

***Temporary Measures: a play about legacy***  
by Jennie Webb

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## ***Temporary Measures: a play about legacy***

### **Characters:**

**ANGEL**, F 50s, a woman who wants to do the right thing

**LANA**, F definitely over 30, but could be well into her 40s or 50s or 60s, a caregiver

**BEN**, M 40s, Deaf or Hard of Hearing, a well-meaning friend

### **Setting:**

*A modest house in Southern California, not in a particularly affordable neighborhood. Not that there are any, anymore.*

**Time:** *October*

### **Casting:**

*Lana has roots in Eastern Europe and is probably white. The other characters can be any race or ethnicity; Angel is probably not white.*

### **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.*

**NOTE:** *When Angel and Lana are speaking and Ben is onstage, if he cannot see their lips, he cannot understand them.*

## ***Temporary Measures: a play about legacy***

### **SYNOPSIS**

Angel is a woman at a crossroads. She's moved in to be with her dying father for his final days, but those days keep extending and now there's no end in sight. *Temporary Measures* is a dark comedy about legacy and the different shapes it can take when our journey is not straightforward.

### **SPECIAL THANKS**

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Heather Helinsky, Dramaturg

## ***Temporary Measures: a play about legacy***

*We see Angel sitting on a sizeable patio. It's not a particularly elegant or sophisticated space. There are empty pots, a few significantly dead plants, and what appears to be outdoor furniture underneath thick, ugly, custom-made plastic covers, themselves covered with a layer of grime.*

*Behind her is a very large window which looks into the kitchen of a not very new or notable house. It's nearing sunset, so it's dark-ish inside.*

*Dressed in white, Angel sits in a simple chair next to a small bench she's using as a table—these are the only uncovered pieces furniture. Looking out at the view, she picks up a glass of white wine.*

*A moment, then we see a form inside the house. Angel takes a sip just as there is a tap on the window, which startles her.*

ANGEL:

Ah! Oh. Hey!

*She waves at the murky, moving form. Waits for a response. Then,*

I can't really see you. Turn on the lights.

*Movement from within.*

*(louder)* The lights! Turn on the lights!

*The outside lights come on; inside the house appears darker.*

I meant the lights in—!

*She's interrupted by the lights in the kitchen coming on, revealing Lana, a woman dressed in colorful clothes that give off nursing vibes. Beaming a genuine but impossibly cheery smile, she waves. And responds although we can't hear her.*

Ha ha ha. What are you— I can't hear you! Why don't you—?

*She's interrupted by Lana opening the window.*

LANA:

*(from inside the house)* I was saying I feel like I'm on TV! In the window, like this.

*She lifts up a bottle of dishwashing liquid.*

"The world's a very messy place, but you *can* clean your dishes!"

ANGEL:

Ha ha ha. You could be, you know! You should have your own show!

LANA:

*(from inside)* Ha ha. Really? What would I do?

ANGEL:

You'd be you!

LANA:

*(from inside)* A TV show about me. Oh, that would be exciting! One week would be pureeing food and thickening liquid, the next... changing catheters?

ANGEL:

I'd watch it. You wanna join me, sit for a while? I never come out here, but...

LANA:

*(from inside)* Um...

ANGEL:

Come on. He's asleep, yes?

LANA:

*(from inside)* Yes. Sure. Lemme check. Be right out.

*The light goes out inside. Angel looks out at the view again, squints, then gets up and looks around the patio, dissatisfied. Lana joins her.*

ANGEL:

Hey. Do you know where the lights are? I mean the switch.

LANA:

You want them off?

ANGEL:

Yeah, thanks. I think...

*Lana switches them off.*

Yes! That's better, isn't it? The light's nice this time of day.

LANA:

Such a beautiful view.

ANGEL:

I should do this more often! Just look out there and...

LANA:

And?

ANGEL:

Try to forget I'm stuck in this toxic suburban wasteland.

LANA:

Oh, come on. It's not that bad.

ANGEL:

No. And I'm sorry. You're from here, right?

LANA:

Well, I—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* I mean, you live here, now. Your family...?

LANA:

Not too far from here. We like it.

ANGEL:

Right. Again. I'm sorry. You're... Russian?

LANA:

Romanian.

ANGEL:

Well, close!

LANA:

Yes and no. I was born here, but my—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Of course! I didn't mean anything political. Or even geographical, I don't— It was mostly the Rs. *(holding up her empty glass)* Can I pour you some wine? Or make you a drink! Don't know about Romanian cocktails; my dad was a martini man—plenty of gin!

LANA:

No. Thanks.

ANGEL:

It's fine! I don't mind.

LANA:

No, I don't—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* I mean, you're only here for another half hour, right? It's the end of your shift. I won't tell anyone.

LANA:

I'm good.

ANGEL:

You are good. You are the best. Thank you for everything. I'll be right back.

*She goes inside and Lana, still standing, takes in the view.*

*(from inside)* A coke?

*We see a shadowy Angel at the window, which is still open.*

LANA:

Sure! Thanks.

*Maybe there's a bit of light inside from an open fridge.*

ANGEL:

*(from inside)* Do you want a glass?

LANA:

No, don't bother.

ANGEL:

*(from inside)* Really? You sure?

LANA:

Yes!

ANGEL:

*(from inside)* Okay, then. But will you sit down, please?!

LANA:

Ha ha. Thanks!

*Lana assesses the lone chair and covered furniture as Angel returns with beverages.*

ANGEL:

I don't know why, but I hate drinking out of cans.

*She hands the coke to Lana.*

LANA:

Thanks.

ANGEL:

I wasn't always like that. I totally drank beer from cans in college. Not a big beer drinker, but... college.

LANA:

Ha ha. Right.

ANGEL:  
Please!

*She gestures for Lana to sit in the chair; Angel perches on the bench.*

To be honest, I wasn't a big college person, either. Barely got out alive. You?

LANA:  
I like school. I think I told you, I'm studying right now to—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* Right!

LANA:  
I'm really enjoying it.

ANGEL:  
Was it... Occupational Therapy?

LANA:  
Uh huh.

ANGEL:  
And the occupation is... being alive?

LANA:  
Yep! That's it! There's a good program at the college. OT aide.

ANGEL:  
Ah. But did you go to real college when you were younger? I mean, community college is completely real. I'm a dope; I'm sorry.

LANA:  
Ha ha. I did a lot of things when I was younger. I—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* Ha ha. Didn't we all.

*And they drink. They look out at the view. Then,*

I wiped it off.

*Very short pause.*

The top of the can.

LANA:  
Thank you!



ANGEL:

Something my mom taught me, I think. I mean, I drank from cans as a kid. At parties. Didn't have sodas at home, but weekends with dad, at his apartment we'd have those cheap grocery store brands, sit out on his tiny back porch with fences on all sides and drink them. Tiki punch. I always wanted tiki punch. I think my brother... Cream soda? That doesn't sound right. Doesn't sound like a kid thing. Maybe that was my dad. Or maybe that's just what...

*And with that Angel starts to cry. The kind of ridiculous cry that comes with your 2<sup>nd</sup> glass of wine and lots of stuff that's been bottled up.*

LANA:

Are you...

