

Space Available

A play about a woman's place and what (& who) we let define us

by Jennie Webb

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Characters:

JANE, a barren woman – 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. She's Black or mixed race.

CONSTANCE, her productive friend – mid 30s, she's proud that she's able to accomplish things, for herself and others. She can present as white but is of multi-racial/cultural descent and claims the most colorful portions.

MATT, the adjunct husband - late 30s or early 40s, he's appreciative of everything he has, and that he's a part of it all. Even a small part. He's Asian American, but culturally pretty American. Sans privilege or entitlement.

An intense woman who cares deeply known as DIVINA – certainly past 40, she's certain that she knows what's best and has faith everyone else will come to the same realization. She's very white. And everything that comes with it.

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:

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

This is the story of Jane, who's managed to survive an absurd litany of profound misfortunes in a world where the words "womanhood" and "motherhood" are used interchangeably. But when she comes face to face with a surreal future that no one should have to live with, she takes a closer look at what it means to have options. *Space Available* is a play about a woman's place and what (& who) we let define us.

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In black, we see the outlines of two women. One woman, Jane, steps into the light, but the other, who appears somewhat small and frightened, remains in shadow. Jane holds out her arms to the other woman, but there is no response.

JANE:

Okay. I get it. You don't have to— Hah. You don't. You don't have to.

This is a bit like a lightbulb for Jane, but one that's faint and then gone.

Can I tell you something? Don't worry: It's not a "Once Upon a Time," because... time is something that's never made sense to me.

I know in stories there's supposed to be a beginning and an end, but to be honest I can't always tell which is which. For me, one thing never leads to another in the way people expect it to. Or want it to. My story does not unfold in a nice clear path with "oh look!"s popping up along the way.

Nooooooo. In my story, time carries weight. Has dimensions. Layers. Then disappears.

I guess it takes on a sort of shape. A sneaky shape that knocks you around so you have no choice but to go along with it. And everything tends to happen at once, sometimes on top of each other or circling around, again and again, or you're waiting for it and then suddenly you wake up and it's... Okay: your life, right? But you look back and aren't even sure that really did happen and maybe you wish it didn't and since there's no way to stop it, you might as well just...

In the darkness, we hear the voice of another woman, Constance.

CONSTANCE:

What are you doing in the...?

Constance has turned on the lights and we see that we're inside of an empty storefront. the other woman has disappeared.

That's better!

JANE:

It's...

Jane takes in the space. It's a relatively blank slate containing only some awkward shelving or furniture units. One wall is glass, or has a really big window, on which is large, commercially manufactured banner. It's facing away from us, but 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.

Constance has brought in a tape measure and begins to size things up. She is obviously very productive. Jane moves to the window. Perhaps she's looking for the other woman, or perhaps it's something else entirely.

CONSTANCE:

Perfect. This could not be more perfectly perfect. There is totally enough room in here for counters and display cases—the usual stuff you'll need. Those thingies (*indicating the units*) are... Well, I don't know what they are, but you could probably use them for something. Someone as... "outside the box" as you!

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

You're certainly not in it! But what do you think?

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

Isn't it, though? I knew you'd love it. It's so you, and so perfect for the next phase of your life.

JANE:

Oh, yeah?

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

What sort of window are you—?

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) What I'm saying is that that this is a great opportunity, a really great opportunity. And Divina says it's a unique opportunity, because of the zoning. It 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...

JANE:

Enclave. An enclave.

CONSTANCE:

That's exactly it! An enclave. A protected enclave. There's just a couple of buildings that have live/work/breathe units 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...

JANE:
Community.

CONSTANCE:
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...

JANE:
Urban.

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

JANE:
Congested?

CONSTANCE:
No.

JANE:
Claustrophobic.

CONSTANCE:
No.

JANE:
Stuck. Trapped. Paralyzed.

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

Very short pause.

JANE:
What?

CONSTANCE:
I can say that; my grandmother on my father's side was part Japanese. But what I mean is like everyone on top of each other. And this isn't at all like that. It's like Little Tokyo, but not real Tokyo—and that's what you don't want. *Japan* Japanese.

JANE:
Okay...

CONSTANCE:
But here you can stretch out and... look!

She points out the window.

CONSTANCE:

There's green! You could even grow things! Have a fabulous roof garden! You'll be a free-range gal-on-the-go in the inner-city, open your successful business and get written up in the indie press and I'll come and hang out with you and we'll string lights and play music and drink wine, or Mai Tais, or Daiquiris! It'll be just like when we were in college and I held your hand and we figured things out except better because now we know things. Oh, I want to be you and sign the contract right now!

JANE:

Ha ha ha, you really want to be me?

CONSTANCE:

You know what I mean. This is so exciting—I have really missed you!

JANE:

Me, too! And sure: It is exciting but it's also impossible.

CONSTANCE:

Why?

JANE:

Why? Because I have no money.

CONSTANCE:

Stop saying that. You can always get money.

JANE:

You can always get money.

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

You mean the lack of money.

CONSTANCE:

Exactly. You deserve money!

JANE:

I agree!

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

I have not, actually.

CONSTANCE:

Something you might want to consider.

She goes back to measuring the space and Jane picks up her purse.

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

Divina.

JANE:

Divina. Thank her for me.

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

Colleague?

CONSTANCE:

She's a professional friend? Can I can say that? If I admit to being a professional parent?

JANE:

You're certainly not an amateur.

CONSTANCE:

Right. A house, a husband and three kids. How did all that happen?

JANE:

Ha ha. Like you really don't know?

CONSTANCE:

Ha ha. You got me. But don't worry: You've still got time.

JANE:

Ha ha. Thanks for the reminder.

She sets down her purse and starts to poke around the space, perhaps seeing herself in it.

So. How did you meet this Divina?

CONSTANCE:

She volunteers at the school. She's done very well investing in commercial real estate, which is why she found out about this.

JANE:

She's going to buy it?

CONSTANCE:

No, she has another place around here. She knows the guy who just did, though, and he— Hey! I just remembered this and she may be totally ahead of me, because I told her all about you. The owner? He's newly single. She said he was a great guy, owns a lot of property around here, very smart. I think he's... Persian?

JANE:

That's okay.

CONSTANCE:

No? I'm all over the Middle Eastern thing. Swarthy, sexy... Don't tell my little pointy noggin of a husband, of course.

JANE:

No, I didn't mean I'm not... Never mind.

CONSTANCE:

Then let's get back to the space. Really. What do you think? Can you see yourself here? 'Cause I certainly can!

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

She puts the tape measure in her large bag.

JANE:

But you're the one who told me about it.

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

The building's not terrible.

CONSTANCE:

It's temporary. And even a lease doesn't mean all that much; you can get out of a lease.

JANE:

Okay. I love you and I know this all comes from a caring place—

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) It does!

JANE:

I know. That's what I said. And I know I need to get back out into the world and—

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) You called me!

JANE:

I know! But will you please stop for a minute? I need to take things a little slower. I feel like I've lost everything and I can't find anything to grab onto. So it's very hard for me to...

Short pause.

CONSTANCE:

I know.

JANE:

Yeah?

CONSTANCE:

Yeah.

JANE:

Thanks.

CONSTANCE:

But losing your house isn't everything.

Short pause.

JANE:

And I lost my husband.

CONSTANCE:

Of course. And I'm sorry, sweetie. But... how long has Chance been gone, now?

JANE:

He died two years ago in June.

CONSTANCE:

Two years. Okay. I know there's not like a set timeline for mourning. But look at it this way: You are finally free of that house! A great house, but you said it never felt like it was yours, you never felt like *you* in it. Walking away, declaring bankruptcy was the best thing you could have done—all sorts of possibilities are opening up!

Short pause, then Jane grabs her purse again.

JANE:

I have to get back to work.

CONSTANCE:

After we go to lunch. You said you could take a long lunch.

JANE:

It's already been long.

CONSTANCE:

Don't be silly. I'm treating you and I've got a sitter for another hour at least!

JANE:

I don't want to lose my job, too!

We see a group of laughing teenage girls passing by the window, a representation—maybe puppets or animated projections—where they're all hot and sexualized and dressed in school uniforms. Some may carry cartoonish baby dolls and in their wake they leave a smiling, easygoing man, Matt, with an actual baby strapped to his chest.

