

Dead People's Dishes

a play about what we hang onto and what we let go of, how we get through
by Jennie Webb

**Represented by:
Mary Alice Kier
Cine/Lit Representation
Dramatic/Film/Literary Management
310.413.8934
makier@att.net**

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**Jennie Webb
1977 Escarpa Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90041
323.828.8708
jenniewebbsite@gmail.com**

Dead People's Dishes

The play can be performed with 7 actors, most playing multiple characters.

Characters:

MAE 20s F any race—hot-tempered but tries to play it cool, not afraid of going to the dark side; hopefully learning not to stay there.

PK 20s NB (raised male) any race—an empathetic people pleaser, learning late (but not too late) how to get what they need.

SHARON early 70s F white—proud of her ability to be there for others, looking for a spark she's maybe lost or never quite found.

SHARON early 20s - early 40s F white—bright and impulsive, not particularly driven but can be dramatic, tries to hang onto joy.

HENRY early 20s - early 40s M Japanese American—somewhat guarded with a dry sense of humor, keeps track of things.

HAZEL 40s/50s F white—her cup is always half full, even if she has to wear really thick blinders to convince herself of that.

CONNIE 30s/40s F white—tries not to dwell on the emptiness, but when she looks around she just can't help herself.

LUCA 20s/30s M any race to play Italian American—knows what he has to do and what he has to say (and not say) to stay in the game.

ESPERANZA F 20s/30s Latina—a naturally curious people-person, speaks her mind even if she has to break the rules.

SANDRA late teens F Black or mixed race—smart and motivated, had to grow up way to fast and doesn't feel at all ready for what lies ahead.

MISS RHODES 30s F probably white—genuinely giving, she embraces the colorful, bohemian life she's cultivated for herself.

LYNN 30s any gender, any race—no-nonsense, tends to hold back and test, but has an open-ness and a soft spot for the wounded.

GLORIA early 30s F Latina—a realist with a strong connections to the past, she struggles with the burden of family & life expectations.

PANNA 30s/40s F any race—sees the world as a place of transformation and shines a very direct light on that when called upon.

DIANA 20s F Latina—a visionary who is able to channel that into a practical end, she craves and needs a connection to others.

Setting:

Various locations in the Greater Los Angeles area

Time:

May, 2021; February, 1971; June, 1943; July, 1964; August, 1984; April, 1992; November, 2018; December, 2021

NOTES

Casting:

*The play is written so that the actor playing **Sharon (2021)** can also play Hazel; the actor playing **PK** can also play Luca and Lynn; the actor playing **Mae** can also play Sandra; the actor playing **Connie** can also play Miss Rhodes and Panna; the actor playing **Esperanza** can also play Gloria and Diana. The actors playing **Henry** and **Sharon (1971-1992)** each cover a 20-year span.*

Most if not all characters were born in the US; no character should have an accent other than Western/Mid-Western US with the possible exception of Panna and/or Lynn.

The characters of Connie, Miss Rhodes, Lynn and Panna could be older, particularly if not doubling actors.

Dialogue:

— 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.

Characters talking over one another is indicated by columns within the script, with suggested staggering of overlap and emphasis.

SYNOPSIS

A play about what we hang onto, what we let go of and the weight of our losses, *Dead People's Dishes* is made up of stories which move through Los Angeles history to look at how we get through things, over and over again.

SPECIAL THANKS

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Director Margaret Shigeko Starbuck, Autumn Sylve, Amir Levi, Michelle Gillette, Jennifer Finch, Gavin Lee, Ivy Khan, Gloria Ines, Road Theatre Company; Jayne Taini, Jackie Emerson, Jonathan Ohye, Kate Prendergast, Rachael Hip-Flores, EST/LA; Makeda Deplet, Charlotte Munson, Scott Keiji Takeda, Pia Shah, Tania Verafield, Playwrights Union; Pipeline Collective, Inkwell Theater, Cynthia Wands, Amanda Bierbauer, Tanner Weber, Erik Emi, Amy Emi, densho.org; Heather Helinsky, Dramaturg.

This play is for my nieces and my grandmothers, and my mom.

Dead People's Dishes

"A Story and Some Bones"

May, 2021 – Silverlake

We hear birds along with light traffic; maybe the voices of kids walking by. It's a cool afternoon in LA and we're in a somewhat funky backyard patio. Overgrown greenery and decaying wood. A sense of settling. We see a white woman in her early 70s, Sharon, with Mae and PK, a young woman and non-binary person, both in their mid-20s. They're standing by a table covered with dishes. Too many dishes. There's also a ton of packing materials threatening to consume the table and its contents. Wearing a mask, Sharon is efficiently wrapping and packing up items. PK is mostly in examination mode, picking up and discarding. Mae has other interests.

MAE:

Right. But that's the beauty of it.

PK:

Ew. Did you say, "beauty?"

MAE:

Yeah, if it didn't work, no one would know. That's what the whole story is about. Everyone would just think you got food poisoning.

PK:

You did get food poisoning.

MAE:

Exactly. But not bad enough to—

She's interrupted by PK picking up an ornate, crescent-shaped dish decorated in a distinctive floral pattern.

PK:

Hey! Now here's a beautiful thing.

MAE:

What is that?

PK:

It's like a little china... tiara or something.

They hold it over their head.

SHARON:

(masked) Oh! That's—

PK:

(interrupting) Adorable! *(to Mae)* You've never seen this before?

MAE:

No. All of this stuff was... From my grandmother, I think? On my dad's side. I didn't even know it was there.

SHARON:

(taking off her mask, re the odd dish) There are probably more of those. This is all so beautiful; a very generous donation!

MAE:

My mom wanted to get rid of it.

SHARON:

She said it was up to you. It's your family's.

MAE:

My dad's family. Who I never really knew.

SHARON:

I'm sorry.

MAE:

Nothing to be sorry about, Mrs. N! We enthusiastically embrace the matrilineal in this house.

PK:

Your mom's a trip.

MAE:

And even when my dad was alive, let's just say he didn't take up much space.

SHARON:

Oh, I'm sure he—

MAE:

(interrupting) A joke. He liked to say he didn't carry much baggage.

SHARON:

Ha ha, well, that's—!

MAE:

(interrupting) Complete bullshit. Although my mom's line is, he never quite belonged here.

SHARON:

This house?

MAE:

This planet.

PK:

Hah!

MAE:

He did spend a lot of time looking up into space. At the stars. And the moon. All about the moon: I think maybe his grandfather worked on some moon radar thing back, like, forever ago.

PK:

Did I know that?

MAE:

Anyway! This was all packed away, I guess, for I don't know how long. Now my mom wants it out before she sells the house.

SHARON:

Well, it is a good time.

MAE:

What is?

SHARON:

To sell.

MAE:

That's just... How wrong is it that *now* is a good time for anything?

PK:

Will you stop?

MAE:

You know what I mean.

PK:

This is why I'm back in your life, Mae. It took a fire to come between us—

MAE:

(interrupting) I don't know if that's really—

PK:

(interrupting) And a pandemic to bring us back together, so do not go down that road. We can hug again. Disneyland is open. We survived over a year of the unimaginable and now good things are allowed to happen!

MAE:

Which particular part of the unimaginable are you—?

PK:

(interrupting) All of it! Like, collectively never before and never again!

MAE:
You think?

PK:
Yes! I do! I mean, look at you now: My girl, getting out into the world!

MAE:
The backyard, anyway.

PK:
Come on. I'm so proud of the work you're doing down at the Aquarium and this, think of it as lightening your load. You can swim free, friend, and all the while you're supporting the worthy efforts of... *(to Sharon)* What are the worthy efforts?

SHARON:
Silverlake schools' extra-curricular accessibility and inclusion.

PK:
See? Way worthy!

SHARON:
(to Mae) I'll leave anything you might want. My husband doesn't like a lot of things around the house and believe me, I get that! But sometimes you just have to open a door and let whatever it is, in. If it just feels right to hang onto, for whatever reason for however long. I mean, it could be anything. You don't have to try to make sense of it or justify it or figure out why it's important. Maybe it's not. But there is part of me, thinks of a china set, all its pieces, as members of a family, you know?

Mae picks up the peculiar looking dish.

PK:
That would be cute to put, like, earrings in, or something.

SHARON:
Or bones!

MAE:
Riiiiight.

SHARON:
I mean, that's what it's for. It's a bone dish.

MAE:
Seriously?

SHARON:

It's shaped like that to set beside a dinner plate. When you're eating fish, or chicken, even, you very discreetly put the bones on that plate. I remember my grandmother's service had a set. We'd use them on holidays when I was a little girl. I was quite enamored of them.

Very short pause.

Bone dishes.

They all take in the dish. Then,

MAE:

But what about steak?

PK:

Or! What if you're a vegetarian?

MAE:

A big, T-Bone Steak? That bone wouldn't even fit on there.

SHARON:

Ha ha. With a steak, you don't remove the bone, you eat around the bone.

MAE:

But you said chicken. You eat around chicken bones, too. Drumsticks.

PK:

Or wings!

MAE:

Right. Chicken wings.

PK:

Why do they make veggie wings without bones? They make fake meat, they should make fake bones.

SHARON:

I think the idea was that bones were not exactly desirable when dining? In good company, on good china, anyway. Better to pretend they didn't exist, ha ha.

MAE:

But they can be useful as a dining aid. Even in "good company"—wings on point.

PK:

Or ribs! Except veggie ribs. Again. Boneless.

MAE:

They have veggie ribs?

PK:

They're kind of delicious. But man, if they had bones...

MAE:

But ripping flesh off a bone is ultimate carnivore, isn't it?

PK:

Oh my god, or pork chops! Victor and I visited his cousins in Kansas and they had a barbeque, with these tasty, tasty pork chops that had bones sticking way out that you grabbed onto with one hand and, yeah, just ripped into it! A backyard full of white people—teeth gnashing and barbeque sauce all over their faces, like some Midwest horror movie.

MAE:

Wait. You're not a vegetarian now?

PK:

Why would you think that?

MAE:

Because of Victor. And you were talking about fake meat. Veggie meat.

PK:

You don't have to be a vegetarian to eat veggie meat.

MAE:

But I thought— When we were kids, weren't you a vegetarian for a while?

PK:

I was a vegan in 7th Grade. But I still ate some meat.

MAE:

How does that make you a vegan?

PK:

I was like a Buddhist vegan.

MAE:

You were a Buddhist?

PK:

No, I said, "like." Buddhists can eat whatever's offered. That's the way it works.

MAE:

For Buddhists!

PK:

Hey! I was in 7th Grade. I lived at home. I told my parents I was a vegan but there's only so much you can control when you're 12!

Short pause.

MAE:
Okay. So this story I was talking about, before.

PK:
Ugh! What is it with you and that story?

MAE:
It's a fantastic story!

SHARON:
Who did you say wrote it?

MAE:
It's an Amanda B story.

SHARON:
Oh!

PK:
You know Amanda B?

SHARON:
No, actually...

MAE:
Well. She's amazing.

SHARON:
I'll look her up.

MAE:
You should. You'll have to look pretty hard to find this story, though.

SHARON:
And what was it about, again?

PK:
Oh, god...

MAE:
This person who tries to end their life by eating spoiled food from the fridge.

PK:
Death by food poisoning. Pretty.

