some of us were born to struggle. But you need a hobby. What are your interests? It's exciting to me that I've discovered genealogy; it just happened by chance!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

There's always taxidermy.

She moves to the table with the squirrel project.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ach. I so don't understand her.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She's a lot like Eva, actually.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

She is? No. She's much worse. Eva's work is focused and purposeful, long range. So she can get away with it. But this... It's just haphazard, arbitrary gore for gruesome sake. She's always been like that. Thinks she gets to be an artist. I have no idea what she's doing with her life.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm glad she was able to come out.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, yeah. It's not like she's really working—she's been “finding herself” for ten years, whatever that means. Does she have a boyfriend now? Last time she was here she brought someone with her and I can't imagine that lasted.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I think, maybe.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(re the squirrel and equipment) There's no blood or anything left on that, is there?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Doesn't look like it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

This doesn't disturb you?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What can I do?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It's your home.

Very short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It's her sister.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Eva's going to be okay.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Do you mind if we don't talk about it?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Of course not! You need to process this your own way. I haven't been around as much as I would like, but I think I can really be of value now: I do know how painful it is seeing someone you love in such a horrible state.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Thanks.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I mean, my father—his heart attack, it was quick so we were spared that, even though he was so young. About Eva's age, actually! But you may remember a few years ago when my son caught that dreadful infectious disease? Lesions covered every inch him so I know what a shock it is when you can hardly recognize someone!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And my mother! So often it was like no one I knew was even there! Her mind took her somewhere far, far away; I couldn't get through to her, didn't know if she'd ever come back. And in fact she didn't. Completely. But I was a kid. Who knows whether what I remembered was—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Could you—?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Of course it's different with Eva. My mother's condition is genetic—not hereditary, I checked—but I'll bet you anything Eva's brain injury isn't as bad as—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) There's a reason they barred us from the hospital today!

Pause.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

We weren't exactly barred.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

They said no one was to come in again today. That we should go home and stay home. Try to clear our heads. That they'd call if anything happened and we weren't to call them.

She moves away and picks up a book or magazine.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You're right! What can I say? You're right.

Pause.

And our little aquatic friend? She's doing okay?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Seems to be.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I know with the research, she and Eva were almost inseparable.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Almost.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

So that's gotta keep you busy, give you some structure. It's sweet for you to take care of her. Or are you a little attached, too, after all this time?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't know how to respond to that.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh! Attached because of the tentacles! That's funny but I didn't mean that. Do jellyfish even have tentacles?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't really know.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

That's funny. That's very funny. Those girls—and their parents, of course—were always about the science. Not my people.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Nor mine.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well. Where did I leave the rest of my things? My bag. I packed for the night just in case. In the kitchen?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Probably.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Okay, then! I've got so much to do. Getting ready for school to start, which means I have loads of paperwork waiting for me at home. It's just I've been doing so much driving lately and I cannot bear the thought of getting back in that car!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But you guys like this part of town? You and Eva?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I... Yes. We do.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It's changed so much in the past few years, hasn't it? When I first got married, we were looking at buying one of these buildings. As an investment property. But my husband thought it was too overpriced. Can you imagine? I would have been sitting pretty by now. Only it's probably rent control, right? Or stabilized.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yes.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Still. I can't imagine the rents are cheap. Not with all of the upscale retail moving in around here. And restaurants you can't even afford to eat in. Or maybe *you* can, with Eva's salary.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

There are still a few places.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But for real holes in the wall, you have to come over to my side of town.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'll do that.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Will you? Really? Oh, you should!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I will.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

How about tonight. Do you want to come over tonight? I can make you dinner?
You can even sleep over if you want. My son's staying with his dad for awhile.
That'd be fun, huh? I mean, I'm not making a pass at you, or anything.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I didn't think you were.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I really should go. Let you rest and get out of her hair.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Get out of whose hair?

The distant woman has joined them, carrying the notebook and assorted papers.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Whose do you think?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Is this it?

She holds up the envelope with the car registration.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

That's it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Do jellyfish have tentacles?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

She sets down the notebook and other papers.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But not like octopus tentacles. With suction cups and everything.

DISTANT WOMAN:

No. More delicate. Hers actually look like hair, but they're not.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It's how she grabs things?

DISTANT WOMAN:

More for movement. And the occasional sting.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Uh huh. Do you want me to put the tags on for you?

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) Do I?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You do.

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the insistent woman) Okay. I'll get the keys.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I don't need the keys.

She takes the envelope and starts out.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Okay.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But I should put the registration in the glove compartment.

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) She should?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She should.

DISTANT WOMAN:

The keys should be in my purse.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Didn't I see an extra set by the back door?

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) Did she?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She did.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Okay, then!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Will someone check on the jellyfish?

JELLYFISH:

(offstage) Immortal jellyfish!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(to the jellyfish) Right!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I've got it!

She leaves.

DISTANT WOMAN:

So. You survived cousin bondage?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Barely. I feel like a layer of my skin's been ripped off.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Welcome to our childhood. Eva was the only one she could never truly penetrate.
You've met her son?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't think so.

DISTANT WOMAN:

He's like a small dank turtle. He's afraid to poke his head out of his shell.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't blame him.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Indeed. There's a reason I live three thousand miles away. And, of course, my undying disdain for everything about this dry, desert wasteland of a city.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You are terrible.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Not terrible enough to deserve LA.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Ha ha, well, I'm glad you came.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Of course I came. That's what I do. Awful things happen, the police call people, people call me, and I come.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I... I'm sorry.

DISTANT WOMAN:

It's not your fault.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I know. But I know you don't want to be here.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I guess no more than you do.

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No...

DISTANT WOMAN:

I meant, specifically, the apartment. When was it you moved out? How long ago did you and Eva break up?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Not that long before, actually. Some of my stuff was still here.

DISTANT WOMAN:

How fortuitous, then.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What?

DISTANT WOMAN:

That didn't sound right. I meant at least it feels a little like home? Even if everything else is strange?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It makes it more strange.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You think flying in for a catastrophe is better?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No. I'm sorry.