CONSTANCE:

What in the world...?

JANE:

It's your husband.

Matt sees the women and waves.

CONSTANCE:

I know, I know, but he's—

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

(through the glass) Saying hi! Thought we'd stop by! *(to Jane)* Hi!

JANE:

(raising her voice, to Matt) Hi. Is that...?

MATT:

(through the glass) Hope! Yes. *(attempting to show a piece of the bundled baby)*
She's sleeping!

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

(through the glass) What?

CONSTANCE:

(raising her voice) I said she has!

MATT:

(through the glass) Has what?

CONSTANCE:

Grown!

MATT:

(through the glass) She really has!

CONSTANCE:

(to Jane) The first two weren't like that. It's like every day I've got a new, hungrier child on my breast. *(raising her voice, to her husband)* Crazy, huh?!

MATT:

(through the glass) Yeah!

CONSTANCE:

Is that a new shirt?

MATT:

(through the glass) What?

CONSTANCE:

That shirt! Is it new?

MATT:

(through the glass) Yeah! You like it!?

CONSTANCE:

When did you buy it? Is it cotton?

MATT:

(through the glass) Thanks!

CONSTANCE:

(louder) Is it cotton!?

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

(to Jane) He always gets these shirts that have to be ironed. His mother always did his laundry; he just doesn't think.

JANE:

Is he joining us for lunch?

CONSTANCE:

What?

MATT:

(through the glass) What?

CONSTANCE:

(loudly, to her husband) She's not—! *(to Jane)* No, he's just stopping by.

MATT:

(through the glass) Not what?

CONSTANCE:

Talking to you!

JANE:

Why doesn't he come inside?

CONSTANCE:

You wouldn't mind?

JANE:

Why would I mind?

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

(through the glass) Okay!

He starts looking for the way in.

CONSTANCE:

He's off work, home this week and I told him we'd be here. He knows Divina.

JANE:

Great.

CONSTANCE:

He hasn't met the owner though. You know something, maybe he's an Arab. Like an Arabian knight. We have these Egyptians in my mother's family? Mmmmmm. Anyway, he sounds fantastic; I can't wait to meet him. Or for you to meet him, because obviously I intend upon living through you!

JANE:

Wait. Is that what you needed to talk to me about? Are you two...?

CONSTANCE:

We're fine. But I had no idea he'd show up—with the baby! We've got a sitter and it was just supposed to be you and me so we could really... I'm sorry.

JANE:

No, it's—

MATT:

(interrupting, through the glass) Where's the door?

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

(through the glass) Got it!

He heads one way, then the other towards the door.

JANE:

So Matt's home, but you've still got a babysitter?

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

I wish you were my boss.

CONSTANCE:

Then let's make this happen.

JANE:

You need another babysitter?

CONSTANCE:

No, you can be your own boss! But you really have to jump on this while you can, Jane. No more making excuses. You're a smart, strong woman of color; tell me you're ready to stake your claim!

JANE:

Hang on: "making excuses?" I've been—

She's interrupted by Matt, with child, joining them.

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

Definitely!

JANE:

As I was saying, I don't *have* a business.

CONSTANCE:

Everyone's got to start somewhere.

JANE:

I also have no clue how to start a business.

CONSTANCE:

All you need is an idea.

JANE:

An idea and money and credit. *(to Matt)* None of which I have.

CONSTANCE:

Please. You came up with a jillion fabulous ideas in one phone conversation; that's what got me started on this whole thing!

JANE:

I wasn't serious!

CONSTANCE:

Which is why we're here!

JANE:

(to Matt) Your wife really needs a hobby.

MATT:

Why, when she has you?

CONSTANCE:

Hah. *(to Jane)* What about the coffee house weaving studio?

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

Enclave. *(to Jane)* A second-hand furniture and stationery store!

JANE:

And where'd *that* one come from?

CONSTANCE:

Or whatever you decide! Inspiration is only the first step; I'm here to help you take the next one.

JANE:

Towards hand-made soaps and appliance repair.

CONSTANCE:

Come on.

MATT:

You know how to repair appliances?

JANE:

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!

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

When?

CONSTANCE:

Before you started the business.

MATT:

My company?

CONSTANCE:

It's a business.

MATT:

But it's not the same.

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

It all started with an idea, right? Who are you to say that your idea is better than hers?

MATT:

I'm not saying that. But honey, a small, storefront business isn't going to have an easy start, no matter how fantastic the idea.

CONSTANCE:

Why are you being so negative?

MATT:

I'm not being— I'm being realistic.

CONSTANCE:

Well, that doesn't scare me away. I'm already halfway through a business plan, a full-proof business plan for a Black-owned women's business enterprise. 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?

JANE:

Fool-proof.

CONSTANCE:
What?

JANE:
You said “full-proof.” Isn’t it “fool-proof”—even a fool can do it?

CONSTANCE:
Stop being so hard on yourself. *(to Matt)* As long as you’re here, I’m going up to the apartment again, check out the closets. Where’s that tape measure?

She grabs it and leaves. There is an awkward silence.

MATT:
Hey!

JANE:
Hey!

Short pause.

MATT:
You look great. It’s been too long.

JANE:
It has. But it’s great to see you. Both!

MATT:
Yeah! We’ve... She’s been very excited about this.

JANE:
Um... *(re the space)* This?

MATT:
Right. She wasn’t kidding about the business plan, you know.

JANE:
We’ll, this whole thing was a surprise to me. We’re supposed to having a heart-to-heart over lunch.

MATT:
Oh? She told me this was the main event.

JANE:
Really? Then... maybe it is!

MATT:
So is it something you’d consider? That real-estate person says it’s a good buy...

JANE:
Someone's already bought it.

MATT:
Ah. Gotta act fast, I guess.

JANE:
The idea was that I'd rent. It's zoned for mixed use, so I'd open up something down here and live upstairs.

MATT:
Now I remember. Some Korean guy? What's the apartment like?

JANE:
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.

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.

MATT:
Yeah, I hate her, too.

We start to hear noises from lump on the Matt's chest.

VOICE OF HOPE:
Mmmmmmmama... Maaama? Mama! Mmmmm...

JANE:
Ooooh! She's talking?

MATT:
She is! *(to Hope)* Trying to get "Dada" into the rotation more, but...

JANE:
(to Hope) Hey, there!

MATT:
(to Hope) Say hi to Auntie Janie? Say— Nope! Missed your chance. She's fast asleep again.

JANE:
Just like that?

MATT:

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

JANE:

I know how she feels.

MATT:

Yeah?

JANE:

I mean...

MATT:

So... How are things? I was sorry to hear about the house. That sucked.

JANE:

But thank you for your help.

MATT:

I'm sorry I wasn't able to really... do anything. You got the estate all straightened out?

JANE:

"Estate." Makes debt sound so grand.

MATT:

Well, he was white.

JANE:

That, he was.

MATT:

And he had kids...

JANE:

Well, everything got divided up and signed off—they're out of the picture. I just couldn't keep the house on my own.

MATT:

Sorry. And you're living in those apartments by the freeway?

JANE:

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

MATT:

Then this really isn't a possibility.

JANE:

Not in a million years.

MATT:

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

JANE:

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

MATT:

(interrupting) You have plenty of—

JANE:

(interrupting) Or interest!

MATT:

You know you're capable of—

JANE:

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

MATT:

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

JANE:

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

MATT:

You have us.

Short pause.

JANE:

Thanks.

MATT:

Come here.

He holds his arms out in a friendly gesture and after a moment she moves to him. He holds her, perhaps too tightly.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Mmmmmama?

JANE:

(to Hope) Oooooohhhhhh sorry!

MATT:

Ha ha ha. *(rocking the bundle)* Shhhhhh. She'll be out again in a sec.

Jane sets down her purse.

It's been over a year, right?

JANE:

Since...?

MATT:

Chance.

JANE:

Oh. Two.

MATT:

Really?

JANE:

Really.

MATT:

And you were only married for...

JANE:

A year and a half.

MATT:

So that means he's been gone longer than—

JANE:

(interrupting) Yes. He's been gone longer.