MAE:

Suicide by food poisoning. Oh! PK: I didn't mention this, before, but in the course of their... quest, they keep trying the worst, most disgusting, rotting things at the back of the fridge. Stuff that's completely unrecognizable as food, all blended together in sort of a pre-meditated smoothie. Only at one point they begin to add meat because a vegetarian diet does not provide enough toxic opportunities!

PK:

I told you, I'm not a—

MAE:

(interrupting) So the genius of this plan is that if it doesn't work—if you don't die—everyone thinks it was just food poisoning.

PK:

It was food poisoning!

MAE:

But it was also a suicide attempt, except no one knows that.

PK:

What difference does that make?

MAE:

All the difference! You take pills, you probably get taken to the hospital, get your stomach pumped, they label you as mental and that's that. For the rest of your life. Everyone keeps bringing it up. Or not but it's always there. Even if they pretend you're invisible, look the other way so they won't have to think about "What if?" Or they treat you like you're some alien being. Like you don't belong on this...

Very short pause.

But you just happen to eat bad leftovers, you go to the hospital, stomach's pumped and someone buys you a nice dinner. And you get to try again.

After a moment, she begins grabbing dishes, wrapping them in newspaper.

SHARON:

So what happened to him?

MAE:

Who?

SHARON:

The man in the story?

MAE:

Oh. It wasn't a man. Or maybe it was. You know, I don't think she ever specified. For some reason I always pictured a woman.

PK:

Because there are no other options?

MAE:

Yeah, well. Actually, I don't think I remember what happened. In the story. Funny.

SHARON:

Mae...

MAE:

Yeah?

SHARON:

Your father... It was an accident.

Short pause.

MAE:

I know that.

SHARON:

No one ever believed anything else.

PK:

(to Mae) We were sophomores?

MAE:

Juniors. It's been eight years.

PK:

You know what's funny? That was my first tragedy. By proxy, but still.

MAE:

You're welcome.

SHARON:

I'm sorry, why is that funny?

PK:

Now that we're all intimate with tragedy, who keeps track, anymore?

MAE:

He was a terrible driver. That's what my mother said. Totaled the car more than once. Fender benders all the time. But never when he drove with me. Never with me.

Short pause.

SHARON:

We were all very fond of him.

MAE:

Yeah. Me, too. We're done, here?

SHARON:

Just about. Will you hand me some of that bubble wrap? This is very high quality bone china!

PK:

Ha ha ha. "Bone china." Now that is funny. I mean...

They hold up the bone dish in front of them, like a smile.

MAE:

Is that why it's called "bone" china? Those dishes?

SHARON:

Oh, no! No. Hold it up to the light. You see that this has got such a warm color, and it's almost translucent? That's because—unlike porcelain or other ceramics—it's a complete transformation: it's made from bone ash.

PK:

Like...

SHARON:

Traditionally cow, I think. Ox? Good pieces like this may contain up to 45% bone ash.

PK:

(putting the dish down) Okay!

SHARON:

To be honest, when I was a child I never knew that. Mostly, those, I liked the shape. In my family we called them "moon dishes."

MAE:

Moon dishes.

Then she picks up the one in front of her.

MAE:

Mrs. N., is it okay if I keep this?

SHARON:

Call me Sharon, and absolutely. It's part of a set, so I'd guess there are—

MAE:

(interrupting) Nah, I only need the one.

PK:

Not planning to dine in good company?

MAE:

Ha ha.

PK:

Or *any* company?

Short pause.

MAE:

You know what? Hand 'em over. Maybe... I'll open that door. See what happens.

For a moment, Mae appears lighter. They start going through the dishes, looking for a particular pattern and lunar shape.

We're transported by a wave of sounds—space age radar blips. Maybe they wash over us and make us feel very small, and they transform into wires buzzing, after a short circuit or an almost connection. We're back on earth. We might hear bits of news reports telling us where and when.

**“Aftershocks”
February, 1971 – Culver City**

It's early morning and we're in the living room of a makeshift apartment with a small television and a couch covered with books and objects that don't seem to belong there. Stuff's on the ground, as well. Something big has happened here. We see Sharon in her early 20s, wearing a man's shirt that's too large for her. She carries a rotary phone with one hand and dials a number with the other, cradling the handset on her shoulder. Frustrated, she hangs up and re-dials. We hear the radio faintly from the other room and a Japanese American man, Henry, comes in, wearing boxers and a T-Shirt. He's a bit older than she is. He carries two mismatched mugs of coffee—one with a TV station logo; perhaps the other has a Peanuts cartoon.

HENRY:

I thought I had milk, but I don't.

SHARON:

No, that's okay. I don't—

HENRY:

(interrupting) I know you said that, but I thought maybe...

He hands her a mug and she sets down the phone.

SHARON:
Maybe?

HENRY:
Maybe you just said that.

SHARON:
Ha ha. Why would I say that if I didn't—

HENRY:
(interrupting) I don't know! To be... easy? I don't know.

SHARON:
Hang on. Did you just say—?

HENRY:
(interrupting) No! I mean, yes. But that's not what I meant. I meant... nice. To be nice? I don't... It's early. And you look really cute in my shirt.

SHARON:
Ha ha. Well... *(after a sip)* You make really good coffee.

HENRY:
Does that mean I'm forgiven?

SHARON:
Only because I'm being nice.

HENRY:
Lucky me!

They both feel pretty lucky at this moment.

The radio just said it was 6.5, on the Richter scale. That's major.

SHARON:
It certainly felt major. And nothing about it on TV?

HENRY:
Not last time I looked. National news is Apollo 14; supposed to be back home this afternoon.

He starts toward the TV.

They say it was worse out in the Valley, further west and up in San Fernando. Don't you—?

SHARON:
(interrupting) Yeah, close to—

Suddenly, a loud boom, and they both clutch their mugs to keep coffee from spilling. Yes, the earth is moving.

HENRY:

Whoa!

SHARON:

Is that...?!

HENRY:

Yeah, are you...?!

SHARON:

I...!

And it's over.

HENRY:

A quick one.

SHARON:

(with feigned familiarity) God I hate aftershocks.

HENRY:

I bet the phone lines are out. That's why you can't get through.

Sharon moves to the phone again and it begins to ring. She instinctively picks it up.

SHARON:

Hello? Oh. Hi... This is Sharon... Uh, yes, he's right here.

She hands the phone to Henry, mouthing "I'm sorry!" but he's not phased.

HENRY:

(into the phone) Hello? Oh, hi, Mom. Are you okay? I tried to call earlier—

The power, too? Are you sure you're safe in the house, maybe you should—

Really? Then good. I'll—

It's fine. A few books and things fell here, that's it.

Oh, that's... Sharon. Okay, I have to go.

No, I'm not supposed to work today. But I should keep the line clear in case...

Right. Of an emergency. I'm hanging up now; talk to you later.

He hangs up and smiles at Sharon, who is looking through fallen books.

SHARON:

You're a Sci Fi guy!

HENRY:

I am. That was my mom.

SHARON:

I got that. And I'm sorry if I put you in a... Sharon explaining situation. I just—

HENRY:

(interrupting) It's okay! Today... We just do the best we can.

SHARON:

Right.

Short pause.

HENRY:

She said they're covering it on Channel 4.

He moves to the TV and turns it on; we hear the sound of an improvised newscast. He adjusts the rabbit ears. Sharon takes stock of her attire, then the room.

SHARON:

Okay, then, I guess I should head home...

She finds her purse and heels.

HENRY:

Um, where exactly do you live?

SHARON:

On White Oak, near Chatsworth. It's in the sticks but my roommate's uncle—

HENRY:

(interrupting) It looks like they're evacuating that whole area. The dam up there is messed up; might bust open.

SHARON:

What?

HENRY:

My sister lives out there, with her kid. She's on her way to my mom's.

SHARON:

Shit! I have to—!

Very short pause.

HENRY:
What?

SHARON:
I have no idea! Oh, my god! Before I was thinking— I don't know what I was thinking. I mean, I've been in earthquakes, but nothing like this!

HENRY:
Me, neither. (*pointing to the TV*) Look at that: Great footage—that's the new hospital in Sylmar. Collapsed.

SHARON:
We're not far from there! Our apartment, the whole building could be...

HENRY:
They're trying to get people out; bodies are trapped between floors.

SHARON:
What if my roommates—? They could be crushed. Completely crushed, lying, dead. Or limbless. Under a pile of rubble!

HENRY:
Looks like the power's out. Electric lines are down. Gas leaks. Lots of fires.

SHARON:
Or burned to a crisp. Mutilated beyond recognition.

HENRY:
Well, hopefully they're evacuating, or else—

SHARON:
(*interrupting*) They could drown! Get trapped under some timbers or something and be struggling for air, or washed away, down some—!

HENRY:
(*interrupting*) I remember when one guy drowned in his car. (*re the TV*) Whoa. Look. See that truck? Flattened. The freeway overpass just fell right on it during the quake.

SHARON:
Oh my god! What if they—

HENRY:
(*interrupting*) Crawled out from under the rubble, escaped from the fire, piled into a neighbor's truck, raced down the streets to get ahead of the flood and then, boom?

Short pause.

SHARON:

Do you think that's funny?

HENRY:

A little?

Very short pause, then Sharon picks up the telephone again and starts to dial.

SHARON:

Very little. I know you want to keep it free, but—

HENRY:

(interrupting) I just said that to get rid of my mom.

Sharon smiles a little.

SHARON:

(into the phone) Hey! Hi! It's—

Yeah, I'm okay. *(looking at Henry)* At a friend's. In Culver City.

Really? Is everything—?

Shit. I mean, sorry. But good. I guess.

Okay. If they call again, will you give them this number?

She looks at Henry, again apologizing and at the same time asking for permission.

HENRY:

390 9274
9274

SHARON

390...

SHARON:

9274

Right. Thank you.

I don't... His name is Henry. I'll call you later? Bye.

She hangs up the phone.

I'm sorry. I just—

HENRY:

(interrupting) No, it's cool.

SHARON:

Thank you. That was Uncle Pete; my roommate's uncle.

HENRY:

Oh. And your—?

SHARON:

(interrupting) They're both fine. And the building is fine. Mostly fine.

HENRY:

Are they evacuating?

SHARON:

They are. They...

And she begins to cry. Hard. He starts to move to her but this is all very raw and new.

HENRY:

Heyyyyy! Are you okay?

SHARON:

No, I am not okay! For all we know half the City is destroyed!

HENRY:

But your building's okay?

SHARON:

Yeah, I mean, the water all splashed out of the pool. And everything fell out of the cabinets. Every piece of china is probably all smashed to bits.

HENRY:

You can get more dishes.

SHARON:

You don't understand. That was my grandmother's good china! She gave it to me and now, I... I could lose everything! My mother just sent me a box with all my dolls and stuff from when I was a kid? That's like, my entire history but he said my roommates just got into the car and didn't even have time to grab any of it! If we get flooded out I have no place to live and I don't even own the shirt on my back!

She picks up a small, shiny dress from the floor.

This could be everything I have to my name! My slutty work uniform!

HENRY:

Oh, it's not—

SHARON:

(interrupting) You know it is. Be honest: Was it me or the dress you took home?

HENRY:

Can you give me a minute?

SHARON:

Uh huh. It's all good in the bar at night—in the light of day I would get arrested.

HENRY:

What do you wear during the day?

SHARON:

I... During the day it's only the bartender.

HENRY:

That makes sense.

SHARON:

Glad something does. Shit. I just remembered: I left my car at work last night, didn't I?

HENRY:

You did.

SHARON:

So I don't even know if— it could be gone, too!