DISTANT WOMAN:

No. I'm serious. Maybe it does make it easier, having that separation. I'm thinking of our parents.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
Your... Sure.

DISTANT WOMAN:
They were living out here and I was already in New York, at school, when they died.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
But that must have been unbelievably hard. Wherever you were.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Definitely unbelievable. And it's over ten years now. Also unbelievable. But I think this is harder.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
Really?

DISTANT WOMAN:
Don't you?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
I don't have anything to compare it to.

DISTANT WOMAN:
On the scale of unbelievability?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
Right.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Right. Well, as bizarre as it seems, there's something almost reassuring about a freak accident. A "natural disaster," whatever the scale. Your mother and father sunning themselves on a beach after doing ground-breaking marine research and suddenly being crushed by a falling cliff. You have an easier time putting it someplace because there's absolutely no place to put it. And then you go back to your real life.

She goes back to her squirrel.

I like how this is turning out. Sliding the pelt off of the body was a lot harder than I thought it would be. I had to scrape off a lot of fat tissue. He must've been happy before he croaked. So what happened when you found out. About Eva?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
What?

DISTANT WOMAN:

When you first found out. Before you called me.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh. I told you. I got a call from the police.

DISTANT WOMAN:

They came here first.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Right.

DISTANT WOMAN:

So what did they say? What exactly did they say?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't really remember.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You do. It wasn't even a month ago. Eva could remember every word when she got that call from the police. About our parents. I'll bet even now she could.

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

They asked me if I knew Eva. They asked me if I lived here—they got my number from her phone; it said "Home." I told them I didn't live there anymore. I asked them what had happened. They said she'd been found, severely beaten. They said she was alive but in critical condition. I asked them which hospital and they said they'd meet me there. And they did. And I called you.

DISTANT WOMAN:

After you got to the hospital.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah, I'm sorry, I didn't think. I couldn't think.

DISTANT WOMAN:

No. It's okay.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It's not okay. None of this seems real. Which I guess is normal. But definitely not okay.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I think I'm going to have to add a little more bulk to this form.

She is carefully adjusting the squirrel's skin, fitting it on a white form, and taking it off again, then molding the form itself with a knife.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You want the skin to be a little loose; too tight and it messes up the hair pattern. But this is one saggy baggy squirrel. I'll try some more clay, I guess. I could have done a carcass cast. Maybe I still will. It's still in the freezer.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What?

DISTANT WOMAN:

The squirrel carcass. The skinned body. It's still in your freezer. I mean her freezer.

Pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I told them I was her sister.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes. At the hospital. That's what they said.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't know why I— So they'd let me see her right away. I mean, I told the cops the truth. I told them everything.

DISTANT WOMAN:

But you couldn't stay with her. That first night?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, I did. I mean, it took them awhile to find her. And me. So by the time I got there it was, like, four in the morning. It was already morning for you.

DISTANT WOMAN:

July 18th.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Right. I did stay with her. But then it started getting light out and I remembered the jellyfish.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I was on a plane.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I didn't want to leave.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You did the right thing.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It felt so odd coming here, alone. It was the first time I'd been back.

DISTANT WOMAN:

What do you think?

She holds up the squirrel, complete except for its cotton ball eyes.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It looks... blind.

DISTANT WOMAN:

The eyes are the last thing and I'll do some more work on the face, make it more expressive, more alive. "Death is the beginning of a new life in taxidermy." Isn't that great? They really say that.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

What do they say?

The insistent woman has joined them, with the jellyfish.

DISTANT WOMAN:

All sorts of things. To those who listen.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Okay, then. My job here is done. Tags on, registration in place and now I really must make my way back to my part of town. I asked this one if she'd like to come home with me but she declined my offer.

JELLYFISH:

I like your car, though.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I told you, it's not my car. It's your mother's car.

JELLYFISH:

Seriously? *My mother?* (to the other women) Does she know how far back in time she's going?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

No, I was talking about—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Wait. Did you take the jellyfish outside?

JELLYFISH:

Immortal jellyfish! Please! Give me a fucking break already!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(to the insistent woman) Did you?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I didn't see the harm in it. She's been cooped up in this apartment for almost—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) She is incredibly fragile. Particularly after what she's been through, the stress, she needs to be kept in a stable environment! You can't just—!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(interrupting) She looked pale!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She's supposed to look pale!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

The fresh air did her good.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Do you have any idea what's in "fresh air?"

INSISTENT WOMAN:

We were just outside for a minute! I wouldn't let anything happen to—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) You don't understand! There are predators out there. Her entire system could be at risk!

JELLYFISH:

Hello? How many times to I have to say it: *Immortal*?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Come with me.

She takes the jellyfish firmly by the hand and they leave.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

My goodness! She sounds just like your sister!

DISTANT WOMAN:

No, my sister would have had your head on a petri dish. Et voila!

She holds up her squirrel, which now has shiny black eyes.

C'est fini.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Uh huh.

The distant woman moves away from her project

But you know something, she does have a point.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You bet your ass, she does.

She picks up the notebook from Eva's room and begins to read it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

No, I mean the je— the immortal jellyfish. If she's immortal, what's the worst that could happen?

She begins to gather up her papers and belongings.

DISTANT WOMAN:

It doesn't work that way. The Turritopsis is actually very, very delicate; very sensitive and entirely defenseless. She can't really feed herself, not in this environment, and outside she could be suffocated by just about anything. She needs a constant temperature. Good thing it's warm, but in this arid climate? You're lucky she didn't turn into a pile of dust.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Seriously?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Absolutely.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh my god. I had no idea! Why do they call her immortal then?

She continues to collect her papers from around the room.

DISTANT WOMAN:

(absorbed in the notebook) In the right conditions, without outside threats, she's capable of naturally cycling through lifespan after lifespan, sexually maturing and then devolving into, essentially, an embryo. Which then, again matures. Her make up is such that certain circumstances, namely distress, can activate chemical and genetic switches that spur rejuvenation. Which is what Eva was studying. How the degree of the injuries or damage affected the overall timeframe of transformation. Forcing the process through calibrated trauma.