MATT:

That's funny to think about.

JANE:

Strange to think about.

Very short pause.

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.

MATT:

Everything?

JANE:

Pretty much! It all 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.

MATT:

She admires your "buoyancy."

JANE:

She does, does she? Lately I guess I feel more "un-moored" than usual.

MATT:

Bankruptcy can do that to you. But how do you think a lot of businesses stay "afloat?" Ha ha ha.

We see stylized images of attractive business people through the window, interacting with their devices. Their conversations are loud and proclamatory. One them involves Divina, an intense woman who obviously cares deeply about a great many things. She catches sight of Jane and Matt inside, and begins knocking on the glass.

DIVINA:

(through the glass) Hello?

MATT:

Hello!

Divina looks at them both, not seeing what she wants.

DIVINA:

(through the glass at Jane) Is...?

Matt looks to Jane: Does she recognize this woman?

JANE:

(to Matt) I have no idea.

DIVINA:

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

She moves quickly out of sight.

JANE:

Oh! *(to Matt)* That's the— I thought you knew her?

MATT:

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

Divina sweeps into the room.

DIVINA:

(to Jane) You must be the infamous Jane! Marvelous to finally meet you. *(to Matt)*
And...?

MATT:

Matt. We actually spoke on the—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) Yes! We did! So you're the husband! It's lovely that you're able to
take off work, for family.

MATT:

Ha ha, well, this week, more like the adjunct husband, home doing nothing.

DIVINA:

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

MATT:

You'd better ask my wife about that.

DIVINA:

Oh, I don't need to. And my goodness! I didn't even recognize little Hope. She just
keeps getting bigger and bigger.

MATT:

Ah, she's a little sensitive about that.

DIVINA:

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

MATT:

I was joking.

DIVINA:

Body image and girls is not something I take lightly.

MATT:

No pun intended?

Short pause.

DIVINA:

No. I could not adore your wife more, can I say that?

MATT:

Sure. I say it all the time.

DIVINA:

I'm glad; it needs to be said. You are blessed to have her.

MATT:

I agree.

DIVINA:

Good.

Very short pause.

Did she pick out that shirt?

JANE:

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

DIVINA:

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

JANE:

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. And the package, together... I'm sure you feel it: This is an incredible opportunity.

JANE:

Ha ha, that's what she keeps saying.

DIVINA:

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

JANE:

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 that I feel like I do know you. And have known you, for a long time. So with a little help from the man above, I wanted to make sure you got your foot in the door. I have a place just across the way, you know, and we women have to stick together!

MATT:

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

JANE:

Why don't I go be useful?

MATT:

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

DIVINA:

We would so appreciate that.

MATT:

I'm so on it.

He starts looking for the way out.

DIVINA:

(to Jane) You've had a chance to see everything. Do you have any questions? I think you'll fit right in; it's a very multi-cultural neighborhood. The owner's not here, is he?

JANE:

No.

DIVINA:

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

MATT:

Where are the stairs?

DIVINA:

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

MATT:

So you say.

DIVINA:

Exactly.

He leaves.

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

JANE:

Yes. And you work at the kids' school?

DIVINA:

I volunteer. I don't have any of my own, but children make everything worth it, don't they?

JANE:

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

DIVINA:

Don't worry; you've got time.

JANE:

So I've heard! Have you been in real estate long?

DIVINA:

I just dabble. Commercial investments. (*pointing out the window*) That's my little building, there.

JANE:

Ah! Sweet.

DIVINA:

I was heading in a more serious direction but with everything going up and down so quickly these days, I admit it: I got scared.

JANE:

For good reason.

DIVINA:

But we can't stay frightened forever! And now the market is getting hotter and hotter, so we rise like a phoenix from the flames and start again. Oh! No! I'm sorry! I'd completely forgotten about the fire. How you lost your parents in a fire. So tragic.

JANE:

Yeah, that's—

DIVINA:

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

JANE:

Thank you.

DIVINA:

Thank you for allowing me to share it.

JANE:

You're welcome.

DIVINA:

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

JANE:

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

DIVINA:

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

JANE:

It was absolutely great to meet you Divina, but honestly, I'm not in a great position right now. So even if I could afford this place, any new doors are locked tight.

DIVINA:

Oh, I know all about the bankruptcy.

JANE:

Oh.

DIVINA:

But what I also know is that there are keys. There are always keys for the right person.

JANE:

Really.

DIVINA:

Even without your husband. May he rest in peace. Or especially without him! Because I can see that the dark, emptiness that he left inside of you is crying out to be filled, and it will be! In a very short time.

We hear the sounds of a jackhammer and see a larger-than-life representation of beefy construction workers outside as Constance hurries into the room.

CONSTANCE:

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

DIVINA:

Don't you look positively radiant?!

CONSTANCE:

Thanks! Isn't this amazing? *(to Jane)* You got tons of room to expand up there if you knock out some walls, 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.

CONSTANCE:

Right? Boxes and boxes of memories gone. Just like that!

DIVINA:

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

CONSTANCE:

"Grab me! Rent me! Do it now!" And you two met.

DIVINA:

We're fast friends already. Soon to be neighbors?

JANE:

You live in your building?

She moves to the window to take another look. And as an escape. Also, the construction workers.

DIVINA:

Actually, no: I'm past that phase of my life. I do plan to spend a lot of time "in the hood," however!

CONSTANCE:

That's fantastic!

DIVINA:

Isn't it? This couldn't have worked out better! The energy in this room is going to feed me for weeks.

JANE:

Hey, is that a hot dog cart?

It is, an old-fashioned hot dog cart being pushed outside the window. Perhaps the construction workers gather around it.

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

CONSTANCE:

You're not serious, are you?

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

Since when don't you eat meat?

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

Really?

CONSTANCE:

It's for the kids, and I told you: We need to find somewhere we can talk.

JANE:

Then how about that place on the corner. You can have a tunamelt.

DIVINA:

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

CONSTANCE:

Good to know.

DIVINA:

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

CONSTANCE:

Right. *(to Jane)* My Uncle Javier has a taco stand? Let's stay away from food.

JANE:

What?

CONSTANCE:

(getting Jane back on the business track) I mean, take coffee house off the list, and you don't want to open a café or anything.

DIVINA:

But! You can't go wrong with resale. Especially baby clothes; there's a never-ending market, everything gets cycled back in!

CONSTANCE:

Oh! Yes! That is a fantastic idea!

We suddenly hear the patter of not-so-little feet upstairs and a squeal that doesn't sound particularly baby-like-

MATT:

(from upstairs) And where do you think you're off to?

DIVINA:

Now, there's a warning sound! No more rest for the wicked once they start walking!

JANE:

Wait. Walking?

CONSTANCE:

(to Divina) You can say that again.

JANE:

Hope's walking already?

CONSTANCE:

Sprinting. I can't keep up with her.

DIVINA:

It happens just like that. You blink and next thing you know...

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, her words more developed than last time we heard her) Bye bye Dada! Dada! Bye bye!

CONSTANCE:

They must put something in the food, now-a-days.

JANE:

Yeah...?

CONSTANCE:

At home, we're strictly organic. Oh! For lunch, there's that farm to table place across the bridge! It's supposed to be amazing.

JANE:

Sounds great.

CONSTANCE:

(to Divina) I have not seen nearly enough of my friend lately and we're making up for that, today. It used to be, we were inseparable. No secrets; we shared absolutely everything. *(to Jane)* Right?

Very short pause.

JANE:

Right!

She looks back out the window—the hot dogs are history. We again hear footsteps from upstairs. Louder this time.

MATT:

(from upstairs) Oh, no. You can't get away from me, missy!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, sounding even older) Ha ha ha ha I can I can I can I caaaan!

More laughing and footsteps. Jane moves towards the stairs to investigate.

CONSTANCE:

(to Divina) Did I tell you about how we met? Just about everyone in our dorm was white, and there we were, thrown together. Ten minutes later I realized I'd never known anyone like her, who'd been through what she had... and survived to talk about it!

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

MATT:

(from upstairs) Gotcha!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, sounding about 3 or 4) Daaaaad! Stop dat wight now!