*Lana starts to get up but is stopped short.*

ANGEL:

No no no no no no no sorry I'm... I'm good. I am. I'm fine.

*Kinda not, but the tears have stopped.*

Soda can memories. Who'da thought? Jeez.

LANA:

It's been a rough week. You've been going through a lot.

ANGEL:

Me? I haven't been doing anything but waiting around, filling out paperwork.

LANA:

Still.

ANGEL:

So, if you think about it, that means it's a good week! My father is no longer on hospice care, which means he's officially not going to die! Hooray!

LANA:

Ha ha. Well...

ANGEL:

*(shouting for comic effect)* Sorry, Dad! Hope I didn't wake you! *(softer)* Shit. I hope I didn't!

LANA:

You didn't.

ANGEL:

Man. How do you do this? Like, every day. For how long?

LANA:

My shifts, you mean?

ANGEL:

No. I mean, have you been... helping people for a long time?

LANA:

I'd like to think so. But I've only done hospice work a couple of years.

ANGEL:

That must be— Shit. Now that my dad's un-hospiced can you still come?

LANA:

Well, I was going to talk to you about that. The coverage changes. And the company I work for, home health aides aren't contractually—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Whatever it takes, we'll make it happen. Because you are a saint. I mean everyone who's come has been great. But you! I don't know how you do it!

LANA:

Ha ha, it's my job!

*Very short pause.*

Are you going to be okay on your own here, tonight?

ANGEL:

Yeah. I guess. Crazy. It'll be the first night alone since I moved here, since my dad...

LANA:

That's what I thought. But everything is written down, and help is just a phone call away. You're not alone.

ANGEL:

And he's not going anywhere, ha ha ha.

LANA:

Ha ha. No.

ANGEL:

Someone will be here tomorrow, early, in case I mess up. And tonight my deaf friend's coming over!

LANA:

Your...

ANGEL:

I have a friend. Who's deaf. I mean, he's my friend before he's deaf. I mean, he's always been deaf so that doesn't really—

LANA:

*(interrupting)* Right.

ANGEL:

It's just he moved up North and we haven't spoken in a while, but that doesn't matter. I love him to death and not just because he's deaf, or in spite of it, that's not even... When did my brain stop working?

LANA:

I get it. Were you two...?

ANGEL:

Oh! No. He's like family. I told you about the email I got?

LANA:

I'm not sure.

ANGEL:

Then I didn't. It's about my grandmother. Not my dad's mom, my mom's mom.

LANA:

And she's...

ANGEL:

Dead. So the thing is, I get this email from this woman who runs a deaf school— or a teaching organization, or something. In Ohio or somewhere. And my grandmother taught the deaf. Both she and my grandfather were teachers. He was a high school principal but she taught little kids. And maybe adults, too? She had a housekeeper who was deaf. I just remembered that. Huh. She had a beard. The housekeeper. Not my grandmother.

LANA:

Okay.

ANGEL:

Not that that would have mattered. Well, except to her. My grandmother was very beautiful but I think also very vain. None of us are very hairy. The women in my family. I always considered that a positive but that's actually very... what? Buying into Anglo-centric beauty standards?

LANA:

My family: Eastern Europe. Lots of bearded women.

ANGEL:

God love 'em. I honestly wish I could grow a beard sometimes. What a transformation, right? When my ex- shaved his, he was like a complete stranger.

LANA:

So what about the email?

ANGEL:

Right! Sorry. It turns out that my grandmother wrote this manual to teach deaf kids.

LANA:

Teach them sign language?

ANGEL:

Oh no no no! She did not sign! It was to teach them to speak. Vocally.

LANA:

Ah!

ANGEL:

Not a simple matter, as you can probably guess. This manual is very impressive, very technical. I found a copy my mom had! But the thing was—and I remember talking to my grandmother about this, years later—at that time, you didn't want to teach deaf kids to sign. It would make them different, you know? You wanted them to be "normal." To fit in.

LANA:

When was this?

ANGEL:

Late 60s was when it was published. Or not really published; it's a booklet, really. This woman wanted my permission—as my grandmother's proxy since my mom's dead—to publish it. To use, like, today. In classrooms.

LANA:

Well, that's exciting!

ANGEL:

Is it?

LANA:

It's not?

ANGEL:

It's just weird to me that that's, like, my grandmother's legacy.

LANA:

She wasn't proud of her work?

ANGEL:

I think she was. But she also... It must've been not long after she wrote it, that it all became very controversial. It was called "Oralism," my deaf friend told me. "Failure to imitate" was the worst possible outcome.

LANA:

Oh, my!

ANGEL:

Uh huh. My grandmother was a very absolute person. She believed what she believed and was astonished if you had other opinions. We'd talk about how the world was changing and she'd say, "Who'd have ever thought?!" like, honestly, everyone thought the same things. And now, I wonder if she wished she'd learned to sign. Would that have... opened up her world?

LANA:

Did she ever talk about that?

ANGEL:

No. You didn't really ask her that sort of thing. Anyway. But it gave me an excuse to look up my friend. Which I've been meaning to do for forever, and as it turned out he's down here at a conference this week! So he's stopping by.

LANA:

Nice.

*The two take in the view. The lighting is still lovely; sunset hues.*

Your deaf friend.

ANGEL:

Right. But I'm sorry I said it that way. Like I said, my brain... You'll probably meet him. *(taking out her phone)* What time is it?

LANA:

Does he have a name?

ANGEL:

Ha ha. Yes, actually. Ben.

LANA:

Ben.

ANGEL:

And the fact is that Ben speaks very well. Which means, I guess, someone—like my grandmother but not my grandmother, obviously—probably taught him? I actually never thought about that before. I know he's got a hearing aid, so I guess I always thought it was something he could just... do!

*We hear a loud, awful noise; the sound of wood scraping on concrete.*

ANGEL:

And speak of the devil... I told him to come around to the back.

*We hear a loud bang.*

LANA:

I know someone who can fix that gate...

ANGEL:

Yeah, I should...

*Ben joins them from alongside the house.*

BEN:

Hi, there!

ANGEL:

Hey! Ooooooh! It's been too long! How are you, my friend!

BEN:

I'm good. How are you?

*Angel hugs him, her face out of view.*

ANGEL:

Good. Sorry about the gate.

BEN:

What?

ANGEL:

*(facing him)* Sorry. Sorry about the gate.

BEN:

Yeah. It gets stuck?

ANGEL:

And it makes a terrible noise.

BEN:

Didn't bother me!

ANGEL:

Ha ha. No. Do you want a glass of wine?

BEN:

That would be good.

ANGEL:

Red or white?

BEN:

Red.

LANA:

I'll get it.

ANGEL:

No! I'll— Ben! This is Lana. She's one of my dad's caregivers. My favorite but don't tell anyone.

BEN:

Nice to meet you.

LANA:

And you. *(to Angel)* But please. Let me?

ANGEL:

Thanks. There's a bottle of red out, next to the fridge.

LANA:

Saw it. Be right back.

BEN:

Thank you!

LANA:

Not at all!

*Lana goes into the house and Ben looks around.*

BEN:

This is a nice place. It's a beautiful view.