The insistent woman is now by the table, taking in the squirrel.

(re the squirrel) What do you think?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Where did you get that?

DISTANT WOMAN:

What do you mean, "get?"

INSISTENT WOMAN:

What do you think I mean?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I "did" it. I created it. I didn't "get" it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You did not create a dead squirrel. Even I know that.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Of course not. It was outside. In the back.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You killed it?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I didn't kill it. I found it. Dead. That's what got me started.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Your macabre little project? Fascinating.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You think this is macabre? I'm just doing what the carcass tells me.

She sets down the notebook and moves back to the table and the squirrel.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Is that what you do now? Are you a professional New York taxidermist?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Which would be fantastic. What would my big sister say to that? But no, I just learned this. Or I'm learning as I go. Isn't he gorgeous?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

He's certainly... squirrel-like.

DISTANT WOMAN:

What else should he be like?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I will never understand you girls.

DISTANT WOMAN:

But see how I've caught him in a fluid pose? I've been watching squirrel videos. You can almost feel the motion.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Squirrel videos?

DISTANT WOMAN:

You have to honor the integrity of the animal in its first life before you give it a second one.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Let me get these out of your way.

She retrieves a stack of papers.

Oh. But should I leave the bit about Æthelred? I swear, even you would be intrigued by some of the—

DISTANT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Can you pass me that bone saw?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

How about I just leave. I'll head out now to miss traffic.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Like that's possible in this city.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It's entirely possible, if you know your way around.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Super.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Then I'm off. You'll let me know if they call, right? If anything changes.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Yes I will.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
You have my cell number.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Yes I do.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
I can come back tomorrow. But I'll plan on going straight to the hospital. Or no: I'll call you.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Okay. Good.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Because they might not let us go in, again.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Oh, they'll let us. I so cannot take another day like this one.

A violent shift. We see the jellyfish and the caught woman standing face to face.

JELLYFISH:
So?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
So what?

JELLYFISH:
You're going to make me?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
I couldn't possibly "make" you. You can do whatever you want.

JELLYFISH:
Then I'm going to go back outside! It's a lovely day, today. Who knew, stuck in here all the time?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Cut it out.

JELLYFISH:

Why are you so mean to me?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm mean? How am I mean? I'm taking care of you.

JELLYFISH:

You don't like me. You've never liked me.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Of course I like you.

JELLYFISH:

No you don't. You just put up with me. For Eva's sake. And now that she's gone—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) She's not gone.

JELLYFISH:

Well, she's not here!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, she's not. Are you hungry?

JELLYFISH:

I'm not hungry. I'm retaining water. My mesoglea's all bloated.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'll leave you to it, then.

JELLYFISH:

To what? Leave me to what?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't know. What do you normally do? Between— Procedures.

JELLYFISH:

How'm I supposed to remember? Apparently I heal. It's all written down if you're ready for a real page-turner.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Why don't you just take a break, then. Go for a swim. Or isn't there a little TV in here?

JELLYFISH:

The one you took when you left?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Oh. Right.

JELLYFISH:

She told me. But now that you're back...

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm not—

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) Where is it? The TV.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I... left it at a friend's house.

JELLYFISH:

Oh, where you were staying?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah, where I was staying.

JELLYFISH:

With your new girlfriend?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't have a new girlfriend.

JELLYFISH:

Then go get it.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Go get—?

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) The TV! Since you're here, now.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm not actually here.

JELLYFISH:

Uh, reality check?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm not back. I'm just staying here until...

JELLYFISH:

Until?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Until something happens.

JELLYFISH:

What?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't know.

JELLYFISH:

Some sort of plan would be helpful. What's next?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't know. That's what...

JELLYFISH:

What?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't—!

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) You know it's been four weeks, already?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yes.

JELLYFISH:

What did you do to her, anyway?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I didn't do anything to her!

JELLYFISH:

I mean before she left.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Before she left, when?

JELLYFISH:

The last time she was here she was crying.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Don't say that. She wasn't crying.

JELLYFISH:

You want me to lie to you? She was.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Eva never cried. Not once.

JELLYFISH:

Maybe not in front of you.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Well, then I wish she would have! I wish she would have done a lot of things. And I wish I would have, too. Look: I loved Eva. I love her. It just doesn't work, me living here. With her.

JELLYFISH:

And with me?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah, actually.

JELLYFISH:

But I thought we were happy.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

A lot of times we were.

JELLYFISH:

That we kept each other safe.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

We tried. I tried.

JELLYFISH:

Not hard enough.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Maybe not. If it's even possible.

JELLYFISH:

But Eva took care of us.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Eva... You said it yourself: You don't remember. Every time she does her thing and you're re-born—

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) Please. That sounds so jesusy.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Then...?

JELLYFISH:

It's called transdifferentiation.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Okay. Well, every time that happens, it's like you get a do-over. The bad stuff's erased. So you don't really know what it was like.

JELLYFISH:

Because I don't remember?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

That's what I'm saying.

JELLYFISH:

Just because I don't remember, or don't remember how you think I should, doesn't mean I don't know things. There are different ways of knowing.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Then see if this makes sense. Our life here—putting everything under the microscope but never really dealing with it, deep down—I couldn't do it any more.

JELLYFISH:

So you left. And her brain got bashed in and now she thinks she's a jellyfish.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Sometimes.

JELLYFISH:

She's not, is she?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, she's not.

JELLYFISH:

Talk about irony, huh?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What do you mean?

JELLYFISH:

Well, you were always jealous she loved me best, and now—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) That's not true.

JELLYFISH:

No?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No. Of course she loved you. She does love you. And how could I be jealous of you? I've known you your whole—

Short pause

JELLYFISH:

My whole life? I don't think so.