DIVINA:

Little Hope certainly knows what she wants!

CONSTANCE:

All three of them! Don't have any idea where they got *that* from, ha ha ha.

MATT:

(from upstairs) Ha ha ha. Oh, yeah?

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) Yeeeeeeeah!

MATT:

(from upstairs) Really?

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) Weawwwwwwy!

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

(from upstairs) You gonna make me?

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) Nooooo!

More laughter.

CONSTANCE:

Or was it, "Three is as easy as two?" Geez, now I'm not sure.

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) I said no! Daddy! I said stop!!

MATT:

(from upstairs) Okay! Okay! You win!

The laughter continues.

CONSTANCE:

Is that bonkers? I can't remember. My mind is like a, a... *(to Jane)* what is it?

JANE:

(still tracking the voices) What? Oh. A sieve.

CONSTANCE:

I was going to say a strainer. Stuff just leaks out and hopefully none of the grey matter gets stuck in the holes. But that's what I have a husband for, right?

DIVINA:

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

CONSTANCE:

Not to her face, anyway!

DIVINA:

I know it's all god's plan, but still: I wish I could've...

CONSTANCE:

Ooooooh... *(to Jane)* It really is heart-breaking. Divina and her husband tried everything, and then—

DIVINA:

(interrupting) No, no—none of my sad tales can even begin to touch the tragedies of Jane.

CONSTANCE:

(to Jane) Which is why we're turning it all around here today! Only positive things from this point forward for my friend. We're opening things up for you, making this a place to process all of the grief and sorrow and violence and betrayal... so that you'll finally be able to settle down and create.

Pause.

JANE:

What if I don't want to create?

CONSTANCE:

That's ridiculous.

JANE:

Why is it ridiculous?

CONSTANCE:

We've been through this before. Start with creating a business. Think of it as a career move!

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

A job you hate! Do you know how wrong that is?

JANE:

What, employment?

CONSTANCE:

Please. I know you, Jane. When you're shut down like this, you just need a little push.

JANE:

You don't— I am not the same the person I was when we were in college, Constance! A lot has happened since then.

CONSTANCE:

And you didn't deserve any of it! *(to Divina)* I told you about the car accident? She doesn't drive, anymore.

JANE:

What does that have to do with—?

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) Because I made sure this is close to all sorts of public transportation!

JANE:

Okay. That was very kind of you, but I can make my own decisions.

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

And right now I need time to figure out what that is!

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

Of course you do!

JANE:

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

Short pause.

DIVINA:

A space in your heart and your home, for others, and all of that love you poured into your marriage.

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

Don't do that to yourself.

JANE:

(to Divina) I'm sorry, but it was my husband's house. And my marriage—

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

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. In whatever way we can, we create. That's what we do.

JANE:

(to Constance) Does she know I don't even cook?

CONSTANCE:

She's talking about a family.

JANE:

Oh!

Short pause.

Of course! That's what this is all about.

We hear a loud thud and a prolonged wail from upstairs.

CONSTANCE:

(raising her voice) Honey?

MATT:

(from upstairs) She just tripped. She's not hurt!

CONSTANCE:

(to her husband) She's probably hungry.

MATT:

(from upstairs) So what should I do?

CONSTANCE:

(to her husband) Feed her!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, sounding more like a matter-of-fact 5 or 6 year-old) No! I don't want food. I'm not hungry. Do not tell me what I am, Mom!

CONSTANCE:

Well! I beg your pardon!

MATT:

(from upstairs, to Hope) So tell me! What are you? No food... maybe a ghost? A fairy? A mermaid?

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) Daaad! That's siwwy, moo maids eat food! And I am thusty. Vewy, vewy thusty! My mouth is so dwy I'm a dwy desewt, dat's what I am!

MATT:

(from upstairs) Uh...

CONSTANCE:

(to her husband) You didn't bring water? Or anything?

MATT:

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

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) Moooommmmm!

Dramatic moans resume.

CONSTANCE:

(to the other women) Do you believe this? Never leave home without a juice box.

She produces one from her bag.

DIVINA:

(reaching for it) Let me.

CONSTANCE:

Thank you, and here...

She hands her a small bag of goldfish, as well. Divina quickly leaves.

Man. As active as she is, I can't imagine him leaving the house without—

The wailing has stopped.

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

She hands Jane a flat package.

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

JANE:

Thanks.

CONSTANCE:

Uh oh. I scared you before, didn't I? The one-two-three 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 multi-colored squash blossoms. Look look look how sweet are those girls!?

JANE:

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'd already had kids?

CONSTANCE:

Of course not. You're the one who keeps talking about nothing! Having nothing. But nothing's going to happen if you don't make it happen. So first we get you the space. We get you set up and then we let nature take its course.

JANE:

"Mother" nature.

CONSTANCE:

I didn't say— But time is going to run out before you know it, and sweetie: If you wanted to try—which I figured you still did, right?—you have to start dealing with the elephant in the room.

JANE:

In this room?

CONSTANCE:

Your grief. I mean, of course Chance, but the thing is this: No one was more affected than me by your... earlier loss. You knew that, right? I mean, we never talked about it. I know 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 allowed yourself to truly grieve.

JANE:

I have no idea what you're talking about.

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

When I—

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) Oh, and this is bringing it all back. I'm going to start crying. Remember when you told me you were pregnant? I had just had Faith and Prudence was starting to talk; I was so excited and 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 our husbands die off..."

JANE:

I certainly messed that up for you.

CONSTANCE:

You know what I mean. I'm sorry that sounds dumb, but I love you and that's what I was going through!

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

I only brought it up because I know how you handle these things. You keep your head down and never look back.

JANE:

You know, I do remember how excited you were. But you seem to have forgotten that 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.

CONSTANCE:

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.

JANE:

I'm sorry.

CONSTANCE:

It's okay. Like we said, everything's different now.

JANE:

No, I'm sorry you felt that way. I'm not sorry I didn't have a baby. I made the right choice and I'm very grateful I had that option.

CONSTANCE:

Of course! I know!

JANE:
Okay.

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

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

CONSTANCE:
You never told me that.

JANE:
No, I didn't.

CONSTANCE:
What happened?

JANE:
I had an abortion.

CONSTANCE:
What?

JANE:
I had—

CONSTANCE:
(interrupting) I don't understand.

JANE:
What don't you understand?

CONSTANCE:
Why you—

JANE:
(interrupting) Because we didn't want kids. He already had kids. And he was just diagnosed. We didn't know what was—

CONSTANCE:
(interrupting) Oh! Sweetie! I had no idea. I thought you guys were— You poor baby!

Matt comes into the room freed from the baby harness.

MATT:

Okay! Anyone else besides Hope ready for lunch?

JANE:

Yes! Let's go!

CONSTANCE:

I'm not hungry.

MATT:

Are you okay?

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

She begins to sob.

MATT:

All right! I mean, come here! Honey...

She does and he holds her.

Shhhhhh. It'll be okay. And I won't say anything else. I promise.

CONSTANCE:

(through her tears) No, I'm a dope. I'm a bad friend. *(to Jane)* Will you ever forgive me?

JANE:

For...?

CONSTANCE:

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!

MATT:

Honey?

JANE:

Hang on, he wasn't— Well, of course he could be an asshole, but he was sick! And he wasn't controlling me.

MATT:

I wouldn't have thought so.

CONSTANCE:

Me neither!

JANE:

Are you talking about babies? That was our decision, together.

MATT:

You didn't have any.

JANE:

That's what I'm saying.

CONSTANCE:

He was older; he'd already had kids.

JANE:

And we both decided that we didn't need children in our marriage.

CONSTANCE:

Because he already had them.

JANE:

That was part of it.

CONSTANCE:

And look where that left you. In your thirties and all alone!

JANE:

So you think I'd be better off right now with a... three-year-old kid? I wouldn't be able to survive!

Pause.

CONSTANCE:

You're right.

JANE:

I know.

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

(re this statement) Whoa! What was that?

We hear Divina's laughter and chatter from upstairs.

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, sounding even older—8 or 9) You know something? You don't listen very well. That is not what I said!

DIVINA:

(from upstairs) Ha ha ha, no?

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) No. I don't even like boys!