ANGEL:

The house is whatever. The view is nice. I never come out here.

BEN:

Why not?

ANGEL:

There's always so much to do and I... forgot about it?

BEN:

Then do I get credit?

ANGEL:  
For?

BEN:  
Helping you remember things that are nice.

ANGEL:  
Absolutely. Oh, Ben, I have missed you!

BEN:  
You, too. It has been *way* too long.

ANGEL:  
I know. I...

*Short pause.*

BEN:  
How is your dad?

ANGEL:  
He's... declined but... plateaued, shall we say?

*A look from Ben.*

He's taking longer to die than they think he should. So they pulled the hospice designation.

BEN:  
To cut back on services. Sorry.

ANGEL:  
Yeah? Is that the deal? I'm very confused about what happens next, and no one seems to— You're the medical genius. Can you tell me what I'm looking at, here?

BEN:  
In terms of?

ANGEL:  
My dad!

BEN:  
I don't know. No one can really say, when it comes to this point. Every case is different. And remember, I'm in a lab, now.

ANGEL:  
So living and dying, not so much?



BEN:  
No, everything is—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* I get it. I'm sorry. So tell me: What are you working on?

BEN:  
A new project I really love.

ANGEL:  
Ooooh! What is it?

BEN:  
We're building off of the work they did at Harvard.

ANGEL:  
*(contorting her face and mouth)* Haahhhhrvahhhd! Faaaancy! Why am I not surpriiiiiiised?!

BEN:  
*(unable to read her lips)* I can't—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* And there she is!

*Lana has come back out with a glass of red wine.*

LANA:  
*(handing the glass to Ben)* Here you go.

BEN:  
Thank you.

LANA:  
*(speaking and signing)* You're welcome.

BEN:  
*(speaking and signing)* Do you sign?

LANA:  
*(speaking and signing, not well)* Just enough to look like an idiot.

BEN:  
*(speaking and signing)* No, it's great that you're trying!

ANGEL:  
*(to Lana)* How is he? Did you look in on him?

LANA:  
Fast asleep. He should be out all night.

ANGEL:  
I hope so. Well. *(lifting her glass)* Salud!

BEN: Cheers! LANA: Noroc!

LANA:  
Romanian. "Good luck."

ANGEL:  
Well, I'll take it!

*They drink. Then Lana motions to the covers on the furniture.*

LANA:  
How about we...

ANGEL:  
Yes! Please! I don't know why I've just been sitting, surrounded by all this dirty plastic...

BEN:  
The covers? I can help.

*They begin to remove covers. Which complicates sightlines and communication.*

BEN:  
*(to Lana)* How long have you been working here?

LANA:  
I came on right when he was moved here.

BEN:  
What?

LANA:  
When her dad was moved here.

BEN:  
*(to Angel)* When did your dad move here?

ANGEL:  
To this house? I don't even... Fifteen years ago?

BEN:  
*(to Lana)* Fifteen years?

LANA:

I only started working here in April.

ANGEL:

Oh! Yeah, for the past... almost 4 years—wow—he'd lived in a Board and Care—like a nursing home but in a private house with only—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* Yes, I know what a—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Right. But then 6 months ago, he—we—moved back here.

LANA:

For hospice.

ANGEL:

His, not mine, ha ha ha.

BEN:

You didn't like the Board and Care?

ANGEL:

No! They were great!

BEN:

They could have done hospice there.

ANGEL:

I know. And that would have been fine. I just thought I would... take him home to die. His home. I never lived here.

BEN:

You are a good daughter.

*The covers are all off, folded into a pile, revealing large, ornate wrought iron furniture. Chairs, tables, plant stands, and a few elaborate, rather creepy statues.*

ANGEL:

Well! Look at that!

LANA:

Just like magic!

ANGEL:

I have nooooo idea where all this came from! One of my dad's old girlfriends?

BEN:

It's like from a castle or something!

LANA:  
It really is!

ANGEL:  
But ack! Look at me!

*During the process of removing covers, Angel has gotten dirt all over her white clothing.*

How did you two not... Man!

*The others are pristine. Angel wipes at the dirt as Lana gathers the covers.*

LANA:  
Why don't I go and—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* No! Stay and chat with us!

LANA:  
I'll put these in the garage. *(to Ben)* I am still on the clock, ha ha ha.

ANGEL:  
And I am watching her like a hawk!

LANA:  
I get away with nothing!

*She leaves with the covers.*

BEN:  
She seems good. She has a good attitude.

ANGEL:  
She does have a good attitude.

BEN:  
And what about you?

ANGEL:  
My attitude? Sucks. No surprise there.

BEN:  
No. What about everything else? I haven't really talked to you since before we moved.

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* I know. And I should've... Greg and I aren't together, anymore.

BEN:  
I heard.

ANGEL:  
Ha ha ha...! Oh. I thought that was a joke.

BEN:  
No. Just an expression.

*Ben smiles, to Angel's relief.*

Tell me: How are you, really?

ANGEL:  
I'm okay! I guess. I mean, what can you do?

BEN:  
About what?

ANGEL:  
Any of it.

*She points to the new seating options.*

Shall we? Take our thrones? Ha ha ha.

*They sit and Angel reclaims her wine glass. Then,*

You know, I have been horrible about keeping in touch with anyone. Everyone!  
Things here have just been...

BEN:  
I understand.

ANGEL:  
Yeah? Thanks.

*Very short pause.*

And how are *you*?

BEN:  
I'm good! Work is good.

ANGEL:  
And Simon?

BEN:  
He's good. Did you see?

ANGEL:

See what?

BEN:

I just posted. We're adopting.

ANGEL:

Really? A kid?

BEN:

No, a dog.

ANGEL:

Oh! I thought—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* That is a joke. Yes, a kid.

ANGEL:

I— That's great!

BEN:

But sometimes I think we should have just gone for another dog.

ANGEL:

Ha ha. You'll be a great dad. That's wonderful news!

BEN:

Thank you. It's almost final and I'm very nervous.

ANGEL:

You shouldn't be. Well. I mean, being a parent. That's like... I'd certainly be nervous!

BEN:

But you never wanted kids.

ANGEL:

I... No. I guess not.

BEN:

Wait. You guess?

ANGEL:

Ha ha. I suppose that was a definite choice.

BEN:

I remember you being very definite.

ANGEL:

Right. Can you imagine if Greg and I had had kids?

BEN:

You might have split up years ago?

ANGEL:

Very likely!

BEN:

Then it might have been worth it!

ANGEL:

Sorry. I know you never liked him.

BEN:

I didn't like him for *you*. He hated me, though.

ANGEL:

That's not true.

BEN:

Oh, it is. Then after I met Simon—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* I know, I know! I think... I think he felt threatened.

BEN:

Threatened? By me or Simon?

ANGEL:

I don't— Both? You guys made it look so easy and Greg was never...

BEN:

No, he wasn't.

ANGEL:

Did I let him come between us?

BEN:

Something did.

ANGEL:

I am so sorry, Ben. Maybe I figured you two had each other, so...

BEN:

That is a terrible excuse!

ANGEL:

I know! I don't— I don't know. Honestly, at that point I think I was just trying to play nice, keep him happy. Man! Who was that woman?