A violent shift. The distant woman has added small yellow wings to the squirrel. The insistent woman is placing her papers into an overnight bag.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Are you allowed to do that?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Allowed?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Yes. That's very unnatural.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I guess that depends on your reality.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You live in a reality where squirrels have wings?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Just as easy to believe as a reality where a woman can't walk around the block at night without getting the shit beat out of her just because she's a woman!

She goes back to her project. The insistent woman watches her.

After a moment,

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I keep forgetting to ask. Have you heard from their friends?

DISTANT WOMAN:

What friends?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

The friends whose house it was.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Oh. Yes.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

They must feel awful. They were out of the country, right?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

That must have been such a shock for them. Finding out and not being here.

DISTANT WOMAN:

As opposed to?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, you got on a plane and were here that afternoon. Were they close to Eva?

DISTANT WOMAN:

They still are. They're close to both of them.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

So did they come home early?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I don't— No. They couldn't.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Really? She and Eva were taking care of their house while they were gone, right?
They were lesbians?

DISTANT WOMAN:

The friends? No. They're men.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh! I thought they were— Gay men?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Not that that has anything to do with anything, but yes.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, that seems strange. Two gay men, and the girls are watering their plants and walking their dogs while they're gone, and then Eva nearly gets killed late one night in their back yard and they can't cut their holiday a wee bit short?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I don't have any—

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Anyone would think that was strange, even you.

DISTANT WOMAN:

What do you mean, "even me?" What's that about?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Please. Look at your squirrel.

DISTANT WOMAN:

First of all, it didn't happen in their back yard.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh, I know that. Technically.

DISTANT WOMAN:

"Technically?" It was like two blocks away! Three!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

LA is not like New York. Neighborhoods do not change from block to block. We're more fluid. What I'm saying by "back yard" is "neighborhood."

DISTANT WOMAN:

And it wasn't dogs; it was cats

INSISTENT WOMAN:

What?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Eva wasn't walking dogs. It was cats. They had cats.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

So she was walking—?

DISTANT WOMAN:
(interrupting) You know what I mean.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Now that is really strange.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Boy, look at the traffic out there.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
All this time I could have sworn it was lesbians! Lesbians and dogs, late at night.
That's what I was thinking.

DISTANT WOMAN:
What are you blathering about?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
That she was walking the dogs. That's why she was on the street. That's what
made sense to me. I must have made that up. I thought she had to go over there
late to walk the dogs. That's what I've been thinking all this time.

DISTANT WOMAN:
There were no dogs.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
And that makes this all the more horrible, doesn't it? Because it's even more
unimaginable. Couldn't cats wait until morning?

DISTANT WOMAN:
Maybe they're like high-maintenance jellyfish, or another demanding Hydrozoan.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
But even so, they don't need walking. Why would she go for a walk in that
neighborhood after she got there that late?

DISTANT WOMAN:
It's a bad neighborhood?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
No. It's a great neighborhood. You haven't driven through it? I do it all the time, I
can't help it. I mean, when I'm on this side of town.

DISTANT WOMAN:
Yes. I drove through it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And by the house? Where they found her?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

So you know. You've seen. Those are some nice houses. But this is LA. It's not a walking city, and it doesn't matter what your property values are. Late at night, there's nowhere you should—

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) What? Should what?

The caught woman has joined them.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

There's no neighborhood where it's safe to walk late at night. In LA. Because no one's around. Walking. *(to the distant woman)* I'm sure there are streets in New York where there's always a crowd, 24/7, but here it's not like that. That's what I'm saying.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I didn't know she'd gone for a walk.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Of course you didn't. It was the middle of the night. You were here, asleep. But the question is, why was she walking? She's not crazy! All this time I was thinking she was walking the dogs.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Dogs?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Lesbian dogs.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Hang on. I'm missing something here.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I'd say so.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Right? And now that I'm putting it together, of course there were no dogs, because if there were dogs they would've torn those assholes to pieces!

DISTANT WOMAN:

Unless they were small dogs.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Or they would have scared them away and then this horrible tragedy would have never happened in the first place.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Or if they were small dogs they might have been found, bloodied and beaten, under the bushes with her. Maybe instead of a squirrel, this would be one of them. A Pomeranian, perhaps?

She holds up the squirrel which now has a fish tail as its lower body in addition to wings.

I could make it a Pomeranifish.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh my god.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You think? I'm not done with it. I have to glue on each scale, one by one. But this is feeling really right. Honestly, his tail was looking awfully ratty, so I bypassed natural selection and now, there's no holding him back! Land, sea or air, Mister Squirrel's moving on.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I don't think it's healthy to even humor you, here.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

They thought it was a cat.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Who thought what was a cat?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(re the squirrel) That *thing*?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No. That night. The police told me they thought they heard a cat. Crying.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Your friends?

DISTANT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) The Craigs, right?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
The Craigs?

DISTANT WOMAN:
The friends whose house it was. I just remembered, they're both named Craig. (*to the caught woman*) Right?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Well, that adds yet another bizarre twist, doesn't it?

DISTANT WOMAN:
Does it?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
To me. (*to the caught woman*) Oh! A cat! Now I get it. They thought one of their cats got out. She must have gone looking for one of the cats!

DISTANT WOMAN:
One of the Craigs' cats?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
That makes sense.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
No...

INSISTENT WOMAN:
You're right. Eva would not be stupid enough to chase a cat. Not for blocks, anyway.

DISTANT WOMAN:
And how are they going to hear their cat crying when they're in Bangkok?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
What I'm saying is they thought Eva was a cat.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Who thought Eva was a cat?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
The neighbors who found her, half naked, in their bushes. They heard moaning outside their window. They thought it was a cat. A hurt cat. A wounded cat. They heard Eva and thought she was a dying animal.