DIVINA:

(from upstairs) I'm not at all sure I believe you!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) But— Why not?

CONSTANCE:

I'd better get up there.

DIVINA:

(from upstairs) Because I don't think you know what you're saying!

JANE:

(re the voices, to Constance) What is going on?

CONSTANCE:

That's what I want to know! Have some goldfish.

She tosses a small bag to Jane and hurries out.

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) Just because you think something doesn't make it true. Specially not when it's other people!

CONSTANCE:

(offstage) All right, who's gonna tell me what's going on up here?

DIVINA:

(from upstairs) Mum's the word! Just having some girl talk!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs) "Muum?" Like, "Be quiet?" That's— You sound just like my mom! Or maybe that's what I should call her. What do you think, "Muuuuuum?"

Uproarious laughter from Divina as Matt moves to Jane.

MATT:

Jane, you're my witness: Tell me I'm not the only one who heard that.

JANE:

No! That's what I—! I've been thinking I was—!

MATT:

(interrupting) "You're right and I was wrong."

Very short pause.

JANE:

What?

MATT:

I don't think that's ever come out of my wife's mouth! And, "I'm sorry!"

JANE:

No. That's not what I meant. Is that really...?

The voices from upstairs have entirely faded away.

MATT:

Is what really?

JANE:

I— I guess I'm just— This is not at all what I expected, today.

MATT:

Me neither! "I was wrong!" Too bad I didn't record that!

Almost unconsciously, Jane opens the goldfish. Outside of the window, we see a small, old man, maybe in silhouette. He begins to paste up newsprint flyers directly onto the glass.

MATT:

(picking up Jane's gift) Hey, she gave you a calendar. Cute, huh?

JANE:

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

MATT:

Then maybe you shouldn't.

JANE:

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

Short pause.

MATT:

We should have gotten you one with cats?

JANE:

Fuck you.

MATT:

Okay.

JANE:

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

MATT:

What's "this?"

JANE:

Oh, everything being about me having kids.

MATT:

Like everything... today?

JANE:

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 cause of all my misery.

MATT:

You're miserable?

JANE:

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

MATT:

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

JANE:

And as a man.

MATT:

Thank you for noticing.

JANE:

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

MATT:

Is there?

JANE:

Jesus, you too?

MATT:

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

JANE:

But what I wanna know is how everything seems to have shifted here.

MATT:

What do you mean?

JANE:

It's like my womb's suddenly a retail opportunity. Like my only choice is not if, but when.

MATT:

She just wants you to be happy.

JANE:

And what if I never have kids? Will your wife cut me off?

MATT:

My wife would never— We would never cut you off.

JANE:

I have absolutely no interest in conversations about breastfeeding. Is something wrong with me?

MATT:

Nothing's wrong with you.

JANE:

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

MATT:

So why not just keep your options open?

JANE:
Another reason not to have a baby.

MATT:
Yeah? I'm just sayin'...

He opens the calendar.

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

JANE:
Yeah.

MATT:
You don't know what you're missing!

JANE:
I'm missing the spectacular lunch your wife promised me, that's what I'm missing.

MATT:
Excellent! When do we leave?

JANE:
That's just what I've been—

DIVINA:
(interrupting) And what are the two of you doing down here, hiding in the shadows?

Divina has appeared. The papers on the window have blocked some light.

JANE:
Nothing! We weren't—

MATT:
(interrupting, pointing to the window) Hey, what's going on out there?

The old man continues to put up more layers, sepia-toned flyers full of old-timey images.

DIVINA:
Isn't it extraordinary? I saw that dear man plastering away from upstairs. He's marvelous, isn't he? Takes me back to when life was simple. Right was right, we all knew our roles and how to be there for one another.

JANE:
What does that—?

DIVINA:

(interrupting) But don't worry! Even if a solid barricade went up down here, you've got wonderful light up there. And privacy! Almost unheard of in a commercial property like this.

JANE:

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

DIVINA:

This is a very helpful community. He's spreading the good word about the clinic that's just opened in my building.

JANE:

A clinic?

DIVINA:

(interrupting) Oh! Didn't I mention? It's the reason we need you here! It's a welcoming haven for women in need—counseling and natural family planning services. We just got funding and, well, there's a bit of controversy about it so... he's helping to ensure transparency. This is for you.

As she hands Jane a juice box, we see someone walking with a picket sign outside, partially obscured by the papers over the window.

JANE:

What sort of controversy?

MATT:

Any more goldfish?

DIVINA:

You can certainly ask your wife. She'll be down shortly.

MATT:

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

JANE:

Is that— They're picketing the clinic? Right-to-lifers?

DIVINA:

No, no no no. Nothing like that. People are confused, that's all. We're living in very confusing times.

MATT:

(to Jane) Did she tell you we're pescetarians? It does feel kind of like a cult. But she loves that word.

CONSTANCE:

What word do I love?

Constance has joined them.

MATT:

“Pescetarian.”

CONSTANCE:

Oh. Yes. I do. We’re not vegetarians.

MATT:

Because we eat pesce.

JANE:

Wait. Where is Hope?

CONSTANCE:

She’s fine. She’s got her phone.

JANE:

Her what?

MATT:

I didn’t think she was old enough, either, but you can’t send kids to school without them.

CONSTANCE:

(to Jane) Don’t worry. Smartphone security is much better than it used to be. *(to Divina)* Did I tell you? That’s how they stole Jane’s identity.

DIVINA:

Yes: Through a text. Devastating.

MATT:

Speaking of school, any more goldfish?

JANE:

Okay. I have to get out of here.

CONSTANCE:

You want more snacks?

She produces another bag of goldfish.

JANE:

No, I need food. Real food.

MATT:

(re the goldfish) Then can I have those?

JANE:

Sure! I'll just pick something up and eat at my desk which is pretty much my stolen identity of a life right now.

CONSTANCE:

I was going to—

JANE:

(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.

CONSTANCE:

But this was about—

JANE:

(interrupting) Your grand plans for me, I know. We've been down this road before but I'm sorry: Right now I'm just not able to step into my world as you and apparently everyone else imagines it. Maybe part of me wishes I could, but I'm going to sit this one out. Okay? Next time maybe I'll be ready.

She looks for her purse.

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

CONSTANCE:

No. Wait!

JANE:

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

DIVINA:

Isn't it getting a little late for "next time," Jane?

JANE:

Excuse me?

CONSTANCE:

Right! *(re Divina)* She told me the owner's getting on a plane, tomorrow!

MATT:

(to Jane, handing them over) Take the goldfish.

JANE:

I don't want—!

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) And we haven't really had a chance to—

She's interrupted by voices from outside. There's another picketer and they're being confronted.

DIVINA:

Oh, my. That doesn't make for a very warm welcome, does it?

As she moves to the window, we hear noises from upstairs.

MATT:

(shouting upstairs) Hope! Be careful!

CONSTANCE:

That's all you got? "Be careful."

MATT:

I can dream, can't I?

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, sounding positively pre-teen) My god! Enough, already! I'm okay! Why can't you just leave me alone! Stop treating me like a baby!

JANE:

That's— How old is she?

CONSTANCE:

Not old enough to know better, apparently.

DIVINA:

It's such a difficult 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...

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

MATT:

You have a better one?

CONSTANCE:

Would you talk to her, Jane?

JANE:
To... Hope?

CONSTANCE:
Yes! I think she would listen, coming from you.

Loud music suddenly blasts out from upstairs, followed by a crash and a scream.

(shouting upstairs) Hope! What did I tell you about those ridiculous heels? You're going to break an ankle!

VOICE OF HOPE:
(from upstairs, shouting over the music) They're my favorite shoes! I'm fine!

CONSTANCE:
(to the room) Lord help us, she's dressing like some sort of... *(shouting, to Hope)* And put your earbuds in! No one wants to—! *(to her husband)* Honey?

MATT:
On it. *(to Hope)* Princess? You all right?

He hurries out.

CONSTANCE:
(calling after him) It's the rest of us you should worry about!

The music stops.

Finally! *(to Jane)* So can I count on you?

JANE:
For what?

CONSTANCE:
I'm her mom. Her highness won't listen to me, especially not when it comes to things like sex and sexuality and the non-stop changes in her body...