BEN:

“A character in someone else's story.”

ANGEL:

What?

BEN:

That's how you said you felt. The last time we had dinner together, before—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Well, *that's* certainly dramatic!

*A look from Ben.*

Shit. You know we were together for eighteen years?

BEN:

Oh, I know.

ANGEL:

Ha ha.

BEN:

So what happened?

ANGEL:

Nothing happened. Which probably figured into it. Everything was just what it was, like in some kind of holding pattern. I probably should have left years ago. Then when I got the news about my dad, that was that! I moved out, put my stuff in storage, took a leave from my job... And now I get to have a whole new extended life in this hell hole caring for my apparently no-longer-terminal father!

BEN:

Did you say “hell hole?”

ANGEL:

I can't stand it down here. I thought I'd be here for a couple of months, at most. Then I'd sell this house. Set up somewhere new in LA. Fresh start back at the office and maybe have enough to buy something? Although in this market...

*It's getting darker out. Ben is struggling to read Angel's lips. Maybe Angel unconsciously speaks louder.*

Do you miss LA?



BEN:

Do I miss LA?

ANGEL:

Yeah!

BEN:

Sometimes? My dog misses it more than I do. San Francisco is very different for him.

ANGEL:

Ha ha. Again. That is so wonderful for you and Simon. He is a *great* guy.

BEN:

A great guy. Yes. He is.

ANGEL:

And kids? I don't remember you wanting kids!

BEN:

Me wanting kids?

ANGEL:

Right! I don't remember that!

BEN:

Probably not something you and I talked about.

ANGEL:

I guess not...

BEN:

It's okay. My family is complicated, as you know. And when I got older, I thought: That's it, then! No kids.

ANGEL:

Hey. You're a man.

BEN:

A gay man. Another complication.

ANGEL:

Granted. But you're younger than me.

BEN:

What?

ANGEL:

You are younger than I am!

BEN:

And I always will be!

ANGEL:

Hah!

BEN:

And Simon is younger than me. But we didn't want to wait too much longer. To be "those" dads. So we signed up and it all happened very fast!

ANGEL:

Huh.

*Lana joins them carrying a tray with two wine bottles and some snacks. Napkins.*

LANA:

Anyone ready for a refill?

ANGEL:

You didn't have to do that!

BEN:

What?

ANGEL:

She asked if—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* I know, I couldn't understand what *you* said!

*Lana turns on the outdoor lights, spotlighting the dead plants and other oddities. She's set the tray on a table.*

LANA:

Is that better?

BEN:

Yes! Thank you!

ANGEL:

Oh! I didn't...

BEN:

Sorry. I couldn't read your lips.

ANGEL:

Not your fault! I'm like... addled! I guess I thought with your hearing aid...?

BEN:

It's just noise unless I can—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* I know! I forgot! I... *(pointing to the plants)* At least now we can fully appreciate the dead foliage!

*Ben smiles and Angel pours red wine in his glass.*

I'll top this off for you.

*Angel's phone buzzes; she checks it as he takes a sip.*

BEN:

I like this wine. What is it?

ANGEL:

Oh, looky looky what I've got! A package! I'll be right back.

*Before she leaves she shoots a look at Lana.*

LANA:

I didn't say anything!

*Angel is gone. Ben looks to Lana.*

BEN:

What did I miss?

LANA:

Do you like nuts?

BEN:

Nuts?

LANA:

Macadamias!

*She holds out a dish.*

BEN:

Thanks.

*He take a few and Lana sits, grabs her coke.*

LANA:

You said you like that wine?

BEN:

Yes.

LANA:

I like the label.

BEN:

Yes, it's very... unexpected?

LANA:

You think so? Hmmm.

*Another look at the label, then she points to a particularly grotesque statue.*

Now that! That's what I'd call *(speaking and signing the word)* unexpected!

*Ben nods, agreeing. Lana smiles. Then shrugs. Ben smiles. They look out at the view.*

BEN:

*(speaking and signing)* The lights! Beautiful!

LANA:

*(speaking and signing the word)* Yes! My shifts are always during the day so I'm never here this late. The view really... *(speaking and signing the expression)* comes alive. Is that right?

BEN:

*(speaking and signing)* Yes. And that's a great way to put it. Do you speak Romanian, too?

LANA:

Ha ha. No, not really. My grandparents did.

BEN:

My husband is part Romanian. The good part.

LANA:

Good for him!

*We start to hear music coming from inside. Something Bossa Nova-esque. ("An Occasional Man"?) Lana turns to look inside, as does Ben. The lights come on in the kitchen and we see a delighted Angel on display. She's posing, or rather contorting in strange positions trying to show us something.*

ANGEL:

*(from inside)* What do you think?

*Ben looks to Lana. Lana shoots him a look, then responds.*

LANA:

*(to Angel)* We can't see them!

ANGEL:

*(from inside)* Argh!

*She raises her knees up, then kicks her heels up. Then lifts one leg onto the counter as Ben looks again to Lana for some explanation. Lana shakes her head.*

*(from inside)* Wait!

*She moves out of sight and Ben turns to Lana for clues.*

LANA:

Let's just say there have been a lot of packages delivered.

*Angel comes back in with a stool, sets it in front of the counter. Sits in it, leans back and lifts both legs up so that only her legs and feet are visible. She begins dancing in the air to showcase a remarkable pair of shoes. It's quite the dance. After the finale, Lana starts clapping and Ben joins her.*

LANA:

Gorgeous!

ANGEL:

*(from inside, only her legs and feet visible)* You think so? Not totally crazy?

LANA:

Ha ha. *(softly, to Ben)* "Not crazy?" she's asking. *(to Angel)* Not at all!

BEN:

She has always been a little—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting, from inside)* Woot! I wasn't sure, but I had to try 'em... I mean, right?

*She's righted herself and gazes with wonder at her now obscured feet.*

LANA:

*(softly, to Ben)* The shoes, she's talking about.

BEN:

I know. *(to Angel)* Nice shoes!

ANGEL:

Thank you!

*She shuts the window, then turns out the lights as she dances out of the kitchen.*

LANA:

I admire her moves. I once won a samba contest, in high school.

BEN:

How long has she been getting packages?

LANA:

The last few weeks. Sometimes multiple deliveries.

BEN:

And are they all...

LANA:

Shoes? Pretty much!

BEN:

How many are there?

LANA:

I have no idea. She's got a room full of them. All still in their boxes.

BEN:

Should I be worried?

LANA:

That is entirely up to you!

*She turns back to the view with a handful of macadamias.*

BEN:

Can you tell me how her dad is doing?

LANA:

No longer mobile; very limited motor functions. Vitals generally low. Advanced dementia. Hallucinations. Only occasionally responsive and aware of his surroundings.

BEN:

Okay. I get it.

LANA:

But he's amazingly content, considering!!

BEN:

He was always easy going.

LANA:

I believe it. He'll be lying there, eyes closed, then break into a huge grin. Like he wants for nothing.

BEN:  
End of life. You see everything.

LANA:  
I expected to be here a month, maybe two. He's just not ready to go.

BEN:  
Did he say that?

LANA:  
Not in so many words—he no longer speaks.