Pause.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And now she thinks she's an immortal jellyfish.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Is that really true?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I don't know what's "really" true anymore. As you've suggested, I'm not the person to ask. However, amidst gibberish and talk of other marine phyla I'm pretty sure those words came out of her mouth. "I am Turritopsis." Only of course it was more than a little slurred, seeing as how half of her face isn't even working, isn't attached to anything; it just hangs there like a lumpy sack of useless flesh.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

That's horrible.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Although, to be honest, it's much better than it was at first. *(to the caught woman)* Remember the first week or so? The cops said whoever did this must have been really pissed off. Her body was bruised and scraped and ravaged, sexually violated, but there was something else. It was like it was an explosion of rage and anger. Like they looked right into her eyes and let everything go. Her whole head was like a misshapen mass of raw meat, you couldn't even tell it was her.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

She doesn't need to hear that!

DISTANT WOMAN:

What are you talking about? She was there. She saw it. And she won't ever get it out of her mind. What it looks like when someone's beaten beyond belief by another human being. The inhuman sounds she was still making. That'll never go away. Ask Eva to paint you a nice picture sometime: She remembers every detail of what it was like to see our parents' crushed, splintered bodies lain out on an otherwise pristine Malibu Beach, the birds flying overhead and the waves crash, crash, crashing, oh so many years ago.

Pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I'm going outside.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Are you—?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(interrupting) I'm fine.

She leaves.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the distant woman) What is wrong with you?

She leaves.

DISTANT WOMAN:

What is wrong with me.

She looks her distinctive taxidermy beast in the eyes.

Any thoughts on that?

A violent shift. The caught woman paces outside like a caged animal. The insistent woman, with her bag and papers, watches her.

After a moment,

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I'm so sorry about her.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Christ! You scared me!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I'm sorry! I didn't mean to. The last thing in the world you need is someone sneaking up on you, even in this part of town!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You're right!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Listen. I really have to be going. And I know you don't want to talk about this, but everything *is* going to be okay.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Ha ha ha ha. Really?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Yes. It is. In some ways, you're actually in the best of all possible places. I mean, given the circumstances.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I am?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh, definitely. Eva is in one of the top hospitals in the world. And the trauma team was there from the get-go. That is significant. You may not see this because you've been there every day, but she has made remarkable improvement!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You can't be serious.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You just can't see it!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

There's not a part of her that's connected to any sort of consciousness!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Here's the thing, though: They have not given up on her. If they really thought there was no hope, they would've just left her: a gurgling mass on the bed.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Someone said that to me. Like it was a cause. A cause and effect. Like she fucked up the experiment. Made a mistake.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You know that's not true.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Of course not. So obviously I did. What if she'd finally unlocked the genetic code to immortality and now, because of me, she's lying there, for the rest of eternity, not able to do a damn thing about it?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. Do not go there. That doesn't help anything. The fact is that Eva's brain— Well, even for this side of the family, it's impressive. It's not a brain that's going to get pickled in a jar without a fight, if you'll excuse the expression. Which isn't even an expression. I don't know what I'm saying except that this seems like it's been a very long day. Doing nothing. But what I'm trying to say is that your girlfriend is hooked up. Off the hook as they say. Or they probably don't say that. I don't know.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't either, because right now all she's hooked up to is a feeding tube.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

And they told us this morning that'd be out soon!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Which will make what sort of difference?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

It will all make a difference in the long run. And you don't have to worry. You've got time!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Time for what?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I know who to talk to at hospitals—it's not the doctors, it's the admin team—and I found out from them that her insurance is to die for. She's got connections. They will provide the best kind of rehab and therapy for as long as she needs it or longer. If only my institutionalized mother had that kind of deal going.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Please, I can't—

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(interrupting) And to top it all off, she's got a disability policy that'll mean you, personally, are set for life! You don't even have to work. My god. I wish I were you at times like this. You guys were so smart to have filed a domestic partnership when you did!

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

We did?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Of course you did. It's right here.

She hands a document to the caught woman.

I was going to make some copies.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I didn't know about this. Eva did this without telling me.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Boy. Then that is a real gift, huh? You should have gotten more paperwork by now. Maybe even checks. It's amazing how fast they can move when they want to. They haven't sent you anything since the accident?

CAUGHT WOMAN:
The accident?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
The hospital should have automatically completed disability forms after Eva's accident.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
Eva didn't have an accident. She was attacked.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
I know that. But they don't know who attacked her. So they don't like to call it a crime.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
They don't "like" to? But it is a crime.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Not if there's no criminal.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
There is a criminal! There's probably a bunch of them.

INSISTENT WOMAN:
I'm sure! But Eva will probably never be able to remember anything, so they're calling it an accident. Just for the report. That's what they do.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
How do you know that?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
My mom. After a suicide attempt, one time she was raped. Never caught the guy.

CAUGHT WOMAN:
The accidental rapist?

INSISTENT WOMAN:
Right? Crazy, huh. And scary. Dealing with that was sure a mess.

DISTANT WOMAN:
We live in a scary, messy world.

The distant woman has joined them.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

We really do. Anyway. I'm sorry I wasn't able to do more to help you straighten it all out today. There's only so much you can process before you begin to feel the red tape tighten around your neck! Ha ha ha. But I'll be back.

She puts the rest of her papers into her bag.

Oh! I have to tell you what I found! A possible link to Pepin the Short. Isn't that exciting? Going back forty-five generations!

DISTANT WOMAN:

Is that your car getting a ticket?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Is it? Shit. Okay. I'll see you tomorrow. And I know you don't care, but Pepin the Short, King of the Franks, was the father of guess who: Charlemagne! What do you say to that?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I don't know what to say.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Uh huh!

She starts out.

Oh! We were talking about the disability claim. Have you gotten any checks?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yes?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Okay! *(to the caught woman, re the document)* So you hang onto that. I really have to go.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Until tomorrow.

She leaves.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(offstage) Oh! Say goodbye to the jellyfish for me!

JELLYFISH:

Immortal jellyfish.

The jellyfish has floated outside.

Why do I even bother, anymore?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You shouldn't be out here.

JELLYFISH:

You said I could do anything I wanted.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I didn't—

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) You did! Those very words!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

But that's not what—

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) Can you spell "Mixed Messages?" Who's in charge here?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No one's—

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) That's what I thought. Then I don't need any of you. I can take care of myself!