JANE:
Isn't she a little young?

DIVINA:
They're never too young these days.

CONSTANCE:
(to Jane) I was thinking, a cautionary tale...

DIVINA:

Yes! *(to Jane)* You could tell her about your uncle and his inappropriate advances when you were a child.

JANE:

“Inappropriate advances?” He molested me!

CONSTANCE:

That’s not inappropriate?

DIVINA:

(to Jane) 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!

JANE:

I’m sorry?

DIVINA:

Don’t be. One mistake, so many years ago, and now you can use it to let Hope know she’s not doing herself any favors, acting out of her own desires.

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

No! God, no!

DIVINA:

I’m not saying that at all.

JANE:

Because that would be very, very wrong.

DIVINA:

Of course it would!

CONSTANCE:

(to Jane) And it was such a long time ago!

DIVINA:

What I’m saying is that when life throws something at us—whatever it is, however traumatic 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.

CONSTANCE:

(to Jane) See? This is why I knew you two had to meet!

DIVINA:

Perhaps the rocky road you've traveled has led you here today, to send a message to others!

JANE:

Lady, it is just me here, trying to take care of myself! You can send your own damn messages!

DIVINA:

Jane, I know what you—

JANE:

(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.

JANE:

Where did you find her again?

CONSTANCE:

Are you mad at me?

JANE:

This was a terrible idea. Maybe I'll let you make it up to me. Maybe. Where's my purse?

CONSTANCE:

No no no no no.

We hear the sound of a shrill whistle outside.

JANE:

What the...?

Through the window we see Divina, a whistle around her neck, speaking to the group of school girls; their faces are pressed against the remaining spaces of glass, trying to peer in. It's all very parochial. The old man continues to plaster up papers.

What do you know about this whole "clinic" of hers? Something's not right out there.

CONSTANCE:

So let's just make everything right for you, in here!

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

It's not like that.

JANE:

Good!

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

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

JANE:

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

CONSTANCE:

Do you even have anyone left, now?

JANE:

No!

CONSTANCE:

Okay, then! So this is what I was trying to say before: Deep down you are one of the best people I've ever met. So let's make good things happen and you can *become* those good things.

JANE:

Just like that!

CONSTANCE:

Yes! I know you're scared, but you can't be afraid to let new experiences, new possibilities, new people, in. Believe me, it'll be like: "Yes! This is it! This is what I was missing!" Just wait! I mean, don't wait. Not too much longer!

Pause.

JANE:
Have you forgotten who you're talking to?

CONSTANCE:
No...

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

CONSTANCE:
Oh.

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

CONSTANCE:
Ohh, now I'm going to cry.

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

CONSTANCE:
Ohhhh.

JANE:
So does that mean I did?

CONSTANCE:
Whhhhhaat?

JANE:
Got what I deserved.

CONSTANCE:
Nooooo! You have to stop talking like that.

JANE:
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.

CONSTANCE:
Just stop stop stop stop. I love you and everything you've been through, yeah: it would have killed me, but like Divina was saying—

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

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) No, listen to me. I am so glad I'm your friend and no matter what, we've always been there for each other, right?

Another whistle and Jane sees the girls desperately gesturing toward the window as they're being moved away.

JANE:

What is—? Look at those girls! We shouldn't be spending a minute longer in this place!

CONSTANCE:

You know what? I don't blame you.

JANE:

Blame me? For what?

CONSTANCE:

For wanting to leave.

JANE:

That's good to know!

CONSTANCE:

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 tried, or thought I tried or I told myself I tried? But the last few years, with the girls and trying to hold my marriage—and the company!—together...

JANE:

What?

CONSTANCE:

I thought I could do this one thing for you. But am I just trying to make myself feel better? While everything falls apart and we face complete financial ruin?

JANE:

Wait. The company. Your husband's company?

CONSTANCE:

It's all a disaster. A complete disaster.

JANE:

That's what you wanted to talk about today?!

CONSTANCE:

So maybe I'm totally off base! Maybe it's me that's not processing! My *own* grief.
Or maybe I'm... I'm... Oh, what's the word?

JANE:

Projecting.

Very short pause.

CONSTANCE:

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

Divina appears.

DIVINA:

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

CONSTANCE:

Really? Oh, wow. This isn't what I expected! I mean, I didn't expect to be expecting!

DIVINA:

It's god's will!

JANE:

Fabulous.

The noises grow louder from outside—there are more protestors.

Will someone please tell me what is happening out there!?

DIVINA:

The community is gathering. In support of the clinic.

JANE:

In support? Really?

DIVINA:

Absolutely! And I was telling them about our plans for this space: a consignment shop for new mothers-to-be. Everyone's thrilled to have someone like you on board. You have a face these girls—and women here of all ages—will respond to.

CONSTANCE:

She does! That's what I was—

JANE:

(interrupting) Oh, no! *(to Divina)* There is no way I'm working for you.

DIVINA:

Of course not! You'd do your own sweet thing; set up shop here with clothes and toys and supplies and be the street sister everyone comes over to talk to!

CONSTANCE:

That sounds perfect!

DIVINA:

(to Jane) We'll get you up to speed on natural, non-hormonal family planning. We're already providing advice and referrals, and now, with the government helping us, we can transform the neighborhood!

JANE:

Jesus Christ...

DIVINA:

Oh, he's on board, too!

CONSTANCE:

(holding her belly) Maybe I should get some advice—this is definitely not what we had planned!

DIVINA:

Let me:

She puts her hand on Constance's soon-to-be-bump.

It's a boy!

CONSTANCE:

Really? We've always wanted a boy. I mean, I love my girls to pieces, but...

DIVINA:

Oh, I know. *(to Jane)* Keep your eye on unisex onesies, to start out with. They're affordable and we can order them in all sorts of hip patterns.

CONSTANCE:

(shouting upstairs) Honey! Honey!

We hear muted arguing upstairs, Matt and a teenage girl.

HOPE:

(from upstairs, to her father) That's not fair!

MATT:

(from upstairs, to Constance) We'll be right down!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, to her father) Why do you even pretend to care!

MATT:

(from upstairs, to Hope) I'm your father! That's my job!

VOICE OF HOPE:

(from upstairs, to her father) But you don't know anything about me, or my life! What I do, who I am? You have no right to tell me what to do! I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate all of you!

CONSTANCE:

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

More noises from outside, and Jane begins to move pieces of shelving units or other furniture next to the window so that she can see onto the street—only the top portion of the window remains unblocked.

JANE:

(to Divina) All right. I wanna know where those girls went.

DIVINA:

They're safe. This is all for them, you know, their future; the owner's helping me make sure of that.

CONSTANCE:

The owner. Where is he from, again?

DIVINA:

Arkansas. Or maybe North Carolina. Texas?

Matt comes into the room

MATT:

So here's my question: How many more years before we can run away from home?

CONSTANCE:

Honey! Guess what?

We hear shouting from outside.

MATT:

The neighbors are getting restless?

DIVINA:

Just a little hiccup. I'll be right back; need to be sure everyone's on the same page.

JANE:

A page from what century?

But Divina is gone.

This is insane.

She starts to climb the stacked furniture to see out of the window.

CONSTANCE:

(to her husband) Come here, you.

She reaches for his hand, and puts it on her stomach.

I am pregnant!

MATT:

What?

CONSTANCE:

It's a boy!

MATT:

Really? I thought we were...

CONSTANCE:

I thought so, too.

MATT:

Well!

CONSTANCE:

Right?

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

We can do that.

MATT:

But not your belt. Not literally.

CONSTANCE:

Ha ha, I'm going to tell Hope. Now we'll have to make double sure she gets a diversity scholarship, huh?

She hurries out.

MATT:

Sorry, that's my wife! Always two steps ahead. Whatever the "race," ha ha ha.

Jane is perched precariously on the furniture; the shouting outside grows more intense.

Ooooh! Are you okay?

JANE:

I'm okay. I'm always okay. But something very not okay is happening out there.

MATT:

What is it?

JANE:

This clinic in her building? The people protesting are pro-choice. Which at first made no sense, but then she mentioned "the government" and I remembered: Doctors and women's clinics? They're under a gag rule if they want federal funding.