HENRY:

What, sucked into the earth?

SHARON:

That could happen!

HENRY:

It could!

SHARON:

You're awfully nonchalant about all of this!

HENRY:

Like you said, we've seen lots of earthquakes. And worse.

SHARON:

What's worse than an earthquake?

HENRY:

Well, depending on—

SHARON:

(interrupting) Never mind! I...

Very short pause.

SHARON:

I've only been out here a year. I'm from Chicago.

HENRY:

Oh.

Very short pause.

Well, if you need a place, you can stay here. I mean, it's only me.

Very short pause.

Just if. You know

Very short pause.

You want more coffee?

SHARON:

Thanks. A heater?

He picks up both mugs and goes back into the kitchen. Maybe she looks around the apartment with a new perspective.

How long have you lived here?

HENRY:

(offstage) I moved in—

SHARON:

(interrupting) I mean, in LA.

HENRY:

(offstage) Oh. Since I was... two?

SHARON:

Because you don't have an accent, or anything.

HENRY:

(offstage) No. I was born in Wyoming.

SHARON:

Wyoming? Your family's from there?

HENRY:

(offstage) No. We just... My family's from here. But I was born in a camp.

SHARON:
A what?

HENRY:
(offstage) A camp.

He comes out of the kitchen with her mug and a bowl decorated with a blue and white Asian pattern. Sharon is still at a loss.

An internment camp, during World War II. After Pearl Harbor, out here we were all evacuated. Basically carted off to prison for a few years.

SHARON:
Oh! I didn't...

Henry sets down the bowl and hands her the mug.

That was all before I was born, so... I'm sorry. You don't have to talk about it.

HENRY:
It's okay.

She takes a sip of coffee.

SHARON:
None for you?

HENRY:
I'm a one cup guy.

SHARON:
Good to know!

Very short pause.

Do you remember being there? In the... camp?

HENRY:
Heart Mountain. I have some memories, but they're— I remember pulling a toy.

SHARON:
That's sweet!

HENRY:
It was a can on a string. My toy. I think I was pulling it through the dust.

Henry picks up the bowl.

I was going to make cereal, but forgot: I don't have any milk.

He takes a handful of dried cereal, then offers it to her. Sharon takes a piece.

SHARON:

That's a pretty bowl. Is it from your family?

HENRY:

Nah, Salvation Army. Our family doesn't— It's not like we have a lot of heirlooms. My parents went to the camps with what they could carry; lost everything else. Then got sent home with nothing but a train ticket and \$25. Anything my mom's collected since then, she tends to hang onto.

SHARON:

Huh...

Very short pause.

HENRY:

Did I tell you... you look really great in that shirt?

She doesn't mind hearing it again. For the first time, she moves close to him and they both look at the TV screen. The newscaster is finding his groove.

The stream of sounds from the 1970s television transform into old timey radio, perhaps a too-cheery 1940s song.

**“Share and Share Alike”
June, 1943 – Pasadena**

We're in a bright, pastel kitchen. Everything is in its place and the curtains match the table cloth. It's mid-day and we see two women, both white; Hazel is in her 40s or 50s and Connie, probably a bit younger. They're looking with wonder at a large, covered soup tureen on the table. The bowl is decorated in a distinctive floral pattern that we've seen before.

CONNIE:

Can I tell you something? I haven't felt this excited in... I don't know how long!

HAZEL:

It feels so incredibly wicked but...

She dips into the tureen and lets a ladle of sugar spill luxuriously back into the bowl. It's a pretty sexy move.

What was I going to do? Let it go to waste?

CONNIE:

Ohhhhhhh that would be plain old... unpatriotic!

HAZEL:

A slap in the face to our soldiers!

CONNIE:

Uh huh!

HAZEL:

And all things being equal, what's the harm of a little "excess?"

CONNIE:

Excess? It's one bowl of sugar!

HAZEL:

Well... Two! If—

CONNIE:

(interrupting) Hell, yeah!

Hazel takes out a small box of sugar hidden in a cabinet as Connie pulls an empty sugar bowl from a bag. Hazel carefully fills the new, smaller bowl.

HAZEL:

You don't think he could get into trouble, do you?

CONNIE:

Who?

HAZEL:

The Italian at Jurgenson's.

CONNIE:

He doesn't work for the grocery; he makes sausage. And it's not as if he sold it to you.

HAZEL:

No! And I wouldn't have—

CONNIE:

(interrupting) Of course you wouldn't have!

Very short pause.

But he could have, you know. Sold it. On the... *Black Market*.

HAZEL:

I don't think he's *that* sort of Italian.

CONNIE:

He told you it fell off a truck? A whole crate of sugar?

HAZEL:

He and his family live down by the Parkway. And those delivery trucks take those curves like it's nobody's business!

CONNIE:

Then I'm sure that's possible: "The right place at the right time."

HAZEL:

He is a good family man. I've met every one of his daughters; he's got one son overseas, and the other—

CONNIE:

(interrupting) I believe you! But you should know, people have been talking.

HAZEL:

About the Italian?

CONNIE:

No. Not by name, anyway. They're saying there are ways to get things.

HAZEL:

That was tires. Gasoline.

CONNIE:

And fabric! Now it's almost everything. Meat—all the best cuts. Cheese, coffee...

HAZEL:

You know you can re-use your grounds.

CONNIE:

Ugh. For the war effort? And Ed's fine with that?

HAZEL:

What with ration books, I tell him, everyone gets his fair share. And here in Pasadena, we have our gardens and farms close by; eggs thanks to your chickens.

CONNIE:

Technically, they're my mother-in-law's.

HAZEL

All I'm saying is no one's going hungry!

CONNIE:

Certainly not the chickens.

HAZEL:

I do miss the Nakashima's strawberries, though.

CONNIE:
Yes!

HAZEL:
But like they say: We are all in this together!

Short pause.

CONNIE:
Hazel. I know this is going to sound un-American, but don't you just get worn out?

HAZEL:
What do you mean?

CONNIE:
Day after day after day... At first, it was Pearl Harbor. Which was terrible.

HAZEL:
Shocking, is what it was!

CONNIE:
And then, last year, all the kerfuffle and learning to adjust, which you'd expect...

HAZEL:
It is a world war.

CONNIE:
But look at the calendar, it's June already! 1943. It's going on two years and we're still in the thick of it, in how many countries? And even here, at home, everything feels... different.

HAZEL:
We all have to make sacrifices, Connie!

CONNIE:
I know that. And I realize that I am very fortunate.

HAZEL:
We all are.

CONNIE:
Jim's got a job in munitions, even with his bum leg; my kids are still too young to serve and your boy's safe back East, in the Signal Corps, what? Shooting radar at the moon?

HAZEL:
He's doing his part!

CONNIE:

Of course! All I'm saying is...

A knock on the back door startles them both.

HAZEL:

Oh! For land's sakes! I'll just—

She gestures towards the sugar bowls as she heads to the door. Connie tucks away her bowl and Hazel returns with a striking young man, Luca, carrying a large bag and a young Latina, Esperanza—she is very pregnant.

Well, look who's stopped by!

LUCA:

Luca Pontrelli. You can call me Luke.

HAZEL:

He's the Italian's son!

LUCA:

I... yes. And this is my wife, Esperanza.

ESPERANZA:

Nice to meet you.

HAZEL:

And you! "Esperanza." That's a beautiful name!

CONNIE:

(to Esperanza) How far along are you?

HAZEL:

Oh! Let me get you a chair, Esperanza. You shouldn't be—

ESPERANZA:

(interrupting) No, I'm fine. This baby is getting far too comfortable in there! I'm a week past my due date and she needs to make an entrance!

HAZEL:

Ha ha ha! I always wanted a daughter.

CONNIE:

You're sure it's a girl?

ESPERANZA:

It had better be! We've got two boys at home: twins.

HAZEL:

Twins! How do you like that?!

ESPERANZA:

I'm very fond of them both, but I'm sorry to say that they don't leave me much time to think about it!

HAZEL:

I wouldn't imagine so; one son was a handful, but twins!

ESPERANZA:

They run in my family.

HAZEL:

Is that a common thing? You all seem to have so many babies!

LUCA:

We really can't stay long. (*re Esperanza*) I'm trying to keep her close to home, these days.

ESPERANZA:

It's the middle of the day, sweetheart. Calm down. (*to Hazel*) I love this neighborhood. Your house is beautiful.

HAZEL:

Thank you! We love our little bungalow.

ESPERANZA:

And my father-in-law thinks the world of you. Says you're one of the good ones.

HAZEL:

I—

LUCA:

(*interrupting*) Yes! That's why we came here, because he... Because of his generosity.

HAZEL:

He's not in trouble, is he?

LUCA:

No, and that's what I'm trying to avoid.

ESPERANZA:

He says you're someone who can be trusted. From him, that means a lot.

HAZEL:

Oh!

CONNIE:

So this is about...

She reveals her sugar bowl.

HAZEL:

(to Luca) I'm apologize, Connie is one of my closest friends. I hope that's—

ESPERANZA:

(interrupting) No! It's fine!

HAZEL:

It just didn't seem right not to share!

ESPERANZA:

Exactly! *(to Luca)* See? *(to the women)* My husband, he doesn't trust anyone!

HAZEL:

My Ed's just the same! Believe me, Connie can keep a secret!

CONNIE:

I live two doors down.

ESPERANZA:

The chickens!

CONNIE:

Right.

ESPERANZA:

And what happened to that strawberry farm, not far from here?

HAZEL:

That belonged to the Nakashimas. I suppose it still does. But it's in sorry shape, anymore.

ESPERANZA:

I saw that; there are no more strawberries?

HAZEL:

No. Such a shame. You should have been here. The day before they left town people came and took every one of those plants. Pulled them right up from the ground; didn't pay them a cent, I heard. Granted, I don't know what the Nakashimas were planning to do with them. It's not like they could have...

ESPERANZA:

Excuse me. Did you say, "left town?" Weren't they rounded up and—?

LUCA:

(interrupting) As I was saying, *(to Hazel)* and as I'm sure my father explained to you, when he found that crate he also wanted to do the right thing. Share it with neighbors. Family. And people he admires.

HAZEL:

"Admires?" Really?

LUCA:

Oh, yes. But he's my father, and he didn't... think things through. Realize that what he was doing might get the wrong kind of attention. Or attention for the wrong reasons.

CONNIE:

Those reasons being...?

LUCA:

Events such as they are, it's best that he'd refrain from... publicly extending his generosity. And by the same token, it might not be advisable for him to keep this good luck to himself. To ourselves. Where it could be easily... misconstrued. If there was someone, perhaps, less trustworthy who—

ESPERANZA:

(interrupting) Oh, for goodness sake, Luca, out with it.

CONNIE:

Please! This is all sounding very—

HAZEL:

(interrupting) It's not as though he committed a crime, did he?

LUCA:

(interrupting) No! Not at all!

ESPERANZA:

There doesn't have to be a crime. They'll still use it as evidence.

HAZEL:

But how can they use—?

CONNIE:

(interrupting) Hazel: He's Italian.

LUCA:

And even if that weren't the case—

ESPERANZA:

(interrupting) Our family can't take any chances right now. Because of my brother.

CONNIE:

What did your brother do?

ESPERANZA:

He did nothing. They arrested him in the riots; we're trying to get him out.

HAZEL:

He's in one of those Zoot Suit gangs? He was in the riots?

ESPERANZA:

No! But yes, he... He was attacked, is what happened. He was out after dark, they stripped him naked, nearly killed him, then threw him in jail.