BEN:  
I'm glad you're here for her.

LANA:  
Yes. Well. I've grown rather fond of her. Both of them! But as my grandmother used to say, "Moartea nu tine calendar: Death keeps no calendar." So I'm afraid that this is my last—

*She's interrupted by Angel coming back out, barefoot.*

ANGEL:  
Hey hey!

BEN:  
Where are your shoes?

ANGEL:  
I can't wear them outside. I wouldn't be able to return them.

*Lana shoots Ben a look.*

BEN:  
Okay.

*Angel tops off her wine and sits, noting the view.*

ANGEL:  
Oh! What sweet lights! That view just keeps getting better!

BEN:  
Yes! It... *(looking to Lana, signing without speaking)* comes alive.

LANA:  
Yes! Ha ha ha.

ANGEL:  
Hang on. Just what are you two up to?

LANA:  
*(holding out the dish)* Macadamias?

ANGEL:  
Where'd you find macadamias?

LANA:  
They were in the cupboard.

BEN:  
I'm sorry about your dad, Angel.

*Very short pause.*

ANGEL:  
Thanks.

BEN:  
I'm sure it has been difficult. What have you been doing, for you?

ANGEL:  
For me?

BEN:  
Yes. For yourself. Have you been able to—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* You mean besides my frequent spa days?

BEN:  
That's not what—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* Well! While my dad lies there, curled up in bed, I have been opening up locked doors, discovering files and drawers and boxes of the most fascinating artifacts! Tax records from the time he was 16. Notebooks of car mileage. And manila folders of women! Every woman he dated after the divorce, starting with his 1970s computer matches.

BEN:  
I'm sorry, I didn't mean—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* No, it's fine! And soon I'll have a new fun activity: putting it all into the shredder!

BEN:  
Even the women?



ANGEL:

Maybe I'll spare them that indignity. I also have a room full of my mother's stuff. From the apartment; didn't have a chance to go through it after she died and thought why not bring it here! Kill two parents with one stone, so to speak.

BEN:

You were always quite efficient.

ANGEL:

Kind of you to remember.

BEN:

I really loved your mom.

ANGEL:

Yeah. Me, too.

*Very short pause.*

"What are you doing for you?"

BEN:

I was trying to—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* I know and I'm sorry, but that's a terrible question. You have a horrible bedside manner.

BEN:

That's not what Simon says.

LANA:

*(to Ben)* So you're a doctor?

ANGEL:

He is, indeed.

BEN:

But I'm in research.

LANA:

What are you researching?

ANGEL:

He's... *(to Ben)* What are you researching?

BEN:

Vaginas.

*Short pause.*

ANGEL:  
What?

BEN:  
I'm researching vaginas.

*Very short pause.*

ANGEL:  
Vaginas.

BEN:  
Yes.

ANGEL:  
Did I know that?

BEN:  
I guess not.

ANGEL:  
Since when are you into vaginas?

BEN:  
You haven't known me *all* my life.

ANGEL:  
I mean as a grown up. A medical professional.

BEN:  
Vaginas are very interesting, clinically.

ANGEL:  
I don't doubt that, but—

BEN:  
*(interrupting)* Not enough attention has been paid to them.

LANA:  
Now you're talking.

BEN:  
It's true!

ANGEL:  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, but what's the deal?

BEN:  
The deal?

ANGEL:  
With your work!

BEN:  
I'm doing clinical tests with a new silicone model that can grow vaginal tissue cells.

LANA:  
Well, that is impressive!

*Angel shoots Lana a look.*

ANGEL:  
*(to Ben)* And you need a model for that, why?

BEN:  
To test treatments. The cells couldn't be kept alive in vitro.

LANA:  
No go on test tube vaginas?

BEN:  
Using different species also failed.

LANA:  
And no animal vaginas! That's something to think about, isn't it?

ANGEL:  
What are you—? *(to Ben)* What about actual human vaginas?

LANA:  
Would you want to them to test on your vagina?

BEN:  
Exactly! So this is very important. The vaginal chip.

ANGEL:  
Did you say "vaginal chip?"

BEN:  
Yes. The model is a small, silicone chip.

ANGEL:  
That you put into your—?

BEN:

*(interrupting)* No, no, no. We work with them in the lab. No actual vaginas are harmed.

LANA:

It's like a vagina stunt double!

BEN:

Ha ha. Yes!

ANGEL:

A vaginal chip.

LANA:

That is remarkable!

BEN:

It is! But it's only the first step.

ANGEL:

The first step to what? A silicone vagina?

BEN:

To find new ways to treat infections. And disease in the entire female reproductive tract.

ANGEL:

There we go! The whole kit and caboodle! Who needs a real womb when you can build one in a laboratory!

BEN:

No, that's not what—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Out of plastic, no less!

BEN:

What are you—?

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* I need another—

*She reaches for a bottle and knocks Ben's glass of red wine onto her lap.*

Shit!

*Everyone gets up.*

LANA:  
Let me...

*She starts to clean up.*

ANGEL:  
No I'm—

BEN:  
*(interrupting)* I am sorry! But I don't know why you're so upset!

ANGEL:  
I'm not—

BEN:  
*(interrupting)* Maybe I should be going.

ANGEL:  
No. No. I'm sorry! I don't know what's... Here.

*She picks up the red wine bottle.*

BEN:  
I'm okay.

*Angel refills his glass, anyway.*

ANGEL:  
You're obviously not! Your friend just poured your wine all over herself! I didn't get any on— Oh, no. Your shirt! Sorry, I—

BEN:  
*(interrupting)* Where is the bathroom?

ANGEL:  
There's one next to my dad's room.

BEN:  
I don't know where your—!

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* It's right—!

LANA:  
*(interrupting, to Ben)* Go through the kitchen, then down the hall. Second door.

*Very short pause.*

BEN:

Okay.

*Ben leaves. Angel refills her glass then sits, perhaps choosing a new chair. We see the light come on in the kitchen and Ben appears at the window. He meets Lana's gaze—perhaps she shrugs. Then he lowers the shade on the window and passes through the kitchen. Lana sits with her coke. Both women look out at the view. It's not a very comfortable silence. Lana pushes a small bowl toward Angel.*

LANA:

Chocolate?

ANGEL:

Huh?

LANA:

I found some chocolates. Dark chocolates. Truffles, maybe? I'm not entirely sure what qualifies as a truffle. But they're very good.

*Angel notices her outfit, which is more the worse for wear.*

ANGEL:

Jesus! Look at this mess!

LANA:

White wine.

ANGEL:

Help yourself.

LANA:

No. It's good for red wine stains. Pour some white wine on them.

ANGEL:

Really?

LANA:

I spilled plenty of red wine in the day.

*Angel begins to splash white wine on her clothing, employing progressively creative techniques. Directly from the glass, using her fingertips, a napkin, macadamias...*

So. You were upset. Can you tell me why?

ANGEL:

What do you mean?

LANA:

The vaginal chip.

ANGEL:

Right! The vaginal chip! How about that?

LANA:

Pushed some buttons?

ANGEL:

What are you talking about?