MATT:

Oh, right. What was that about?

JANE:

You can't tell a women about all of her options, or even make real referrals. But "natural" family planning pretty much takes abortion and a whole range of contraception right off of the table. So the money's rolling in and everyone's happy except for the women who, oh, might not want to have babies.

MATT:

How do you know this?

JANE:

How do you not? It's been happening for years, right alongside *actual* clinics closing and laws restricting access. But no one looks twice because on the surface it's all clean and cozy. I'd guess being called out has pissed off some very righteous people.

Jane turns and teeters on her perch.

MATT:

(moving to help her) Hey! Let me—

JANE:
(interrupting) No, I'm fine.

MATT:
I know, but...

Jane makes her way down to him.

JANE:
So! Another baby! Four kids!

MATT:
Yeah! Imagine that!

JANE:
And you're happy about this?

MATT:
Why wouldn't I be?

JANE:
"Belt tightening?"

MATT:
There is that.

JANE:
I do know a thing or two about being broke.

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

JANE:
Can you afford it, though? What about your company?

MATT:
What about it?

JANE:
She said there've been problems.

MATT:
A few layoffs and we've closed up this week. Things'll get better.

JANE:
Oh.

MATT:

Sorry to worry you. And if you need a few bucks, we can—

JANE:

(interrupting) No! No, I'm... It was just your wife's mention of "financial ruin."

MATT:

She said that?

JANE:

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

MATT:

She did?

JANE:

Not in so many words. She intimidated it.

MATT:

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

JANE:

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!

MATT:

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

JANE:

Apparently not. Where's my fucking purse?

MATT:

So what are we gonna do, huh?

JANE:

"God's will!"

A sudden swell of voices from outside.

MATT:

Whoa! Haven't those people heard about the gag rule?

JANE:

Very funny.

MATT:
You really want to go out there?

JANE:
I... I don't know what I want.

Matt again opens up his arms to her.

MATT:
Come here.

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

JANE:
Thanks.

MATT:
My pleasure.

JANE:
Me too.

MATT:
Good.

Jane breaks the embrace.

JANE:
I'm not sorry, you know.

MATT:
Okay.

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

MATT:
Oh. Yes! That night.

Short pause.

Definitely a mistake.

Short pause.

And... the afternoon?

JANE:
Last year? I don't think that counts.

MATT:
No?

JANE:
No. Because we didn't really...

MATT:
No. Not really.

JANE:
But that night. It was right after Chance died.

MATT:
I know.

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

MATT:
You were.

JANE:
And you were there.

MATT:
Yeah.

Pause.

JANE:
Does that make me sound awful? I think about it a lot. And of course I was sorry. For a long time. So sorry. I felt terrible. For her. And for my husband! Of course, he was dead. But still...

MATT:
Of course!

JANE:
That whole time was 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—just the memory—feels like something I can still put my hands around. Something that I took for myself and even though I know it was wrong, it's still mine. It's one thing I still have.

MATT:
That's... I'm glad.

JANE:
Good!

MATT:
But... if we're getting all proprietary, here, can I have the afternoon?

JANE:
Ha ha. I guess. I mean, it wasn't really—

MATT:
(interrupting) It wasn't nothing.

Short pause.

JANE:
No. It wasn't.

MATT:
I love my wife.

JANE:
I do, too. And I'm so grateful she never found out.

Very short pause.

MATT:
Oh.

JANE:
Oh?

MATT:
I kinda thought you knew.

JANE:
Knew what?

MATT:
That you'd talked about it. You two. Constance knows. I thought you guys must have—

JANE:
(interrupting) How did she—?

MATT:

(interrupting) I told her.

JANE:

When?

MATT:

Last year. After... what didn't happen, happened. I'm sorry, but I could never keep something like that from her.

JANE:

You did for over a year.

MATT:

I told her it was my fault. That it happened. Both times.

JANE:

There was only the one—!

MATT:

(interrupting) She is amazing, though! It took a while, but she forgave me. And you, well...

He again holds out his arms to her, but Jane does not respond.

Well. She loves you.

Divina reappears, flushed.

DIVINA:

(to Jane) You are loved. Never forget that. And you have love to give, as well.

MATT:

Chance was one lucky asshole.

DIVINA:

(to Jane) But I'm talking about a different sort of love, you must realize that, now.

JANE:

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 who are you to say that the all choices you've made were really yours to make?

JANE:

What did you just say?

Constance quickly enters the room.

CONSTANCE:

Oh my god oh my god oh my god oh my god.

MATT:

Honey! Are you all right?

CONSTANCE:

I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know.

MATT:

The baby?

CONSTANCE:

Ahhhh!

MATT:

It's okay! It's okay! Honey! What happened?

DIVINA:

The baby's fine.

MATT:

(to his wife) Yeah?

CONSTANCE:

Yeahhhh.

DIVINA:

Believe me. Everything's fine.

CONSTANCE:

It's noooooot!

DIVINA:

You're right, it's *more* than fine! We've been blessed here with not one, but two babies!

MATT:

Twins?

CONSTANCE:

Noooo! It's Hope! She's pregnant!

MATT:

What?

DIVINA:

Isn't that wonderful!

JANE:

Hope?

MATT:

My baby?

CONSTANCE:

She's not a baby anymore!

DIVINA:

No, she's a beautiful young woman! And soon to be, a mother!

MATT:

No that's... That's not possible. How is this possible? I'm not— Oh, shit. I'm not ready for this!

CONSTANCE:

None of us are! What is she gonna do? What in the world is she gonna... Ahhhhh!

She throws herself into Matt's arms.

JANE:

I'm so sorry.

DIVINA:

There's nothing to be sorry about. Nothing at all. Yes, this was brought about by unfortunate circumstances, but Hope has been given a gift which transcends that!

JANE:

What are you talking about?

DIVINA:

A child of rape is still a child of god.

Silence.

CONSTANCE:

What?

MATT:

My daughter was—?

CONSTANCE:

When did—?

DIVINA:

(interrupting) No no no, all we need to worry about now is honoring the precious gift of new life!

JANE:

Okay! That's enough. If Hope was raped, that does not even remotely involve you.

DIVINA:

It involves us all!

JANE:

What do you know about rape, or what it can do to a woman's life?

DIVINA:

Not like you, of course. But that's what allows you to reach girls who have strayed in a way that no one else can!

JANE:

It is time for you to go.

DIVINA:

And you'll be right behind me? I want to—

JANE:

(interrupting) I'm not gonna be anywhere near you! Or your little "natural" clinic—you're not fooling anyone, you know!

DIVINA:

We're not trying to! Welcoming havens like ours are serving the needs of women, all across the country!

JANE:

That's not what women need. Not all women.

DIVINA:

Need, or think they need? Now, I know your people—

JANE:

(interrupting) "My people?"

DIVINA:

Who have historically been made to surrender your bodies, been betrayed by medical practitioners and the healthcare system. But on our path together we'll—

JANE:

(interrupting) Oh no, you and me? There is no "our" path.

DIVINA:

But that's what's brought you here, where you were meant to be!

JANE:

What are you talking about?

DIVINA:

Think about it: How long have you been held down, afraid to take action lest misfortune strike again? You've felt abandoned, violated, 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. That, my friend, is why you're here. Not only for yourself, but for all women.

Very short pause.

And we can also expand into e-commerce: "Jane's Second Chance"—second-hand clothes for mobile moms. I've claimed the website, already.

She is gone. Perhaps the old-fashioned images on the newsprint begin to flicker, like in a newsreel. After a long moment,

CONSTANCE:

This is not at all what was supposed to happen, today.

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

Okay.

Matt starts out, then turns back.

MATT:

Does she?

CONSTANCE:

What?

MATT:

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

CONSTANCE:

Right.

MATT:

Right. So, what now?

Short pause.

CONSTANCE:

I have no idea.

Very short pause.

MATT:

Okay.

He is gone.

CONSTANCE:

Oh, my god. I don't. I've absolutely no idea. None at all. What happens next? I am completely without a clue!

JANE:

Welcome to my world.

CONSTANCE:

You look away one second...