HAZEL:

I am so sorry!

ESPERANZA:

Thank you.

HAZEL:

I tell you, those hoodlums are destroying our country! The way they dress, *(to Connie)* talk about excess! Using yards and yards of fabric that should be keeping our soldiers in uniform, then getting their hooks in innocent young men like your brother, and—

ESPERANZA:

(interrupting) No, that's not what—!

LUCA:

(interrupting) We really must be going! But before we do, I'd like to ask you if I could impose on you to—

ESPERANZA:

(interrupting) Just do it, and we can leave!

After a brief moment, he empties his bag which contains many, many, many small boxes of sugar.

HAZEL:

Oh, my!

LUCA:

With my father's compliments.

ESPERANZA:

Keep them, give them to whoever.

LUCA:

From you, a secret that can be kept. But from my father, or any of us...

Very short pause.

CONNIE:
Of course.

HAZEL:
Where shall I say it all came from?

Short pause.

CONNIE:
It fell off a truck.

LUCA:
Yes. It truly did.

ESPERANZA:
Shall we?

She and Luca start out but before they are out the door, Esperanza turns back.

It was American soldiers who beat him up, you know. Good old boys in uniform. They were the ones prowling the streets, with clubs. Looking for anyone who looked like him, or was the wrong color, no matter what they happened be wearing.

HAZEL:
I— I don't understand.

CONNIE:
(to Esperanza) I'm sorry for all that you're going through. But I'm sure that *you* understand, this hasn't been easy for any of us.

ESPERANZA:
This being...?

CONNIE:
The war! Everything! waking up each morning to who knows what. I keep thinking, how much longer can it go on? I don't recognize my own country, sometimes!

HAZEL:
Oh, Connie. You can't think that way. Ed was watching the news last night and he says our troops have been making major progress, nearly annihilated the enemy in—!

Short but loaded pause.

LUCA:

Annihilated the enemy where?

HAZEL:

In Italy.

ESPERANZA:

Right. In Italy...

Suddenly, one of the sugar boxes splits open. We see white spreading over the table, onto the floor and who knows where else. It's sugar, after all.

We begin to hear the sound of small grains flowing, which grows louder and transitions into the sound of rushing water. A dangerous amount of water. Then, as it builds into a wave, it crashes. And subsides. We hear a coyote in the distance.

**“Fair Warning”
July, 1964 – Baldwin Hills**

It's early evening and we're outside on what appears to be an extended concrete slab. We see Henry, in his early 20s, happy to be with a young Black or mixed race woman in her late teens, Sandra, who seems a bit anxious. They are drinking beers and looking out at a pretty great view. And they're waiting for someone. Something.

SANDRA:

Are you hungry? I'm hungry.

HENRY:

I'm okay.

SANDRA:

I shoulda brought something. To snack on.

HENRY:

It's okay.

SANDRA:

I don't know why she's late!

HENRY:

Sandra, it's cool she was down with it, coming up here, and me, I just like being— I'm okay!

Very short pause.

SANDRA:

Okay.

They both look out again, and Henry points to a specific area.

HENRY:

Look: They're starting to re-build over on Cloverdale.

SANDRA:

Where?

HENRY:

Right there! The houses on the east side were completely washed away.

SANDRA:

Completely, completely?

HENRY:

Um, yes. Where were you last December?

SANDRA:

Moving into your house after our apartment filled with mud, thank you.

HENRY:

Thank my mom. But look: That's where it started. They found that crack in the dam, they watched it while it kept growing and—

SANDRA:

(interrupting) I know. We all got warnings and had to clear out.

HENRY:

Then when it finally burst open, a wall of water, no way to stop it. People on their roofs, on top of their cars? Or the cars floated away? One guy died in his and they found those two bodies, in the—

SANDRA:

I know! That was at Fedco!

HENRY:

Flood Central!

SANDRA:

I know! Henry, could you just...!

Short pause.

HENRY:

Sorry.

SANDRA:

It's not like I really think about it; it was a long time ago.

HENRY:
December?

SANDRA:
It feels like forever ago.

HENRY:
Or... seven months ago.

SANDRA:
Fine!

HENRY:
Hey, are you all right?

SANDRA:
I...

Very short pause.

I have to tell you, that was the crappiest Christmas, ever.

HENRY:
Okay. I won't take that personally.

SANDRA:
Sorry.

HENRY:
I did ask Judy why you wanted to stay with us.

SANDRA:
As opposed to hopping on a train to St. Louis on Christmas Eve? That would have been a happy holiday. Eating nasty egg-salad sandwiches with mom on the Union Pacific.

HENRY:
What's wrong with egg salad?

SANDRA:
Ach! Nothing!

They're joined by a joyful white woman, Miss Rhodes. She carries a rather bohemian picnic basket. Henry and Sandra instinctively hide their beers.

MISS RHODES:
Hello! I found you! I'm so so sorry I'm late! I thought I knew how to get up here but got all twisted around!

SANDRA:

Hi, Miss Rhodes!

MISS RHODES:

(re Henry) And... I thought Judy was coming?

HENRY:

Hi.

SANDRA:

This Henry, Judy's brother.

MISS RHODES:

Oh! Groovy! Hi!

SANDRA:

Judy had to work at the last minute.

HENRY:

And it was my idea, coming here; I didn't want to leave her alone.

SANDRA:

What? You said you—

MISS RHODES:

(interrupting) Hey! It's summer. I'm not your teacher anymore. You're on your way to college. What's a little... trespassing among friends?

HENRY:

Beer?

He reveals his bottle.

I'm twenty-one.

MISS RHODES:

Ha ha. Sure!

He reaches for another beer and Sandra reveals her own.

SANDRA:

I'm practicing for college.

MISS RHODES:

Like I said: No longer your teacher!

Henry hands Miss Rhodes a beer.

MISS RHODES:

And honestly, you are so mature, Sandra, I always forget how young you are.
Wow! Graduating at sixteen!

SANDRA:

I'm seventeen, now.

MISS RHODES:

And all on your own! But I'm so glad the Nakashimas were there for you. It's so special, what you and Judy have.

SANDRA:

She's the best best friend ever.

MISS RHODES:

And please please hang onto that as long as you can! Have you two been having fun since graduation?

SANDRA:

We've been working a lot.

MISS RHODES:

Summer jobs! Yeah! You like yours?

SANDRA:

I work at Fedco.

MISS RHODES:

Oh! Far out!

SANDRA:

Fedco?

MISS RHODES:

I mean, making a little extra bread. For school.

Very short pause.

And this is a view, huh? I'd never been up here, even before the flood.

HENRY:

You can see over there—a huge chunk of concrete's missing.

MISS RHODES:

Look at that. Feels just like yesterday, doesn't it?

HENRY:

Or seven months.

MISS RHODES:

I remember, we were all still in shock after the President was killed, and then this. Watching on the TV. I was so worried for all of you. And so glad no one was hurt!

HENRY:

Five people died.

MISS RHODES:

Of course, but they did such a wonderful job, alerting people so they could evacuate. You didn't have to?

HENRY:

We're over past La Brea, north of Jefferson.

MISS RHODES:

Good! This is such a wonderful neighborhood. *(to Sandra)* Yours was one of the most integrated classes in the whole country, did you know that?

SANDRA:

I guess.

MISS RHODES:

You even have the first Negro City Councilman! Tom Bradley worked so hard with the firemen and policemen... They say it could have been so much worse.

HENRY:

Over 250 million gallons of water, rushing out in less than two hours.

MISS RHODES:

Wow!

HENRY:

You saw the footage? I know the guy who shot it.

SANDRA:

Miss Rhodes: You live in Venice Beach, right?

MISS RHODES:

What?

SANDRA:

Don't you live—?

MISS RHODES:

(interrupting) In Venice! Yes, I do!

HENRY:

Venice?

SANDRA:

And right on the beach?

MISS RHODES:

It's really just a shack, but... Hey: You should come visit before school starts!
You and Judy!

SANDRA:

That'd be cool. We both have next weekend off, and we were thinking it would be fun to maybe—

MISS RHODES:

(interrupting) Definitely! Stay the weekend. My place is very small, but you can sleep on the floor. You're not my students, anymore! We'll have a gas!

HENRY:

When were you born?

MISS RHODES:

Excuse me?

HENRY:

I mean, did you live in Venice in in 1938?

MISS RHODES:

No, I was... very young.

SANDRA:

Anyway, that sounds neat: A weekend at the beach.

HENRY:

(to Miss Rhodes) But you know about the flood, back then?

SANDRA:

Judy loves the beach. And we've—

MISS RHODES:

(interrupting, to Henry) Here? Another one?

SANDRA:

We haven't been all summer.

HENRY:

(to Miss Rhodes) Yeah, but all over. Too many storms, one after another. Everything exploded; that's why they lined the river with concrete. Over a hundred people, dead. Venice was all underwater.

MISS RHODES:

Really!

HENRY:

That's what my mom told me. Her father and uncle went fishing from the front porch.

SANDRA:

Your family didn't live in Venice.

HENRY:

No, down south of Adams. They had a house, before WWII.

MISS RHODES:

That was in 1938?

HENRY:

And it was nothing compared to the St. Francis Dam, in '28—up past Newhall. When it burst, it killed over 400 people. They found bodies in trees, washed all the way out to Long Beach.

SANDRA:

Oh, my god! What is wrong with you? Can we talk about something besides floods and bodies, please?

MISS RHODES:

Ha ha ha. You are quite the expert, Henry!

HENRY:

Well, I... I'm with KTTV.

SANDRA:

He's training to be a camera man.

HENRY:

A grip.

MISS RHODES:

A TV job! Is your father in television, too?

HENRY:

No. He's a gardener.

MISS RHODES:

Oh!

HENRY:

I got the gig because of the flood. I met guys who were filming up here when it happened.

MISS RHODES:

Right on! Sometimes life just works out!

Short pause, then Henry points out at the street again.

HENRY:

A lot of those houses were his. My dad's. I mean, he took care of the gardens.

MISS RHODES:

But the way the neighborhood bounced back, it's almost like it never happened.

HENRY:

Um...

MISS RHODES:

I didn't mean that literally. But it is remarkable. I do love it over here. Like a safe little cocoon, people of all colors, all together!

HENRY:

Now, even more colorful. Nothing like a good disaster.

MISS RHODES:

What do you mean?

HENRY:

After the flood, something like 275 houses were destroyed, right? Gone. But even before that you know what else was gone? A whole lot of the white people. And those houses, the new ones being built? I'd lay money they're not moving back in.

Very short pause.

You want another beer?

MISS RHODES:

Oh. Thanks.

HENRY:

Cooler's in the car. Be right back.

Henry moves off and Miss Rhodes takes in Sandra.

MISS RHODES:

Well! We kind of got off track, didn't we? Are you hungry?

SANDRA:

I guess.

MISS RHODES:

Talking about what happened here. It must be hard for you.

SANDRA:

For me?

MISS RHODES:

Having been uprooted by it. Your mother leaving, losing everything...

SANDRA:

We didn't... I mean, we lost some stuff. But my mom was planning to move back anyway. So she just washed off anything she wanted. Packed it up and split and I'm fine! Starting fresh. It's not like I really even think about it.

MISS RHODES:

About...?

SANDRA:

The flood!

MISS RHODES:

You do have a lot going on. Lots of other things to think about!

SANDRA:

I do!