LANA:

I don't know! It just seemed to me—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Yeah, so maybe it was the idea of some guys in a lab needing to use a “model” to explore the “female reproductive tract?” Maybe they could just listen to us? Pay attention to the living, breathing hosts of said vaginas?

LANA:

That would be a start.

ANGEL:

Right?

LANA:

And?

*Very short pause.*

ANGEL:

This makes no real sense I know, and I've had probably too many glasses of wine, but... Okay: Here's my friend.

LANA:

Your deaf friend?

ANGEL:

Yes! My deaf friend! So he's already got that going for him! He's got a life full of brave and amazing things—Christ, he was an activist and taught sign language to the unhoused while he put himself through medical school! He's also this really incredible photographer, and he and his exceedingly hot husband Simon live in this cute little gingerbread house on the bay and travel all over the world and now he gets to adopt some beautiful deaf kid who will adore him and that kid will probably grow up to save even more vaginas than his father! I mean, talk about a legacy, right? And here I am. Doing what? What am I doing? Holding my breath, waiting for my father to die! Good thing I didn't have kids, what sort of a model would I be?

*Pause.*

LANA:

I was an artists' model once. Ages ago.

*Short pause.*

ANGEL:

Any paintings of your vagina I should know about?

LANA:

Not that I remember.

*Short pause.*

Maybe a sketch or two.

*Maybe both women laugh. Angel takes a chocolate. They look out at the view.*

*Then we hear the strains of an upbeat 1940s number ("Swinging on a Star"?), but this time the music has a different quality. It sneaks up on us as if it's coming from another place, altogether; Angel and Lana do not hear it. Behind them, through the window shade, we see the shadow of a larger than life Ben entering the kitchen. Taking a bottle and pouring into a cocktail shaker. Shaking. Transferring into a martini glass.*

LANA:

You know what really struck me, though? About the job? Even though I did it for just a short time. How different the pictures were. I mean, each artist, working from the same model. Being me.

ANGEL:

Lucky them!

LANA:

Don't you know it! It was at this fancy art school in downtown Los Angeles, so the students were all pretty good, and some of them were extraordinary! Or I thought so, anyway, not that I have an artistic bone in my body.

ANGEL:

Ha. I don't know if I believe that.

*The shadow of Ben turns, reaches out.*

LANA:

Oh you should. I'm an art appreciator. I've been told there's great value in that. Which I choose to believe. Ha ha ha.

ANGEL:

Huh.



*We see the shadow of another man joining him. But this figure is even more stylized, like a silhouette paper cut-out or puppet. He moves as if he's a very old man, with a cane or walker.*

LANA:

And I appreciated all of it. It was beyond exciting and the whole time I felt like I was someone else, in disguise, even though I was mostly naked.

*Ben pours the old man a martini.*

Or maybe because I was naked? Hmmm. I never thought of that.

*The men toast.*

But I remember there was one girl—I say girl because they were all so young; I was, too. A very striking bunch, weird and wild...

*Ben puts a top hat on the old man.*

Except for this girl, who was like a blank slate. You wouldn't give her a second glance on the street. And the teacher never found a kind word for her.

*The men throw their heads back in laughter, nearly losing the hat. Hilarious!*

Granted, whatever was in her paintings looked nothing like me. Some students: yep, I could buy that. Some made me look quite beautiful, for what it's worth. But there were plenty of other students who... I think the word is "abstract?" Well, a whole lot of these "abstractions," the teachers—and other students—went on and on about, like they were masterpieces, these—sorry—very strange paintings!

*With a bit of fanfare, the old man pulls a rabbit from out of his hat. A fantastic trick!*

But what do I know, right?

*At the old man's cue, Ben takes the rabbit.*

Anyway. This girl. This washed out, entirely forgettable girl. What she painted was dark and angry, and dangerous. Not remotely beautiful. Reminded me of the stories my grandmother used to tell me, to scare me as a child. And frankly, they made me afraid for her, this girl!

*With a grand gesture, the old man produces a really big saw.*

Because these paintings, it was hard to even look at them. But if you did look—and at first I had to force myself to—pretty soon, you couldn't take your eyes off them. They grabbed you, wouldn't let you go and then all of the sudden: Ah! There I was. In her paintings.

*The old man directs Ben to set the rabbit on the stool.*

LANA:

It was like she'd captured— and I realized why they use that word, artists. She “captured” a part of me that I didn't even know was there! But I sure as hell recognized.

*The old man raises the saw above the rabbit. Is he going to cut it in half?*

To this day, I have no idea how she did that. I felt completely exposed but I was also kind of thrilled. To be seen, really seen, like that.

*Just as the silhouette of the saw is about to come down, the lights go out in the kitchen. Ben appears on the patio, life-size and martini-less.*

ANGEL:

Oh! Hi!

*She stands.*

BEN:

What's going on?

ANGEL:

What?

*Ben points at her. She has wiped her chocolate-covered fingers all over her clothing.*

Oh, my god. Look at me!

BEN:

That's what I mean!

ANGEL:

I'm an absolute mess. But you've probably already diagnosed that.

BEN:

Is that why you invited me here? For my medical opinion?

ANGEL:

No! I wanted to see you! I wanted to— Ah!

*She's startled by her phone buzzing.*

BEN:

What's wrong?

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* No, I'm okay! Be right back! I'm sorry, but... *(to Ben)* Do not leave!

*Angel goes into the house, turning on the light before she hurries through the empty kitchen. Ben looks to Lana.*

BEN:

I don't understand any of this. She is one of my best friends! Why is she acting like I'm her enemy?

*Lana returns his look. Then points to something out in the view.*

LANA:

Is that a moat?

BEN:

What?

LANA:

I know it couldn't be. But doesn't that look like a moat? The way the shadows tuck in there? Like we're surrounded by a moat?

BEN:

I can't see it.

LANA:

No?

BEN:

No.

LANA:

Have some chocolate.

*She holds out the dish. A moment, then he takes one. He sits and behind them, we see an exaggerated shadow of Angel struggling across the kitchen, carrying a huge, cartoon-like, pile of shoe boxes, in silhouette.*

BEN:

Oh! These are delicious!

LANA:

They are, huh? What technically is a truffle?

BEN:

The filling is made with heavy cream. May I?

LANA:

Of course!

*He takes another chocolate and starting in slow motion, a shoe box falls from the top of Angel's pile.*

LANA:

I worked for a family of chocolatiers, once. Doesn't that sound fanciful?

BEN:

It does.

*Angel makes a move to catch the box which causes another to fall.*

LANA:

It was basically a nanny gig. I had nothing to do with the chocolate. Except eating rejects.

BEN:

Reject chocolate?

*Another catch and another box falling.*

LANA:

Oh, yes. Chocolatiers are very exacting people. Even the children!

BEN:

The children rejected chocolate?

*Lana shrugs. Angel makes an impossible catch, unleashing another box or two.*

That is criminal!

LANA:

I must admit, I prefer pastry, myself.

BEN:

No! I don't want to hear it.

LANA:

No?

*Angel reaches for the boxes and the pile teeters; she is in danger of a major upset.*

BEN:

Our house, it's chocolate or nothing. Chocolate is my motivation and my salvation. For Simon, too. It's what we've got.