JANE:

Here's what Hope needs: We need to keep Divina's people away from her. She needs to know she doesn't have to have this baby.

Short pause.

CONSTANCE:

What if that's what she wants?

JANE:

How will she know if she's not offered a choice? That's the kind of world they want—where what she wants won't even matter.

CONSTANCE:

This all very confusing.

JANE:

It's not. Do you really want your daughter's life to become a foregone conclusion?

CONSTANCE:

Maybe we should talk to the owner.

JANE:

We should not have anything to do with—

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) You haven't even met him!

JANE:

I don't need to! Trust me on this: They are out there saying that our rights are wrong. And if he's part of it...

Short pause.

CONSTANCE:

Jane. What do you really think of me?

JANE:

I think we're very different people. But I love you.

CONSTANCE:

And I love you. I always will.

Very short pause.

No matter what.

Short pause.

JANE:

Oh. Right.

Very short pause.

I don't suppose this means anything, but all this time, I didn't know you knew.

CONSTANCE:

About...?

Short pause. She's going to make Jane say it.

JANE:

Me and Matt. It was just that one time—

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) And also last year.

Very short pause.

JANE:

Right.

CONSTANCE:

And I know. I know that you didn't know. That I knew.

JANE:

But when you told me you wanted to get together today, I wondered if that's what you wanted to—

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) It was a possibility.

JANE:

Why didn't you say anything?

CONSTANCE:

What was I supposed to have said? I know you fucked my husband?

Very short pause.

JANE:

Maybe?

CONSTANCE:

Consider it done.

JANE:

So do you... want to talk about it, now?

CONSTANCE:

No. I know you were at a terrible place. You'd just lost—

JANE:

(interrupting) Yes!

CONSTANCE:

And then there was the whole... non-baby thing. And everything else. And I think there was a part of me... that felt validated that you and I wanted the same thing. That was proud of you for grabbing what you needed. That was glad I could... help, in a way.

JANE:

Really?

CONSTANCE:

And there was another part that was very hurt because it was very mean.

JANE:

It was.

CONSTANCE:

And after he told me, I was sort of pleased I knew something you didn't and could also hate you a little and not feel one bit sorry for you.

JANE:

Ha— Am I allowed to laugh?

CONSTANCE:

I'm not just a stupid mother, Jane.

JANE:

I don't think that!

CONSTANCE:

Oh, sometimes you do. A family is all I ever really wanted and I really did think you wanted that, too.

JANE:

For a while, maybe?

CONSTANCE:

Right?

JANE:

But that was years ago. How is it possible that you have never, ever wavered? All this time?

CONSTANCE:

And how can you wake up every day and still get out of bed, not knowing what's ahead of you?

Short pause.

I guess that's why I wanted you to meet Divina.

JANE:

You—!

CONSTANCE:

(interrupting) Okay, okay, I get that I only saw what I wanted to see, but she's so... convincing!

JANE:

Which makes her even more dangerous!

CONSTANCE:

And she's so great with the kids.

JANE:

Constance! Don't you get it? That woman and the ones like her, they used to be out on the fringe, but now we've got a whole country full of them! They're telling us lies and twisting our faith and making our laws!

Short pause.

CONSTANCE:

And we let that happen, didn't we?

JANE:

We did.

CONSTANCE:

But it's not too late? You'll talk to Hope?

JANE:

Yes.

CONSTANCE:

Good. 'Cause I gotta pee.

She starts out and maybe Jane allows herself to laugh.

I do love you!

JANE:

Me, too!

She is gone. We start to hear new sounds coming from outside. Sounds that carry with them an energy we haven't felt, before. Jane moves toward the them, but is stopped by a small, frightened voice.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Hello?

JANE:

Hope! Hi!

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

It's okay.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Really? It's actually not. It's actually really impossibly far from okay...

JANE:

Okay. You... wanna come in, though?

VOICE OF HOPE:

No. That window's too big. And it's, like, all messed up. It seems like things could crash through that window, any minute, even with all that paper 'cause it's not like a wall, or anything. I mean, who even knows what's on the other side.

JANE:

Sure.

VOICE OF HOPE:

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

JANE:

I think you're right.

VOICE OF HOPE:

I think you're probably the only one.

JANE:

Ha ha. I know how you feel!

VOICE OF HOPE:

So, what: You guys were my age?

JANE:

What?

VOICE OF HOPE:

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

JANE:

Oh! Wow. Yeah, I guess we were.

VOICE OF HOPE:

You were in college.

JANE:

We were!

VOICE OF HOPE:

You know, that's all anyone ever talks about at my house. College. Even my sisters are college crazy.

JANE:

With your mom, that doesn't surprise me.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Because it's like she's stuck in time, there! And 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, I don't even know if I want to go to college. I don't even know what college really is. But you're not supposed to question it, or anything, so to me it's just, like, that's what people do. And what if I'm not one of those people?

JANE:

Have you said all that to your mother?

VOICE OF HOPE:

Uh, have you actually met her?

JANE:

I actually have! She's actually a pretty amazing person.

VOICE OF HOPE:

She thinks so.

JANE:

Me, too! And... I've always been a little bit jealous of her. It's like there's nothing she can't do or make happen.

VOICE OF HOPE:

But it's easy for her!

JANE:

Easy? Or expected?

VOICE OF HOPE:

Either way, that's not fair!

JANE:

No! It's not!

VOICE OF HOPE:

She doesn't get that for some people, it's tough!

JANE:

It is tough!

VOICE OF HOPE:

Super tough!

JANE:

Because 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.

Short pause.

JANE:

No. It didn't.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Why not? That was your choice?

JANE:

It was.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Are you sorry?

JANE:

No. And that's hard when it seems like everyone and everything is working together to make us sorry; but you know what? We all don't have to be moms.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Whoa. You going let my mom in on that?

JANE:

Hah. I already did.

VOICE OF HOPE:

And she, like, believed you? What's next, you don't have to get married?

JANE:

Yes! And you know what else? You don't have to...

A lightbulb goes on again for her, brighter and steadier this time.

JANE:

You don't have to like boys. You don't have to go to college. And you don't have to wait. You don't have to wait for anything or anyone. And if you find yourself in a situation you don't want to be in, you can do something about it. You can take your life back, at any time.

And the light illuminates something new.

Can I tell you something?

VOICE OF HOPE:

Like what, a story?

JANE:

No, something about being pregnant.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Uhhhhh...

JANE:

Don't worry. It's just that I've been thinking about this a lot, lately. So today... I guess it makes sense.

VOICE OF HOPE

I don't—

JANE:

(interrupting) What I found out is that when a woman is pregnant, some of the cells from the fetus escape into the woman's blood.

VOICE OF HOPE:

Ew. Like how pregnant?

JANE:

Pregnant at all. Even a day. A week.

VOICE OF HOPE:

I don't think I really want to—

JANE:

(interrupting) But listen to me—

VOICE OF HOPE:

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

JANE:

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?

JANE:

No. But she's still a woman. And 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 horrible.

JANE:

No. It's complicated. It turns out, these cells can be a good thing, help her fight disease. So just because she's changed, it doesn't mean she's...

VOICE OF HOPE:

Worse?

JANE:

It doesn't mean she's worse. 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.

JANE:

Then, you've got proof that you've been through something really tough, and you survived. But you are more than what's happened to you. A lot more. And no one can take that away. Ever.

From outside of the window, we hear a murmur of voices. There's something different and positive about this sound. The newsprint has faded, or melted in spots like old celluloid, so that we can see that the voices are coming from a huge crowd. Still in shadow, the young woman moves into the room, making her way toward Jane.

VOICE OF HOPE:

So... No matter what you do, life changes you. But you don't have to let it tell you who you are. Or what your story is. That's up to you.

JANE:

I... Ha ha ha ha.

VOICE OF HOPE:

That's not what you're saying?

JANE:

No, that's what you're saying!

Very short pause.

VOICE OF HOPE:
Ha ha ha ha.

JANE:
And yes. You're right.

She takes in the young woman, whom she can now see clearly even if we can't.

Only we can do that.

The women embrace one another. And through the window we start to see an image: many, many women and girls, some with signs, standing together, moving together, raising their voices. Together.

End of Play