MISS RHODES:

Must be unreal for you kids, right now. So much happening. President Kennedy said it: "Every American should enjoy the privileges of being American without regard to his race or his color." And now that's protected by law. Someone like you: You have so much potential; big things are ahead of you! For all of us. "A great change is at hand." How exciting to be part of that!

Pause.

SANDRA:

What if I don't want to be?

MISS RHODES:

What?

SANDRA:

Be part of anything. I'm just trying to take care of myself. That feels big enough.

MISS RHODES:

Of course, but—

SANDRA:

(interrupting) Then maybe I could just have a nice picnic with my best friend—or, sure, even her brother who is like my brother but has turned into a weirdo—and my favorite teacher where we talk about college and having a sleepover at the beach in a little shack which I'm guessing is a whole lot better than our mud-filled apartment even before it was filled with mud, so yeah: I know there's stuff that's really, really bad in the world and there are things going on all over this country—even right here in our "safe little cocoon" you can feel it.

But just because you can see something coming, doesn't mean you're ready for it. And whatever it is, in 25 years will everyone have forgotten about it? Like cars floating off in the streets and houses disappearing in a wall of water?

So then there's me. Just me. Heading off to UCLA where right now I don't know if it'll be at all safe and I can't help thinking: What if, whatever I do—no matter how much "potential" I have... what if it's like... who cares because it's all going to be washed away, anyway? Like *I* never happened!

Pause.

MISS RHODES:

Sandra, I know—

SANDRA:

(interrupting) Do you? Do you, really?

Short pause.

MISS RHODES:

I... I got you this.

She takes a small package out of her basket and gives it to Sandra, who unwraps it. It's a coffee mug with a cartoon picture on it.

SANDRA:

Thanks. That's Charlie Brown, in bed?

MISS RHODES:

No, Linus. Lucy's little brother.

SANDRA:

(reading the caption on the mug) "Look at it this way. The day will happen whether you get up or not."

MISS RHODES:

I love Linus. And I thought... Well, I had a mug I held onto in college. It helped me through. My mother gave it to me. I started each day with it and...

SANDRA:

Thanks.

MISS RHODES:

Here's what I do know: Days will happen. One after another, over and over again. There's no way we can be ready for what that means. But the fact that we're here means we're a part of it, whether we like it or not.

Very short pause.

I suppose I could have gotten one with Snoopy. Dancing.

SANDRA:

No, this is tough. Thank you.

MISS RHODES:

You're very welcome.

Henry comes back with beers and his jacket.

HENRY:

Okay! We'd better hurry up and eat before the sun goes down. It gets very dark up here.

MISS RHODES:

I'll bet!

She starts to unpack the basket and turns on a small transistor radio as Henry puts his jacket over Sandra's shoulders.

HENRY:

I thought you might get cold.

SANDRA:

Thanks.

She holds out her mug and he pours beer into it.

HENRY:

Cute. Charlie Brown?

SANDRA:

Linus.

MISS RHODES:

I love Linus. And I hope you all like egg salad!

She holds out sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, then

SANDRA:
Groovy.

HENRY:
Okay!

Sandra and Henry exchange smiles. They begin to eat as the sun threatens to set behind them and we tune in to a popular 1960s song on the radio.

The song grows louder then transitions into a storm of sounds, a crowd chanting at a demonstration, people angry about a lot of things. The sounds drift away and fade into the lapping of soft beeps like you hear in a hospital room.

**“I Am a Fish”
August, 1984 – West Hollywood Adjacent**

Early morning, we're in a hospital. Everything is made of thick, beige plastic. We see a nurse, Lynn, busy behind a counter. Lynn keeps very, very busy. We hear more hospital noises. We hate those noises. Then, an automatic door opens and we see Sharon, now in her mid-30s. She seems dazed, bedraggled. She carries a large bag and a sweater which may be dragging on the ground.

LYNN:
Hello.

SHARON:
Hi. I didn't mean to— I went down to the visitor's room and I must have dozed off.

LYNN:
That is allowed.

SHARON:
Remind me of your name?

LYNN:
Lynn.

SHARON:
Sharon. Did I miss anything?

LYNN:
When your husband asks that, I'm never sure if he means the Olympics.

SHARON:
Ha ha. Right. Henry can be...

LYNN:

(looking at charts) Your sister-in-law is asleep now, but she seems to have had a rough night.

SHARON:

Oh?

LYNN:

Head injuries are like that. She was in and out when I got here this morning.

Lynn checks a clunky computer with a small monitor.

Is she a swimmer?

SHARON:

I don't... maybe? Probably. My husband has tickets to one of the women's events. When is that?

LYNN:

I'm not sure.

SHARON:

I wasn't— Why? Were you watching swimming last night?

LYNN:

No, my shift just started an hour ago.

SHARON:

Right. Sorry. I'm all...

She spies a clock.

Oh! It's later than I thought! *(considering a doorway nearby)* I should... You said she was "in and out?"

LYNN:

When I got here.

SHARON:

What qualifies as "in?" Does she know where she is, yet?

Very short pause.

LYNN:

"I am a fish."

Very short pause.

That's what she told me. Hence my question about swimming.

SHARON:
Huh.

The automatic door opens again and Henry, now in his early 40s, joins them with flowers under his arm, carrying two takeaway cups of coffee.

(to Henry) Hi!

She gives him a kiss and reaches for a cup.

Which one...?

HENRY:
(to Lynn) Light and sweet?

LYNN:
You noticed!

Henry hands Lynn a cup; Sharon's nabbed hers and is gathering her belongings.

None for you?

SHARON:
He's a one cup guy. *(to Henry)* Thank you. And nice flowers!

HENRY:
I didn't know what else to... How's Judy?

SHARON:
Apparently your sister is now a fish.

HENRY:
Um...

LYNN:
Still some disorientation. Her brain is still swollen. But she's heading the right direction.

SHARON:
She looks even worse, though. Her face...

LYNN:
Hematomas can become larger and more pronounced in the days after trauma. But no bones were broken and the surgeon is very good; she'll only have a small scar.

SHARON:
Okay. *(to Henry)* I'm gonna get going. Did you park in the same spot?

HENRY:

Yeah. And there's no traffic. All those "stay off the streets" warnings worked. We should host the Olympics every year.

SHARON:

Oh! When are your swimming tickets?

HENRY:

Last night.

SHARON:

You missed it?

HENRY:

I gave 'em to some guys at work.

SHARON:

You could have gone.

HENRY:

I could have.

Very short pause.

The Finals are on TV tonight. Women's 800 Meter Freestyle. It's going to be exciting. US women took Gold for 200, 400 and 600. Looking good for other events; men too. And we've great odds in Track and Field; with the Soviet Union out we might even have a chance for Gold in Gymnastics.

SHARON:

Okay! I'll go pick up Simon.

HENRY:

My mom said she was okay with keeping him.

SHARON:

Really? That's... Then I'll go home to bed! Enjoy my unemployment. Love you.

HENRY:

See you.

SHARON:

(to Lynn) Thank you!

But Lynn is busy. Sharon kisses Henry again and leaves. Henry holds the flowers. After a moment,

HENRY:

Can I go in and see her?

LYNN:

You can, but she's sleeping.... Your sister had a rough night. *(re the flowers)* She can't have those in her room, you know.

HENRY:

I thought they were talking about moving her.

LYNN:

Not for a few more days. We can keep them here at the desk until then?

HENRY:

You don't look that trustworthy.

LYNN:

Once again, very observant.

Short pause, then he hands over the flowers.

HENRY:

I'll risk it.

LYNN:

I'll get a vase.

HENRY:

I should have brought one.

LYNN:

No! Please. We have a whole room full of vases. It's actually a problem; one of the nurses refuses to throw them out. Be right back.

Lynn moves off with the flowers.

Henry is alone, with only hospital noises keeping him company. Perhaps he looks for a chair, but there are none in the hall. Henry closes his eyes and takes a deep breath. He quickly opens his eyes—hospital smells. We hate those smells.

Henry rolls his head. He holds his hands in back of him and stands up very straight. Then, suddenly, it's as if he's opened himself up and can imagine something being snatched away from him and it terrifies him. He brings his arms forward, across his chest. He holds himself for a long moment. Then, looks around. He is still alone.

We hear a loud beeping sound. Lynn returns with flowers in a glass vase and sets them on the counter.

LYNN:

Do you mind if I tell everyone they're from my secret admirer?

HENRY:
Go for it.

Lynn goes back to the monitor.

Can you tell me more about my sister, the fish?

LYNN:
It's something she said, this morning. "I am a fish." You're swimmers?

HENRY:
No. I mean, we swim, but not like... We had a pond with fish, when we were kids.

Short pause.

Have you been watching any? Olympic events?

LYNN:
I haven't.

HENRY:
Synchronized swimming starts next week. I couldn't get tickets.

LYNN:
That's a shame.

Short pause.

HENRY:
So if she's talking, does that mean the police can come see her?

LYNN:
Not yet.

HENRY:
She needs to progress to mammals?

LYNN:
As a starting point.

HENRY:
That makes sense.

Short pause.

No one has heard from her husband.

LYNN:
Oh.

HENRY:

Which is actually a good thing because I might kill him.

LYNN:

Then that is a good thing.

Short pause, then Lynn looks up from the monitor.

Has he done this before?

HENRY:

We haven't seen much of my sister in the past ten years. She married a jerk and had a kid but then he left. And she seemed to be doing okay except he came back. Even more of a jerk. And my parents cut her off.

LYNN:

Oh.

HENRY:

It's weird. It only recently occurred to me that our family... our family is kind of broken.

LYNN:

Broken?

HENRY:

Growing up, it was a sort of like everyone was out for themselves. Like we didn't really know how a family worked. But we didn't... it was just the way it was.

LYNN:

Do you blame your parents?

HENRY:

No. I blame war. I blame hate. And a government that feeds that hate.

LYNN:

Oh?

HENRY:

Sorry. That was...

LYNN:

No! It's—

HENRY:

(interrupting) You'd be a good bartender. Does everyone talk to you?

LYNN:

Not everyone. But I do mix a mean daiquiri.

HENRY:
Noted.

Lynn reaches for the charts again.

My parents met in the camps. A shaky beginning, as it turned out.

Perhaps he smiles to himself.

But not the good kind.

LYNN:
Is there a good kind?

HENRY:
That's another story, but I can definitely see my sister wanting to swim away. She once tried to talk to me about "inherited trauma." I blew her off, but maybe...

LYNN:
You're here, now. That's important.

HENRY:
And by some miracle my mom agreed to take care of her son. She hasn't seen him since he was a baby.

LYNN:
Sometimes it takes something horrible to heal old wounds. And I don't mean to be... I know *new* wounds are more my department.

HENRY:
All healing advice appreciated.

LYNN:
Having people here makes all the difference. Oh. And someone named Sandra stopped by earlier this morning? Said she was an old friend?

HENRY:
Sandra! Really!

LYNN:
(handing him a note) She asked if I'd give you her number.

HENRY:
I didn't even know they were still...

This hits him in an unexpected place.

Sandra. That's good.

LYNN:

It is good. When people don't have anyone, it's like, somehow, a very tangible supply gets cut off. I've got a patient in another unit who... I really shouldn't say anything.

HENRY:

Right.

Very short pause.