*He reaches for another chocolate and in back of them, extra appendages spring from Angel's shadow, ready for the assist.*

LANA:

Ha ha ha. And did I hear that you're becoming parents?

BEN:

Yes!

LANA:

That's terrific. A very fortunate kid.

BEN:

The kid we were planning to bribe with chocolate who might not even like it?

LANA:

It will work out. I have a good sense of these things.

BEN:

I hope so. There are so few things in life you can count on!

LANA:

This is true!

*The juggling of the boxes with extra arms and legs in play continues, becoming quite complex and dramatic as Ben helps himself to more chocolate and more wine.*

BEN:

Thank you for listening. This is all happening very fast. We thought we'd have more time to figure it out. Maybe a kid or two to practice on.

LANA:

Ha ha.

BEN:

It should be official next month, but it seems like every day things keep popping up.

LANA:

The "unexpected" adding to the uncertainty?

BEN:

Yes! And that makes it even more stressful!

LANA:

I'd imagine.

BEN:

It almost doesn't seem real.

LANA:

What does, anymore?

BEN:

Good point. You know, if you're in the market—Simon's family?—we're looking for a godmother...

*Success! The shadow of Angel and the mountain of boxes move toward the door.*

LANA:

Ha ha ha. I do have some experience!

*The lights inside go out and our Angel appears on the patio, carrying only two boxes of shoes. Her outfit is still covered in chocolate and wine, now morphed into a bold design.*

ANGEL:

All right, then! Shall we see what we've got, here?

*She sits and opens the shoe boxes, trying on shoes throughout the following.*

LANA:

We were talking about Ben's adoption.

ANGEL:

*(leaning down, her face out of view)* Oh, who's adopting you, Ben?

BEN:

What? I didn't—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Just kidding. I'm so happy for you. How old is he?

BEN:

How old is who?

ANGEL:

The kid you're adopting? Did you post pictures?

BEN:

Not until it's final. But she's 11 months.

ANGEL:

Wait. She? It's a girl?

BEN:

A girl? Yes.

ANGEL:

Huh. I just assumed a boy.

BEN:

So did we. That's not how it worked out.

ANGEL:

What does that mean?

BEN:

We went through the foster-adopt system. For some people, it takes years but we got a call, right away.

LANA:

Really!

BEN:

One of their regular foster mothers died and they were scrambling to place her kids. They asked if we could take this baby and we said yes. She was only six months old.

LANA:

Goodness! I see what you were saying, before. And a baby! That is not at all a common story.

BEN:

I know! Weird, huh?

LANA:

But what a happy ending!

ANGEL:

So you've had her... since May?

BEN:

Late April. Next month, hopefully she'll be ours!

ANGEL:

How did you know what to do? With a baby?

BEN:

We didn't! We thought we'd have—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* And she just happened to be deaf?

BEN:

No.

ANGEL:

No?

BEN:

She's not deaf.

ANGEL:  
She's not?

BEN:  
She can hear.

ANGEL:  
Then why... I thought you were adopting a deaf son. Why did I think that?

BEN:  
I have no—

ANGEL:  
*(interrupting)* Aren't there all sorts of deaf kids in the system that need someone like you?

BEN:  
There are all sorts of kids, period, Angel!

*A moment, then Angel returns her shoes to their boxes. Lana lifts her coke.*

LANA:  
Here's to the expectant father! Fathers!

BEN:  
*(raising his glass)* And to little Stella!

LANA:  
Oh, that's a beautiful name!

BEN:  
Thank you.

LANA:  
Stella for star.

BEN:  
Yes. She is our light.

*They look at the night sky. After a bit,*

ANGEL:  
We'd go camping, when I was a little girl. With my dad. He'd always point out all of the stars. Big Dipper. Little Dipper. Orion's belt.

LANA:  
Orion's belt. You can use it to find Mercury—the planet of communication.



ANGEL:

Maybe *you* can. Plus tons more and I'd have to ask my dad where they were, what they were, every time. Maybe I liked asking him. Communication? He was never much of a conversationalist. No heart-to-hearts, like with my mom. Strictly a question and answer guy. If you could get him to talk at all. But now I look up and... I have no idea what's out there.

LANA:

You can't see stars tonight, anyway. Or probably any night, here. Too many lights, if that's any consolation.

BEN:

Did you say "any constellation?"

LANA:

Ha ha ha. No.

ANGEL:

I don't... Ah. Was that an expectant dad joke?

LANA:

A good one!

BEN:

I try.

ANGEL:

"Expectant." Now that's a good word.

LANA:

It is, isn't it.

ANGEL:

We all deserve to be expectant, don't you think? And I'm not just talking kids. Wait. You don't have any, do you, Lana? Or any plans?

LANA:

Not of my own and no.

ANGEL:

Rentals? Like, are you an auntie?

LANA:

I am.

ANGEL:

Me, too. But you know what? I want to be expectant. I want to expect something. I want to hang my hopes on something that's on the way, that'll be mine. Something I can count on to make me feel worthy and purposeful and... Oh look!

*Angel picks up a shoe box.*

ANGEL:

Problem solved!

BEN:

Shoes give you purpose?

ANGEL:

Close enough.

BEN:

How many pairs of—?

LANA:

*(interrupting, standing)* May I take these inside?

*She gestures toward the shoe boxes.*

ANGEL:

Please. Wait. What time is it? Shouldn't you already be gone? Don't you have to—?

LANA:

*(interrupting)* Soon enough.

*Lana takes the shoes and moves into the house, which stays dark.*

ANGEL:

I honestly don't know what I'd do without her. Can I put in for overtime or a bonus or something?

BEN:

I don't think it works like that.

ANGEL:

Well, when she comes back out I'll convince her to join us for some vino. She's beyond amazing. *(lifting her glass)* Here's to Lana, queen of caregiving!

BEN:

I should be going, too.

ANGEL:

No, you just got here! And I'm sorry about before. I haven't seen you in forever and you went out of your way to hump up to this horrible shack—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* It is not horrible.

ANGEL:

But I am! Will you let me apologize? I love that good things are happening for you and I had no right to ruin that. So, please: On behalf of all vaginas everywhere, thank you for your work.

*A moment, then Ben smiles and bows his head.*

I think you might be the only gay man in existence who's not horrified by vaginas.

BEN:

It's true, I am the only one.

ANGEL:

Glad you're in my camp.

BEN:

And I always will be.

*Short pause.*

Angel, I have missed you. We've missed you.

ANGEL:

Me, too!

BEN:

Can we see more of you, now?

ANGEL:

Ha ha. I'd like that. *(perhaps partially turning away)* To see more of me.

BEN:

Why don't you come up and visit?

ANGEL:

Riiiiight. A little getaway!

BEN:

Yes!

ANGEL:

And who's gonna—?!

*Very short pause.*

Can I tell you something? Kind of on topic. Kind of not.

BEN:

Sure.

ANGEL:

It has recently occurred to me that I've become way too familiar with my father's penis.

BEN:

What?

ANGEL:

I mean, not in a bad way.

BEN:

What are you—!?

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Although I doubt there is any "good" father-daughter penis connection—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* Stop! Angel!