Short pause.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Look, I'm sure you believe that.

JELLYFISH:

But what does it matter what the "jellyfish" believes? I have to tell you, today has been incredibly stressful. Are you aware that I'm not a Scyphozoa, and some people wouldn't even call me a jellyfish?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

JELLYFISH:

Good. Then I'm gonna start going by my full name: Turritopsis dohrnii.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Okay, Miss Dohrnii. What are you doing out here?

JELLYFISH:

I'm hungry. And those plankton were giving me the evil eye; I don't want to eat alone in front of them.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You need to go back inside.

JELLYFISH:

Let's go for a ride. Will you take me for a ride? I have lived in Los Angeles for, I'm not even going to tell you how long, and I have never been in a car. Is that ridiculous, or what?

DISTANT WOMAN:

No more than anything else.

JELLYFISH:

Hey! Why don't you teach me how to drive? I think I'm ready for a little bit of independence. I think I've earned that.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Why don't we wait and ask Eva?

JELLYFISH:

I'm sure it would fine with her.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You do?

JELLYFISH:

Yes. As a matter of fact, we were talking about just that the last time I saw her. That and dating.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Oh, really?

JELLYFISH:

What?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Can't you just have sex with yourself?

JELLYFISH:

Ewwwww. Gross!

DISTANT WOMAN:

Why is that gross?

JELLYFISH:

It's a very personal topic, and you don't know what you're talking about.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You're right, I don't. But I do know you're not the only Cnidarian who can live forever. You can be replaced!

JELLYFISH:

Ohhhhh, that is so going back to Eva.

DISTANT WOMAN:

She's the one who told me.

JELLYFISH:

I don't believe you and I don't have to stay here and listen to this. My perisarc's like about to explode. I'm going back inside.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

There are some sliced shrimp eggs in the fridge. You can eat them in kitchen.

JELLYFISH:

Oh, yum. Sounds like a party. I'll pop some champagne.

She leaves.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Tell me this is just a phase.

JELLYFISH:

(offstage) I heard that!

DISTANT WOMAN:

I'd say, "How'd Eva put up with it?" except I know she didn't.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Listen. I'm sorry about before. I know we're wired different. I just feel like sometimes I have to get up close and feel around inside of things to figure them out. Not that I'll ever be able to figure this out. Or any of it, for that matter. So. What's next?

The caught woman is still holding the partnership document.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Why didn't you tell me there were checks?

DISTANT WOMAN:

What?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Why didn't you tell me there were disability checks?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I— Well, you know. There are stacks of mail we still have to go through.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I do know.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And there aren't actually any checks. Only one payment so far; it's deposited directly into the account. You didn't notice?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It's her money. It's her account.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You haven't been looking at it?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Well, if you had...

Short pause.

Also, I didn't want to scare you. I didn't want to tell you because I didn't want to scare you away.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Then you were right.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I thought so.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

So this means that she's— or, essentially, *I'm* getting money, being paid, because of what someone did to Eva. And I should just live here, and take care of her things, and tool over to the hospital every so often, and for that I'll keep drawing a paycheck. A pretty generous paycheck?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I wasn't with Eva for her money. You know that.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Of course I do. But now...

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Now?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Now it's just there. The checks will keep coming. And her pension. Other money, too. She's got most everything set up so you don't really even have to look.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

How long can this go on?

DISTANT WOMAN:

What's this?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Floating, hanging, trying to find something that feels remotely like reality. It's already been a month. A month of putting life on hold. A month of pretending that anything we do matters, that it's not all impossible. And now you're telling me, what? That financing's in place? So this could just go on—

She stops herself from saying "forever."

A violent shift. The jellyfish is alone, snacking. She holds a small bowl and the notebook containing Eva's records. The flowers from the beginning of the play are lying the floor. They're not in a vase, or in water.

JELLYFISH:

"12 December: Water changed and temperature decreased to 68 degrees Fahrenheit to determine affect of apoptotic blah blah blah..."

She eats and flips through the pages.

JELLYFISH:

Mmmmm! "18 February: Alternating diet of zooplankton with plankton in adult pelagic medusa does not substantially alter Turritopsis movement patterns" Well! Mix it up, Eva. Who knew you took me so close to the edge?

"31 March: Dynamic changes are occurring." Here we go! "Immortal Medusa"—Immortal Medusa; I like that!—"recovering nicely from last dissection; pre-polyp stage lasting only 6 days. Bell diameter increased to 4 millimeters."

Four millimeters. Man. I must've looked good in anything, then.

"24 June: Medusa bell diameter 5.2 millimeters. Natural rejuvenation process significantly inhibited by large bell size." Please. "70 days since last transdifferentiation. Next procedure scheduled 23 August." Nice. Schedules. We like this.

"11 July: Immortal Medusa healthy, sexually mature." I'll say. "Procedure initiated significantly ahead of schedule."

Very short pause.

"First perforations to mesoglea with .3 millimeter, sharpened aluminum instrument. Result is small tears in gelatinous tissue comprising bell. Even these barely discernable punctures impact medusa's mobility. She does not swim, but remains still, except for spasmodic twitching. Evidence of impaired tentacle range and sensitivity. Additional stabs of greater force sever manubrium base; ring canal at umbrellar margin compromised, resulting in complete immobility of tentacles. Immediate evidence of cell death observed."

"Further, amplified strikes with instruments of increasing diameter greatly exacerbate condition: bell is now fully deflated, mesoglea oozing and shredded. After comprehensive mutilation, Turritopsis dohrnii becomes a limp motionless mass, exhibiting no signs of life. 75 stabs total."

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Seventy-five stabs?

The insistent woman, carrying her packed bag, has joined her.

JELLYFISH:

Oh. Hi. Yeah. Seventy-five.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(re the notebook) That's Eva's?

JELLYFISH:

Yeah. Eva's.

She holds out the bowl.

Brine shrimp eggs?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

No. Thank you. And she's writing about... you?