LYNN:

But someone does need to say something. He's not going to make it. And there's going to be no one to witness that, to mark that a life has ended except us, wearing masks and gloves and not knowing anything about that life. Because the people who do—and I have to believe they're there, somewhere—are too scared to be with him. So he's all alone, and there are more and more just like him coming in every day. Young men. Beautiful young men. It's the start of an epidemic, is what it is, but no one wants to talk about it so we keep losing lives to a horrible disease that feeds off of fear and shame!

HENRY:

I...

LYNN:

Now I'm sorry. That was completely inappropriate. But I get so angry. People should be allowed to love who they love.

Very short pause.

Your sister is going to be just fine.

HENRY:

Thanks.

Pause.

LYNN:

Do you really wish the Olympics were every year?

HENRY:

In LA? Well, like I said, no traffic is a plus. Where do you live?

LYNN:

West Hollywood. Not far from here.

HENRY:

Do you spend much time in other parts of the City?

LYNN:

Not unless I have to.

HENRY:

It's wild to see what's been going on. Gates—the Police Chief?—and Mayor Bradley are so concerned with LA's "gang" image that they've been locking up Mexican and Black kids for months now. Asians, too. Giving the LAPD military weapons. You should check out the security down by the Coliseum.

LYNN:

I don't go down there.

HENRY:

Well, if you want to know what a police state looks like...

LYNN:

In LA? I refuse to believe that.

Perhaps Henry smiles a different sort of smile, then looks at the flowers.

HENRY:

Those *are* nice.

LYNN:

Why don't you take them home? Or take them to your mother?

HENRY:

Oh, no. I do not carry anything into my mother's house. You have a room full of vases? She's got a garage full. The only way I'll be able to get rid of them is after she's...

LYNN:

Now there's an inheritance.

Very short pause.

HENRY:

Would you take them to him? Your patient? I mean, if that would be okay.

LYNN:

That would be very okay.

A garbled hospital announcement is interrupted by applause, then crowds cheering. Like at an athletic event, or City-wide celebration. It's very okay.

Until it isn't. And the crowd noises turn violent, before they're siphoned into a nearly traffic-free silence that's not at all what we expect in Los Angeles.

**"Just Get Along"
April, 1992 – Koreatown**

It's early evening and we're in a small apartment with lots of character and a large window. Next to or in front of it is a full length mirror. We see a Latina in her 30s, Gloria, in a simple but elegant off-white gown. She's looking at herself in the mirror, not at all certain about what she sees. There's an open gift box on the ground next to her. She doesn't notice when Sharon, now in her 40s, joins her, holding a bottle of champagne and a plate of cookies.

SHARON:

Oh, my god!

GLORIA:

(terrified) Oh! God! What?!

SHARON:

No! It's— I just— You look gorgeous!

GLORIA:

Sharon! I nearly jumped out of my skin!

SHARON:

Yeah, sorry. Nothing's... I mean, everything, but...

GLORIA:

Right.

We hear sirens passing on the street; she moves to the window.

I told you, driving over here I saw men with guns on top of the stores on Western. I was almost the only one on the road. They're blocking off streets—am I going to be able to get home?

SHARON:

Henry said there was looting, but the curfew's still south of the 10. He'd let us know if Bradley expands it. Champagne?

GLORIA:

Definitely.

Sharon takes two champagne flutes out of the box.

And thank you so much for those. They're gorgeous.

SHARON:

I noticed you didn't have any on your registry. Where are your priorities?

GLORIA:

I didn't want a shitload of dishes; forgot all about stemware.

Sharon hands her a filled glass.

SHARON:

Drink up. At least you don't have to work, tomorrow!

GLORIA:

They cancelled class. Do they want you in the office?

SHARON:

I'm only a temp; not going to worry about it. Let's talk about that dress! Gloria, what were you worried about? It's beautiful!

GLORIA:

You don't think it's too... I don't know.

SHARON:

No! And you look incredible in it.

GLORIA:

Old fashioned?

SHARON:

No! It's classic. You said it was your grandmother's?

GLORIA:

Simple.

SHARON:

No. Elegant. 1940s?

GLORIA:

Sounds right. My mother wore it, too.

SHARON:

Well, it's in great condition.

GLORIA:

It's lived in a sealed box. Waiting for this day.

SHARON:

It fits perfectly!

GLORIA:

And I do like it. I mean, I looked at pictures, growing up and...

SHARON:

Always dreamed you'd wear it?

GLORIA:

No. I always thought, "When I get married, I'm going to wear a big, fancy princess dress out to here!"

SHARON:

Ha ha ha. That was what I was supposed to wear—my mom's.

GLORIA:

And did you? Wear it?

SHARON:

Nah. We had a very small wedding. Barefoot on the beach. It was the '70s, you know.

GLORIA:

Ha ha.

SHARON:

But you! You have a lot of family, right?

GLORIA:

Oh, yeah. And so does he. Mine's a little put out we're doing it down in San Diego, but we're keeping it as low key as possible; found a nice spot.

SHARON:

And not a bad weekend to be getting out of town!

Another siren passes.

Why don't you just leave a day early? Is Carlos off, too?

GLORIA:

They're asking some security to stay on campus, but he's not scheduled.

SHARON:

Well, I can't wait for Sunday. It might be just me; the stupid TV station wants everyone to stay close by, even though Henry asked for the weekend off.

GLORIA:

You do know the City's on fire, Sharon. People are getting pulled out of their cars, the National Guard was called in, there's gunfire in the streets...

SHARON:

Yes, we've had the news on straight since everything broke out after the verdicts yesterday; I just needed... Henry went into work and I just wanted to not think about it.

GLORIA:
How is he doing, anyway?

SHARON:
What do you mean?

GLORIA:
He's Asian; you live in Koreatown? Talk about the wrong place at the wrong time!

We hear a very loud police helicopter and she puts down her champagne.

This was a bad idea, coming over tonight. I really should—

SHARON:
(interrupting) No! Please! Why don't you spend the night? I would love you to. Unless you think Carlos would mind.

GLORIA:
I didn't actually tell him I was coming. He thinks I'm at my parents'.

SHARON:
That's what I like to hear: A marriage built on lies.

GLORIA:
Wouldn't have it any other way.

She picks up her champagne again, and looks again in the mirror.

So. This is it, then! It's really okay?

SHARON:
It's perfect. And I have some pearls that were my grandmother's you can wear, if you want.

GLORIA:
Hey! Takes care of borrowed and old.

SHARON:
Done! What else?

GLORIA:
Buy a new pair of blue panties and call it a day?

SHARON:
Cheers!

GLORIA:
Salud!

They drink. The helicopter noise fades away.

GLORIA:
Weddings are weird, aren't they?

SHARON:
Mine certainly was. God. I was so young.

GLORIA:
How young?

SHARON:
Twenty-two.

GLORIA:
I'm thirty-two.

SHARON:
Still young.

GLORIA:
Although I have been engaged since my twenties...

SHARON:
Ha ha. I'd only known Henry less than a year.

GLORIA:
Swept you off your feet?

SHARON:
Long story. But you. Why now?

GLORIA:
Let's just say I'm not getting any younger and I want kids.

SHARON:
Ohhh you will be a great mom!

GLORIA:
I think so! You and Henry, you never...?

SHARON:
No. We decided that wasn't for us.

GLORIA:
How'd you two meet?

SHARON:
I was working at a bar close to his apartment. He stayed for last call.

GLORIA:
Ha ha ha. Is that what was weird?

SHARON:
No, actually... It was my grandmother.

GLORIA:
Your grandmother?

SHARON:
Who I adored.

GLORIA:
Right! I am crazy about mine. You'll meet her at the wedding.

SHARON:
Lovely!

GLORIA:
Her name is Esperanza, and she is fierce. Not afraid to speak her mind; doesn't let you get away with anything.

SHARON:
Sounds like you.

GLORIA:
Ha ha. In my family, she's the one who really sees me.

SHARON:
That's how I felt! Growing up! My grandma...

Short pause.

GLORIA:
What?

SHARON:
Well, you would not have met her at my wedding.

GLORIA:
Why? What happened?

SHARON:
Huh. It's been so long since I thought of this. Never mind, let's—

GLORIA:
(interrupting) No no no no, are we at the weird? Tell me!

Very short pause.

SHARON:

You know how things can suddenly change—like the world shifts and everything's different, just like that?

GLORIA:

I do.

SHARON:

Okay. I had gone home, to Chicago, late that summer after I'd met Henry. 1971. I'd already moved in with him and was very excited to show them my tiny diamond chip. My parents—and my grandmother, who lived down the street then—had talked to him on the phone. Loved him. But I'm sure they were relieved he was planning to make an honest woman of me?

GLORIA:

My father pretends I still live at home.

SHARON:

So I'd just gotten in—mostly connecting flights, then—and my bags are in the hall and it's hot and sticky and I flash my ring and my dad offers me a beer so obviously everything is as it should be and we sit down and my grandmother asks me for a picture of Henry.

And I'm thinking, "She's never seen a picture?" because I'm sure I've sent a bunch home, so I open up my wallet and show her the one we'd just taken where he looks especially handsome, and I look up at her... and watch the color drain from her face. I'm looking at the whitest of women and she's getting even whiter.

I say, "Grandma! What's wrong?" And my parents are shooting these strange looks at each other. Not saying a thing.

"What is going on?"

And then my wonderful, beloved grandmother looks up at me, and says, "He's a Jap! How can you marry a Jap?"

GLORIA:

Oh no.

SHARON:

My mother tries to explain to me: The war, you know. World War II. She'd lost her younger brother in Pearl Harbor. This was a line that could not be crossed.

My life would be ruined, my grandmother told me. And she never met him.

We again hear a siren.

GLORIA:

Sharon, I'm sorry...

SHARON:

No, I'm sorry! I didn't mean for tonight to be about me. It was supposed to be celebration of all things happy wedding!

GLORIA:

In the middle of a riot.

SHARON:

Well. Yeah. But to be honest, if my grandmother hadn't played the racist card, I might not even have gotten married. Let's just say it escalated the whole thing.

GLORIA:

Well, if I'm honest—*(holding out her empty glass)* and yes please, more champagne—the real reason this is happening now is my grandmother. By way of my mother, who is convinced grandma's time is up and I should put on the dress before she keels over.

SHARON:

Ha ha! Oh, I mean...

She refills glasses as an apology for her reaction.

GLORIA:

No, it's fine. She's fine and Carlos and I figured we'd get married someday. So does the "why now" or "who for" even matter?

SHARON:

He's a good guy.

GLORIA:

He is! Although Esperanza does have some issues with him: He's Salvadoran.

SHARON:

Another life ruined!

GLORIA:

We are rebels, you and I.

As she lifts her glass, the sirens multiply and we see flashing lights pass out front of the window.

So. What did Henry have to say?

SHARON:

About?

GLORIA:

Your grandmother!

SHARON:

Oh! What was there to say?

GLORIA:

Obviously neither of you are Latinos! Or Italians!

SHARON:

Italians?

GLORIA:

My grandfather's side. There is no silent suffering amongst my people.

SHARON:

Ha ha. I guess Henry and I... we tend to let things sit. And simmer.

GLORIA:

Oh, dear. How slow a simmer?

SHARON:

It wasn't until years later—after she died—that he asked me why I'd been shocked.

GLORIA:

And...?

SHARON:

And I know this sounds naive but I was a pretty young when Kennedy was shot and of course the Civil Rights movement was huge but from where I was it all seemed very... black and white!

GLORIA:

Take it from me, there are many shades of hate.

SHARON:

Of course! I do know that but... All right. What's going on right now—the level of violence and anger—it's like a war zone and it makes no sense to me!