JELLYFISH:

Who else would she be writing about?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(reaching for the notebook) May I look at that?

JELLYFISH:

Sure. *(handing it over)* You know, I think I saw some Cheetos somewhere. You won't tell anyone, will you?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

No. *(reading)* "12 July: Degeneration has begun: surface mass settled onto substrate of dish floor, tentacles retracting inward in advance of re-absorption."

JELLYFISH:

(finding a bag) Whoo hoo yumaroo! The crunchy kind! Who bought these? Certainly not Eva!

INSISTENT WOMAN:

"14 July: Transformation progressing, outgrowth of stolons visible. RNA extracted for genes differentially expressed during backward on-togeny, RD." RD?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Reverse development. Like aging backwards.

The caught woman has joined them.

JELLYFISH:

(with her mouth full) Uh, yeah. That's what I was going to say.

She tries to hide the Cheetos.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

(to the insistent woman) I thought you were gone.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I was. I am. I forgot to return the car keys, and then I thought I'd check the cupboards, see how you were for groceries.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

We're fine. *(to the jellyfish)* What are you eating?

JELLYFISH:

Hmmmm?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Never mind.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(holding the notebook) But have you read this?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, I haven't

JELLYFISH:

You haven't?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't have to read it. I lived it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I just... This is what she does? Eva. *(re the jellyfish)* To her?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Over and over again. But she doesn't remember it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

But does she feel it?

JELLYFISH:

Hello. She's right here.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Do you? My god! Stabbed seventy-five times *(referring to the notebook)* "oozing... shredded... lifeless..."

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She has no memory of it and I'd rather us not talk about it.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I would never have expected something like this; it seems so unnecessarily savage. Cruel, even. *(to the jellyfish)* Especially after getting to know you.

JELLYFISH:

What do you mean?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(to the caught woman) She gets paid all that money to do this? In the name of science? I'm shocked.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Then you didn't know Eva.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

This doesn't bother you?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Eva and I weren't together anymore.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

What?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Eva and I had split up. I'd moved out before Eva was attacked.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I didn't know that.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Apparently Eva didn't tell anyone.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(re the book) Was it because of this?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No, it's not that simple. I mean, the work she was doing—

JELLYFISH:

(interrupting) We were doing! The work we were doing: "Unlocking the secrets of immortality."

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

JELLYFISH:

(to the insistent woman) I know I make it look easy, but it's much more complicated than you think.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I'll bet.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

And Eva was more complicated than you can even imagine.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

"Was."

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You said "Eva was."

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Well, she was. Complicated. Inflexible. Remote. Demanding.

JELLYFISH:

There's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with Eva.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Actually, right now there's a lot wrong with Eva. You have no idea because your world is so tiny there's no room for anyone else. You have no idea about anything. Both of you were so absorbed in the idea of each other that you never looked up, you never looked out, you never let anyone in. You could have never seen what was coming because there's no way to rationalize the existence of evil. But in this world it will find you and if you don't know it for what it truly is it will destroy you and everything you love, no matter how long you hang around. So consider yourself warned!

She leaves.

JELLYFISH:

(calling after her) I hate you! I've always hated you and I always will! And coming from me, that means something! Ahhhhhhhh!

She collapses on the table with great dramatic flair, continuing her outburst.

After a moment,

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You know what? I'm going to take off my shoes.

JELLYFISH:

Ahhhhh. I don't even have shoes! Ahhhhh.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Ooooooh. I'm sorry. I've just been on my feet all day, and—

JELLYFISH:

Ahhhhhhh.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Shh shhhh shhh shhh. You can have my shoes. *(handing then to her)* I've got slippers in my bag, see? *(producing the slippers.)*

JELLYFISH:

Ahhh hah.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Uh huh. I think you need a treat, that's what I think. Let's see what they've got here.

Wearing her slippers, she starts to take stock of the cupboards.

I'm not expecting much, of course. No one ever cares about stocking the pantry and fridge during times like these. I mean, even normal people.

JELLYFISH:

No one cares about me, either. Not one bit.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh, sweetie. I don't want to make judgments but there's something definitely wrong, a piece missing with those girls. My side of the family, I think they got all of the empathy genes.

JELLYFISH:

Ugh. I feel...

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I know. It's not fair. None of it is.

JELLYFISH:

I think I'm going to throw up.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Just take it easy. Lie down.

The jellyfish clutches the Cheetos and shoes.

JELLYFISH:

Sure. Then I'll choke on my own orange vomit, and nobody will ever find me. No one will even know I'm gone.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

That won't happen.

JELLYFISH:

How can you say that? You don't know anything about me or my digestive system.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Nothing's going to happen to you.

She picks up the bouquet of flowers from the floor.

JELLYFISH:

What difference would it make, anyway? It's not like I matter.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You do matter. We all matter! Some of us just get more credit. Look at where we came from!

JELLYFISH:

Where *I* came from? Good luck with that.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

I mean, take my Æthelred.

She's filled a drinking glass with water and arranges the flowers.

Poor little guy, he was a good king, all said and done; not everyone can be remarkable. But still, after he dies he gets saddled with "Æthelred the Unready." And his entitled, arrogant bastard brother? Edward the Martyr!" He's actually a Saint in some churches. I tell you, we do have a lot of irony in our extended family tree.

JELLYFISH:

And a lot of corpses.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Well, yes. But that's the thing about ancestry. There's always more for someone like me to find. It never ends.

She checks out the contents of the fridge.

JELLYFISH:

Maybe I will lie down.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

You do that.

JELLYFISH:

Forever.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Oh, Eva is going to get better. She is. She just is. And here's something else: The doctors say she won't remember anything either! None of the terrible things that were done to her. Those memories are probably knocked clean out of her head. How do you like that?

She opens the freezer.

JELLYFISH:

(softly) But they'll still be somewhere. It still happened. There's a part of me that remembers all of it. Everything. Every time.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(re the freezer's contents) Excuse me?

JELLYFISH:

I—

INSISTENT WOMAN:

(interrupting) What in the world is this?

She holds up a small, frozen, skinned body.

A violent shift. The caught woman observes the distant woman with her creature. It now has elaborate, curled horns.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Okay! No one's going to mess with you now! I just have to find a way to make these horns feel like they belong there, like they're organic. Like your crazy little mind just gathered enough energy to push through your skull, and create these gorgeous weapons to put your personal trajectory in perspective. I should make the muscles in your neck strong enough to support them, though. Don't want you toppling over when you swim out of the sea and fly off into the sunset!

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Ha ha ha ha.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Oh! I didn't know you were there.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Sorry.

DISTANT WOMAN:

You find my beast amusing? I find him inspiring.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

It's not that. I was listening to you, and thinking, "You can't swim out of the sea and into the sunset! The sun sets into the sea!"

DISTANT WOMAN:

What? No it doesn't. It sets in the...

Very short pause

I'm sorry. Just another reason LA is so very, very wrong.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I wish you'd have come out more. I wish you'd have been willing to. I was just realizing I don't really know anything about you. About your life. Your real life.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Eva didn't talk about me?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Of course she did, but—

DISTANT WOMAN:

(interrupting) I was actually joking. I know my sister.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And I wish you and Eva were okay. I mean, together. And not just because I wish someone was here who really wanted to be here. Now. I just wish she had someone. In her real life.

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Did you say you do? A guy?

DISTANT WOMAN:

I do. A guy.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

A new guy? A good guy? A guy who wants to be there. Who wants you to be there?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes. All of the aforementioned. Except for the new. We've been together for five years. We're married.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

What?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Which part?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You're married? Why didn't you say anything? Did Eva know?

DISTANT WOMAN:

No.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You— You never told her. That is crazy. I don't understand you two.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Other people wasn't something we ever talked about. Our parents never really taught us how to be with someone else. They were together like they were the same person. And the two of us were just extensions of that, growing up. It was pretty perfect how they died. They literally became one being; they had to pry their bodies apart. But after they were gone I knew they didn't miss us. They hadn't needed us. So we never learned how to be with people. Other people. I'm trying to learn now. It's not easy.

Pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I was staying there, the night she was attacked.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Staying where?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

At the Craigs'.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Their house? Did Eva know that?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She did. When I moved out, that's where I went.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Oh. Because they were on vacation.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And you could take care of things at the house for them.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Then she didn't need to go over that night.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

No. She came over to ask me to come back.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Eva did? To ask you to come back here? Back to her?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah.

DISTANT WOMAN:

What did she say?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I don't know what she—

DISTANT WOMAN:

(interrupting) Yes. You do. You know exactly what she said.

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She said she didn't understand why I left. She said I was wrong. That we should be together. She said she would try to understand me. She wouldn't assume things. She would try to tell me things. She would try to notice things. She said she loved me... She brought flowers.

DISTANT WOMAN:

But...?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

She said it too late. She did it too late. I told her it was too late.

DISTANT WOMAN:

And she left.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

And she left. I thought she'd gotten in her car.

DISTANT WOMAN:

But she didn't. She went for a walk.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yes.

DISTANT WOMAN:

What time did she leave?

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Just after midnight.

DISTANT WOMAN:

So it was already the 18th.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Yeah. It was late and I was crying and I went to sleep. I thought she was on her way home. I thought she was driving away.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Her car's engine doesn't make any noise.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

So I didn't know! I couldn't do anything. I was asleep. I was sleeping.

DISTANT WOMAN:

While she was being destroyed.

Pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I can't live like this. I can't. Not living, just waiting for the next huge, horrible thing to happen.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Maybe it won't be horrible.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Or maybe it won't happen at all. Maybe nothing will happen, nothing will change. Ever.

DISTANT WOMAN:

Oh, something will always change. Something will always happen.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

I can't stay here. I can't *just* stay here.

DISTANT WOMAN:

I know.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

You do?

DISTANT WOMAN:

Yes. I do.

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Things will never be okay, will they?

DISTANT WOMAN:

They'll never be the same.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

So what is next? For any of us.

DISTANT WOMAN:

We make things okay. Or try.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

How is that even possible? I have to leave. This isn't my home. I don't live here. And you: You have a home! You have someone. And someplace to go! You have to leave!

DISTANT WOMAN:

But can you? Leave?

Short pause.

CAUGHT WOMAN:

Can you?

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Not unless you want to get caught in rush hour.

The insistent woman has joined them, dressed in her pajamas and slippers.

INSISTENT WOMAN:

Here's the thing: It'll take forever to get anywhere, right now. The best plan now is come back inside; we all just settle in and get comfortable. And I'll be here if you need anything. Just when you thought you were safe, huh?

A violent shift. We see the jellyfish, sitting on the table wearing the insistent woman's shoes, miserably gnawing on the squirrel carcass. She's reading from the notebook.

JELLYFISH:

"17 July: The hydrozoa life cycle is commonly characterized, in ordinary circumstances, by the alternation of a post-larval benthic polyp and an adult medusa. But there is nothing common about 'the immortal jellyfish,' as the species has come to be called. Nor are these circumstances ordinary." Now you tell me.

"In order to discover the genetic mechanisms underlying the body plan reorganization of the immortal medusa, over the past six years I have placed the *Turritopsis dohrnii* in a world of regular volatility as a scientific model. I had hoped that this cyclical uncertainty would push me closer and closer to what is true. I believe it has. But at the same time, I recognize the distinction that these conditions are imposed by the will of a fellow creature."

JELLYFISH:

"In the human species, emotional and psychological recovery after destructive acts of nature—even the most bizarre accidents—differs wildly from the ability to recover from physical damage inflicted by a person or persons. This last seems to cause injuries on a deeper level, injuries that cannot be seen nor calibrated."

"I have come to believe that I may have, in fact, created a state of metaphorical darkness for my subject that is uniquely human. I don't yet know what that truly means."

She puts the notebook down. She starts to take a really big bite of frozen squirrel but stops herself.

Man. What a crazy bitch.

End of Play