GLORIA:

Haven't you been—?

SHARON:

(interrupting) Yes! Watching and reading and listening and I understand what everyone's saying but I can't— It doesn't seem real! I can't believe it, even though it's happening right here! Right in front of us!

The phone rings, frightening them both.

SHARON:

Jesus!

GLORIA:

Ah!

Sharon picks up the phone.

SHARON:

Hello? Hey!

Gloria mouths "Henry?" and Sharon nods.

Yeah, and she's going to spend the night. Are you—?

Who is—?

Oh! No! Yes. It is. Locked. The back door, too.

Okay. You, too. *(looking at Gloria)* I will.

She hangs up the phone and reaches for the champagne bottle.

Henry says "hi."

GLORIA:

(re the champagne) Yes, please.

Sharon tops off their glasses.

SHARON:

Eddie Lee was killed.

Very short pause.

From Pizza Go. Where we get pizza on 3rd. He's one of the guys who works there.

GLORIA:

Oh, my god.

SHARON:

He was shot, trying to protect it.

Very short pause.

GLORIA:

"The wrong place at the wrong time." I don't know why I said that, before. My grandmother always hated that expression. "The wrong place at the wrong time' is a much, much bigger window for some of us," is what she said.

They might both look out the window.

SHARON:

But can I say, I'm very glad you're here with me, right now?

GLORIA:

Then are you going to give me a cookie?

SHARON:

Yes! Please! Take two!

The women bite into their cookies.

GLORIA:

That's a beautiful plate.

SHARON:

It's from my grandmother's service.

Very short pause.

The only piece I have left.

We hear a fire truck approaching. And again see flashing lights passing by the window.

The sounds of emergency vehicles build and we hear gunshots added to the chaotic wash of sound. Then, bleeding in, club music mix from 2018 underscored by the sounds of a roaring house fire, shouting of first responders.

**“Animal Crockery”
November, 2018 – Lakeview Terrace**

It's the middle of the night and there's a large tent set up outside of an industrial-ish building. It all feels temporary but important—like an outpost in the far reaches of somewhere we never expected to be. We see PK and Mae; they're in their early 20s. PK looks like shit. Dirty and tired. Mae actually looks pretty hot. She's also pretty wasted. Neither of which amuses PK.

PK:

And what exactly do you think you'll be doing here?

MAE:

Helping! Doing whatever I can! Your post said—

PK:

(interrupting) It's barely 2 am; you couldn't find an after-hours club close to home, you had to come all the way out here to be entertained?

MAE:

That's harsh!

PK:

Mae, I have been here all night. I have been taking care of traumatized people and terrified animals in this fire which, apparently, is still spreading like, Oh! Wildfire! So I'm sorry: I really don't have the energy at this point to take care of you.

MAE:

I don't need you to—

She's interrupted by a voice from the tent.

PANNA:

(offstage) PK?

PK:

(shouting off) Out here!

MAE:

Look I... I'm sorry about my message. I know it was not cool but it's been five years since my dad died and today was the day—I mean, yesterday was—and even though you've been mad at me I'm just not... I'm not used to you not being there!

Before PK can respond—or choose not to—they are joined by a woman with an open spirit and absolute certainty, carrying a bottle of water. This is Panna.

PANNA:

Hey! *(to Mae)* Hi, there!

MAE:

Hi...

PANNA:

(to PK) Water?

MAE:

Absolutely! Thank you!

Mae grabs the bottle meant for PK.

PK:

So predictable. Be right back.

They quickly leave.

MAE:

What did I do this time? God!

And she takes a really long drink, completely draining the bottle. Then,

PANNA:

I'm Panna.

MAE:

Yeah. Sorry. Thanks. I'm PK's friend. He was— I thought I would stop by. See if you needed any help.

PANNA:

It's quiet right now. Most everyone's asleep. Or trying to sleep. It was a remarkable day.

MAE:

Remarkable! Seemed like it. I mean, from PK's posts. #2018WoolseyFire #AnimalRescue #LookingforLoveInAllTheWrongPlaces

PANNA:

Well...

MAE:

I was just kidding about the last one.

PANNA:

The next shift's coming on at 3 am.

MAE:

Wait. Is that actually a hashtag?

PANNA:

So you're welcome to stick around if you'd like.

Mae checks her phone as PK joins them with two more bottles of water.

MAE:

(re her phone) Oh, my god. It is!

PK:

What are you—? You can't just show up like this, Mae!

MAE:

Why not? *(holding up her phone)* Volunteers needed! Picture after picture of your cute sooty face next to little crispy kittens? So here I am! Volunteering!

PK:

That's not how it works. There's a lot of organization that goes into an operation like this.

MAE:

So let me help organize! And I was serious, you do look cute.

PK:
Go home and sleep it off, will you?

MAE:
What? I'm not costumed appropriately? You want the animal savoir in crisis look, I can do that, I have something in the— Wait. No. I didn't drive. Or did I?

PK:
Oh! My! God!

They hand one bottle of water to Panna and Mae reaches for the other.

(to Mae) Do you mind? Some of us have been hard at work.

PANNA:
(to Mae) There's more water inside. On the table, if you want to grab another bottle.

MAE:
Yeah. That'd be good. Thank you. You're very kind. You know how to treat people. *(to PK, re Panna)* So I'm assuming this is not your...? No.

She quickly leaves.

PANNA:
Not your...?

PK:
You need to ignore her.

PANNA:
Ha ha. I imagine she makes that challenging.

PK:
Oh, you have no idea. But you see what I've had to put up with? Since I was in 4th Grade? And I apologize. That water is meant for volunteers and workers and displaced animals.

PANNA:
And people.

PK:
And people. In need. Not party girls who just need to hydrate.

PANNA:
She did need to hydrate. But she didn't drive, did she?

PK:

Noooooo. Even sober, there's no way she could have found this place. Who's even heard of "Lakeview Terrace?"

PANNA:

Rodney King. His beating, sparked the LA riots?

PK:

I wasn't born yet.

PANNA:

Well, that was in Lakeview Terrace. When they set up the evacuation center here, I thought, Oh! Lakeview Terrace!

PK:

Okay.

PANNA:

Remind me who you're with: Animal Services?

PK:

Oh. No one. I just volunteer once a week at a shelter, close to where I live. And Victor—

PANNA:

(interrupting) Right! Victor!

PK:

He works there, and asked me if I could help out. You're Red Cross?

PANNA:

Red Cross adjacent. They call me in when they need help. I know my way around wildfires.

PK:

Me, it's animals.

PANNA:

And your skills are certainly appreciated! It was very confusing, messages were going out yesterday and people started showing up here with pets, which we weren't set up for.

PK:

That's what Victor said. It's cool how fast things came together. The crates, food, beds, leashes...

PANNA:

We were getting calls from the center over in Ventura—people there are still reeling from the mass shooting at the restaurant, two days ago.

PK:

Oh! Yeah!

PANNA:

And up in Malibu, movie stars and their horses—fire's not particular about property values. But I tell you, it's a beautiful thing that happens. Community, coming together. Tragic, but beautiful. Been through this many times. I live in Topanga.

PK:

So you were evacuated!

PANNA:

Well, they tried.

PK:

Hang on, you—

PANNA:

(interrupting) I was raised in the Canyon. Santa Ana's are coming from the north-east—our house isn't directly in the path. But we could tell this was going to be a bad one; those are some hot, dry, dangerous winds. Every year it gets worse.

PK:

I've never... I mean, there are always fires. In LA. But I've never been this... in it.

PANNA:

The flames are pretty far west of us, but even here you can feel it. The energy in the air, so angry and menacing. Then the ashes. They float down in this very calm way that completely defies that.

PK:

And the smoke!

PANNA:

The smoke! Yes! You can smell it before you see it. The smell of smoke finds you and sticks to you. Seeps in. You know, smoke itself can even change the composition of living things. Where do you live?

PK:

Hollywood.

PANNA:

Fires are a completely different thing, there.

PK:

Smells are a completely different thing there.

PK moves to take a peek at Mae.

PANNA:

Is your friend okay?

PK:

Looks like she's passed out. But if we need the cot, I have no problem kicking her ass out.

PANNA:

Ha ha. No, I doubt we'll get anyone else in tonight. But you never know.

We hear a dog barking from inside the tent, then another.

PK:

Poor little guys. They just want to go home. Their own bowl, their own toys...

PANNA:

Most people here don't know whether they still have homes. Or what—if anything—will be left.

PK:

That's a trip.

PANNA:

A few families, this is their second night, so they've gone back to where their homes once were, picked through the remains and ashes. There'll be a lump of twisted, charred metal that has no relationship to anything they've ever owned and then, right next to it...

She hands PK a ceramic dog's dish. Pristine.

PK:

This survived a fire?

PANNA:

Incredible, isn't it? A kid brought it with him. We washed it off, and it's good as new. Now his family will hang onto it like it's fine bone china. It'll be passed down, generation after generation, and the story that goes along with it will make it more and more precious.

PK:

(looking at the markings) It's from Walmart.

PANNA:

Doesn't matter. It's hard not to read into fires. I don't know if humans really have the ability to understand "random." We need there to be reasons. We need blame almost as much as we need redemption.

PK's phone beeps; they put down the dish. It's a nice message. PK smiles and responds.

PANNA:

Is that Victor?

PK:

(still smiling) Yes. It's— *(covering)* He said he's going to be a bit late. Asked me if I could cover for him.

PANNA:

It's new, you two?

PK:

I... I don't even know if we are a "you two." How did you...?

PANNA:

He mentioned you, last night.

PK:

He did?

PANNA:

Not by name, but I'm putting it together. He doesn't hide much.

PK:

Really? I mean, I've known him for a while, but...

PANNA:

Nothing like a fire to heat up a relationship!

PK:

That's terrible!

Very short pause.

But do you think it's true?

PANNA:

There is something about these situations. Our relationship to disasters of all kinds—in one way or another we're forever altered. But fire: I think it can fuse people together. Sometimes for the wrong reasons. But sometimes the right ones.

PK:

This feels right.

PANNA:

He seems very solid.

PK:

He's so different from anyone I've ever... Mae has always been my person. Or I thought she was. We were always "you two."

PANNA:

Were?

PK:

I love her. I always will. But... she lost her dad.

PANNA:

That is a very deep wound.

PK:

Oh, I know! We were still in high school. It was a horrible accident but she took it harder than anyone and ever since, what she's carrying with her, it's like there's no room for anyone else.

PANNA:

Right.

PK:

I've tried to be there for her, any way I could. Moving aside anything that comes up in my life. Anyone. For her!

PANNA:

Sounds exhausting.

PK:

It is! And it got to the point where I looked around, at my life, and all there was, was her. And don't get me wrong—she is awesome and I always thought... I always thought it'd be us for life.

ANNA:

And then you met Victor.

PK:

And then I met Victor.

Very short pause.

Obviously I am... smitten.

PANNA:

Can't say that I blame you.

PK:

Right? But it's more than that. With Victor I have space. To become who I'm supposed to be, you know? With Mae, it was like I was trapped in this very small self that didn't feel like me anymore and if I wanted to change, I was betraying her. Because the only thing that mattered was some molded-by-grief version of ourselves and I held onto that only because... it was just what was there.

Out of words, PK picks up the dog dish again.

PANNA:

Breakups are never easy.

PK:

Shit. That's what this is, isn't it?

PANNA:

Sounds like it to me.

MAE:

Yeah. Me, too.

At some point Mae has joined them, unnoticed until now. Her rest has left her exposed and somehow looking younger.

PK:

Mae!

Long pause.

MAE:

I guess I'll be going.

PK:

No, you don't have to—

MAE:

(interrupting) I called a ride. Surprised what great reception you get up here! And man! It gets dark. Like, dark dark. No moon tonight. Can't even see any stars!

PANNA:

The smoke.

MAE:

Right. I didn't even smell it before.

PK:

Mae...

MAE:

I'm sorry I didn't get to meet... Victor! I mean, I'm sure I wasn't fooling anyone with my half assed volunteer efforts. I really just wanted to meet the person who... I know you, PK. I could tell that you'd found someone. I just hope you'll be happy. Whoever you become.

PK:

Mae, you don't...

But she's disappeared into the dark. PK is now desperately clutching the dog dish.

No. No no no no no. This wasn't supposed to...! *(to Panna)* What should I do?

Panna puts her hands on the dish.

PANNA:

I think you know the answer, friend.

After a moment, PK lets go. We hear a car drive up; both Panna and PK look toward the headlights.

Sounds of a car driving away, then more cars. Trucks. A loading dock transitioning into the sounds of a busy harbor. Ships' horns. Then seagulls. Water lapping up against a pier. People laughing at the beach.

**In Place
December, 2021 – Long Beach**

It's late morning and we are in a hi-rise apartment with a harbor view. Geometric shapes in bright colors against white and grey. There's a Christmas tree somewhere and a balcony with a telescope. We see Sharon in her 70s with Diana, a Latina in her 20s. They are setting a small table for three with an elaborate set of china. The floral pattern looks very familiar, and a bit out of place in this modern setting. Diana holds up a small plate.

DIANA:

And this?

SHARON:

I'd call it a bread and butter plate—that's what we called them in Chicago, growing up—but I think more people call them dessert plates. Or cake plates.

DIANA:

Perfect because we are so having cake!

SHARON:

To the upper left of the luncheon plate. You can set the salad plate on top of the luncheon plate.

DIANA:

That's very fancy, Sharon. I like it: Luncheon!

SHARON:

Well, dinner plates are a bit larger. So your instincts were right to use these for brunch.

Diana gestures toward the hallway.

DIANA:

Please go in and tell my mom. She mocks my every attempt at domesticity.

SHARON:

Gloria is very proud of you, you know that.

DIANA:

Yeah. I do.

SHARON:

It was so kind of you to have me over, today. I know these last days—

DIANA:

(interrupting) I should have done it earlier, it's just been...

Very short pause, then she holds up a small bowl.

This...?

SHARON:

A fruit—or dessert—bowl; up to you!

DIANA:

Fruit, and on top of the salad plate.

SHARON:

Done. I feel like I know this pattern; it's beautiful.

DIANA:

Well...! I got it from an antique store in Los Feliz for my mom. She's been bitching to me about never getting good china when she was married.

SHARON:

Really? That's— I remember she said she didn't want dishes.

DIANA:

I don't know. It's probably a brain cancer thing. But anyway, I saw these and it was, like, an entire set and they just seemed so completely ridiculous—and totally beautiful... She said it was her best Christmas present ever.

SHARON:

Awww...

DIANA:

Yeah. She's been saying that every year since her first macaroni necklace.

SHARON:

You're a good daughter, Diana.

DIANA:

And she was a good—

Short pause.

This sucks more than I thought it would. Ready for champagne?

SHARON:

Love some.

Diana picks up a bottle and fills two flutes.

Ohhhh. Did you know that—?

DIANA:

(interrupting) You gave these to my mom before her wedding? Yes, she's been reminding me. For a while there we were drinking quite a bit of champagne. Doctors were pissed at me, but what the fuck? If my mom wants to drown in mimosas, so be it. I can think of much worse ways to go.

She picks up little rectangular pieces of china.

What are these?

SHARON:

Knife rests. She's not been in any pain?

DIANA:

The plus side of brain cancer.

Sharon hands her a stack of silverware.

SHARON:

Cutlery from out to in. Forks on the left.

DIANA:

Got it.

Sharon can't help but look toward the hallway.

SHARON:

Have you been getting enough help, with her here?

DIANA:

At this point hospice is around the clock. So I can sleep. And my brothers have been coming by, but they've both got the babies.

SHARON:

Two more sets of twins. I remember Gloria was delighted. "It's payback!"

DIANA:

Ha ha. It's supposed to skip a generation, but yeah. *(holding up a small fork)*
And...?

SHARON:

Pastry fork. Above the main plates, or on top of the cake plate.

DIANA:

Above. And my dad has stepped up, in his own way, even though he and my mom haven't talked in years.

SHARON:

Good for Carlos. And you're very busy with work, yes?

DIANA:

Off this week but yeah, crazy busy. It's insane how long it took all this to, well, come to the surface.

SHARON:

At my age I shouldn't be shocked by anything, but really: How could that even have happened?

DIANA:

That's what everyone's been saying! They knew DDT had been dumped out at sea way back when, but it was never officially out in the open. Then about ten years ago? This guy I'm working for found what he thought was a dump site, and this year they were finally able to prove it. Documented over 27,000 cannisters filled with DDT waste in ocean off of Catalina. That's when the most of the press picked it up.

SHARON:

What exactly are you doing out there, now? Napkins?

DIANA:

Over in the drawer. We're continuing the count, and trying to figure out levels of toxicity. One of the guys said it's like exploring space, trying to measure stars in the Milky Way. Layers and layers of leaking containers in the deepest depths of the Pacific and some of those have been there since WWII. There could be as many as half a million of them. It's mind blowing.

SHARON:

Good thing we closed the chapter on DDT in the 70s!

DIANA:

Right? Because bad things don't exist if that's what we tell ourselves!

SHARON:

That is my family motto!

DIANA:

I mean, what's a little DDT when you've got Climate Change, Micro-Plastics and the Pandemic to worry about? Only—Hello!—it's never just one thing, is it? And it's all connected. Everything. Every life. Things don't just go away! We've been through a version of this so many times, we need to start dealing with that!

SHARON:

Maybe we finally are?

She's finished folding the napkins into pleasing shapes.

DIANA:

I... Maybe!

SHARON:

I'll put the flowers in the center.

DIANA:

Please.

She looks down the hallway.

It's funny, this is all so surreal—the everyday of *this*, the discoveries in my work, the world which will never be the same—that it's only occasionally, it pops into my head: Oh, my god. My mother will be... gone. What am I going to do, then?

SHARON:

You will feel this enormous hole and it will hurt more than you ever thought possible but you'll fill that with the time you have with her, right now. And all the times before this. And everything will be different and sometimes you won't recognize even yourself, but you will get through it.

Diana can't quite take this in. Yet.

And you have a new girlfriend! Your mom likes her.

DIANA:

And she looooves my mom! But it's been since June; not that new.

SHARON:
Six months?

DIANA:
I guess in the Sharon-Henry scheme of things... How long's that been?

SHARON:
Fifty years. This month.

DIANA:
What? Congratulations! Oh, man, what's that feel like?

SHARON:
It makes me feel very old. And reminds me he's even older.

DIANA:
Stop. You're—

She's interrupted by Sharon stepping away from the table.

SHARON:
(re the table) All right! Glasses go above the knives, and that's that. Back to the girlfriend.

DIANA:
You're not getting off that easy. Fifty years! You're amazing!

SHARON:
Ha ha ha. Oh, Diana... I was so young when I met Henry. And now, I look at you, what you're doing, what you've done. It's important work. It matters!

DIANA:
I—

SHARON:
(interrupting) And your mother was a teacher. An activist. She impacted so many lives. But then there's me. And I'm not remotely amazing.

DIANA:
Who the hell are you to judge?

SHARON:
Honestly? Over the years I think I've worked so hard trying to stay the course, stay afloat and not make waves... Maybe I've been using Henry as my own little damaged life raft so I don't have to think about what's under the surface. But I want to believe there's more to us than that!

DIANA:
Sharon! Yes! Whatever you're—

SHARON:

(interrupting) Let me finish. I have been lucky enough to have so many truly amazing people in my life. And so much happens in a lifetime. So I hope that enough of the maybe-in-some-universe-semi-amazing things I have done have added up to something that counts. But I don't intend to go anywhere, anytime soon so from now on—for your mom, for you, and for me—I am determined to be brave enough to... take a deep dive and do the best I can with whatever I find.

DIANA:

Ohhhhh!

The women hug. Because we can hug, now. Then they turn and take in the ridiculous table, in all its fine dining glory.

SHARON:

Isn't this something. And you know what? I might just buy myself a set. A full china service. See how Henry handles that little shake-up.

DIANA:

You should! But let me finish telling you about this one! So! It's Christmas morning, and we open the box for my mom and my girlfriend's like, "Wait!" Like she's seen a ghost, right?

MAE:

No! Not again!

Mae has come into the room, is carrying bags of food.

The story of the missing moon dishes! Will you ever tire of this?

DIANA:

Hi, babe! And the answer is, no! Never! *(gesturing towards Sharon)* This is—

MAE:

(interrupting) Whoa! Mrs. N!

SHARON:

Mae!

MAE:

Hah! I didn't— Diana said "my mom's friend Sharon" was coming over. I had no idea.

DIANA:

How do you know—?

MAE:

(interrupting) This is Mrs. N! Growing up, Mrs. Nakashima was always...there. You could always count on her, in the neighborhood. She was like the mom you always wished you had.

DIANA:

(looking at Sharon) Well! Isn't that amazing!

MAE:

Right?

SHARON:

Oh, it's lovely to see you, Mae! I was wondering where you'd gone after the house was sold.

MAE:

And the answer is, Long Beach.

SHARON:

That's right. You work at the Aquarium!

DIANA:

I finally wore her down.

MAE:

It was all about the commute.

DIANA:

Riiiiight.

Mae takes in the table.

MAE:

Wow-wee! Check this out. Fine dining!

SHARON:

Ha ha, I remember! These were your family's, right?

MAE:

My dad's family's. Apparently I was not finished with them earlier this year.

DIANA:

Or vice versa. Tell her the other part.

MAE:

I found out that my great grandfather—these were passed down to him by his mother—he was part of this Army project where he was the first guy who bounced radar off of the moon, which kind of opened the door to space travel?

SHARON:
Really!

DIANA:
(to Mae) And...?

MAE:
And it was called Project Diana.

SHARON:
Huh!

DIANA:
So I am your destiny! Get used to it. Dinners with this ridi— beautiful china that wouldn't let you go, for years to come.

MAE:
Bones and all.

This last was for Sharon; Diana probably doesn't make the connection.

SHARON:
Ha ha ha. Mae: How is your friend PK?

MAE:
Oh! *(to Diana)* I just found out. They're getting married.

DIANA:
PK and Victor? That's fantastic.

MAE:
Except... PK wants to know if they can wear your mother's dress.

DIANA:
Over my dead body!

MAE:
Or someone's. *(looking down the hall)* Mom's still hanging in there?

Short pause, then much-needed laughter from all.

Are you going to pour me some champagne, or what?

DIANA:
(filling Mae's glass, then the others) A toast: To finding the pieces, and putting them where they belong.

SHARON:
To holding on to what matters, in the right way for the right reasons.

Very short pause.

MAE:

To dead people's dishes.

The clink of fine crystal. It's a beautiful, pure sound. Perhaps we can also hear the ocean in the background. And the women begin to put food into the dishes on the table. It smells amazing.

End of Play