ANGEL:

I'm talking medically. I'm saying that with prostate issues and UTIs and catheters I've spent waaaaay too much time around my father's penis. In doctor's offices. And hospitals.

BEN:

Oh.

ANGEL:

Not that I have anything against penises in general.

BEN:

Good?

ANGEL:

But somehow, I don't think this is how daddies are supposed to keep their little girls close.

BEN:

No.

ANGEL:

Although it's never seemed to phase him. Someone needs to take care of it so why not Angel?

BEN:

Can't your brother help?

ANGEL:

You've met him. You really think he's going to wipe dad's ass?

BEN:

But he should—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Yeah, he should but we're past all that. He and his happy family are safely tucked away, carrying on the family name. While I remain here. Doing what needs to be done. Because I am a good daughter. I am a...

*She looks up to where the stars should be.*

BEN:

What?

ANGEL:

Hey! I wanna show you something. You remember my grandmother?

*Short pause.*

BEN:

Your grandmother?

ANGEL:

We talked about it, a long time ago. She taught deaf kids. To speak?

BEN:

Yes. I remember.

ANGEL:

Well. The other day, I heard from this woman about a book my grandmother wrote in like the late 60s. She wants to use it to teach, today. Talk about tone deaf. Or wait. Do you say that? Can I?

BEN:

*(moving past her questions)* Teaching speech is not, in itself, a bad thing. But for deaf kids, it's a second language. A foreign language. They need to sign first.

ANGEL:

I remember; you told me! But this book talks about how signing gets in the way—the only thing that will make kids “normal” is “good, natural speech.” Let me go get it.

BEN:

No! You have no idea how much damage that did! Still does, today! Any child has to learn their own “natural” language first, and as early as possible—there is a critical window. Without that there are pathways in the brain that will not and cannot develop. Learning to sign can *help* a child learn to speak!

ANGEL:

How did you learn?

BEN:

Speech? Mostly from my family. No one can sign except my mom. She learned. And speaking is easier for me than for lots of people.

ANGEL:

Oh.

BEN:

Every deaf person is different.

ANGEL:

Of course. But let me show you this book.

BEN:

I don't need to—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Oh, you want to! It's definitely from by-gone era. I mean, now with implants, everything's changed, right?

BEN:

"Everything?"

ANGEL:

They can fix the problem!

BEN:

Being deaf is not a problem that needs to be—!

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* No! I'm sorry, I didn't mean that!

BEN:

Then why did you say it?

ANGEL:

Because I'm... I don't know!

BEN:

No. You don't. But I have these conversations with doctors, surgeons, even! Deafness does not need to be cured. A deaf person with implants is still a deaf person.

ANGEL:

But like you said, different, right?

BEN:

It doesn't change who they are. I have friends who've gotten implants; personally, I don't understand why.

ANGEL:

You don't understand why they want to hear?

BEN:

It's not hearing like you hear. It's like having a computer in your brain. The sounds are manufactured, artificial. It's more like a transmission than hearing.

ANGEL:

Oh, I didn't...

BEN:

No. And it's not even every word—you need to fill in the gaps. Now deaf people, we are used to that—being left out of conversations at the dinner table, at parties, meetings. So it is a choice people can make for themselves.

ANGEL:

Or parents for their—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* Please! That is something that has *not* changed! Like that book: Teaching children to be “normal.” What is normal? A child who is born deaf or hard of hearing—that is their normal. You choose to “give” a child artificial hearing, you take something else away. Language is more than just words!

ANGEL:

But wouldn't parents want their kids to understand them?

BEN:

Or do they want to make their kids *like* them? There are different ways to understand. Stella: She hears, she sees, she walks, she is who she is. She will grow to experience the world and everything in it in her own way. She will figure out what she wants to say, how she wants to say it. I wouldn't want her to do that with a computer in her brain.

ANGEL:

Will you teach her to sign?

BEN:

We are teaching her! She'll be bilingual; have another way to understand the world. *(signing and speaking)* You should try it!

ANGEL:

I know! I should! I...

*Short pause.*

ANGEL:

You will be a very good dad.

BEN:

Thank you.

ANGEL:

And I have a very weird dad.

*A look from Ben. Then the light goes on in the kitchen and we start to hear a ballroom dance tune (“Moon River”?), again with a far-away vibe.*

Seriously, a computer in his brain might explain it; his wiring is certainly different.

BEN:

Explain that.

*We see the silhouette of the old man, now moving easily.*

ANGEL:

Well, at one point, some years back, he said to me, “I don’t feel pain.” And I was like, “Oh! That puts a lot of my childhood in perspective!”

*A very expressive shadow of Lana joins the old man.*

BEN:

Was he joking?

ANGEL:

He was not. I think there was a lot he didn’t feel. Didn’t know how to. My mom always said he was missing a piece.

BEN:

A piece of what?

*Lana and the old man begin to dance.*

ANGEL:

Huh. I don’t... I don’t remember her ever going into clinical detail; to her credit, she didn’t talk about him a lot. When I was little, I thought of myself as a daddy’s girl. And later I realized that was only because he was always just out of reach, you know? And I was always trying to figure out why.

*Lana is a very good dancer. She guides the old man in a formal waltz.*

Now I get that it was him—his missing whatever—but as a kid I was sure it was me. What was wrong with me? How could I be better. Be like him! Which annoyed my mom to no end, even though she didn’t say it. Man, the time I’ve spent trying to be what I thought other people wanted...



*The dancers perform an impressive move, completely in synch.*

ANGEL:

Still, I always thought I understood him. Could translate what was going on in there. I told myself he understood me, too.

*Perhaps Lana dips the old man.*

He doesn't know who I am, anymore.

*Lana and the old man laugh, deeply.*

BEN:

What?

ANGEL:

My dad. He has no idea who I am, now. He looks at his daughter like she's someone he's never met.

BEN:

I'm so sorry, Angel.

*Lana and the old man hold one another.*

ANGEL:

It's been awhile, but the first time it happened I was absolutely gutted. I mean, before he'd called me my aunt's names, my mother, his mother... but he knew I was *someone*, you know?

BEN:

I do.

*Lana does a spin, then returns to the old man.*

ANGEL:

And I'd joke with him and scold him and he'd, "Yes yes yes: Angel! You're Angel!"

"Yes, thank you very much! I am!"

He'd laugh.

"Love you, Dad." "Love you Angel." No matter what, always, "Love you, Dad."

"Love you, Angel."

*The couple glides elegantly across the floor.*

And then one day, as I was about to leave, "Love you, Dad!"

*The dancers stop.*

ANGEL:

And I got that look. That “Who in the world is this person and why would she love me?” look. Or maybe it didn’t even get that far. And then he says...

“Goodbye.”

*The lights inside go out. Perhaps the statues on the patio cast new shadows. Then Angel and Ben are distracted by something out front, moving.*

What is that?

BEN:

I can’t tell.

ANGEL:

That’s like, close!

BEN:

A coyote?

ANGEL:

No. It’s too big.

BEN:

Coyotes can get pretty big!

*We hear howling.*

ANGEL:

Whoa! And hear that?

*Ben shoots her a look.*

Well, that does not sound like a coyote! It sounds like... Something wild. Something that doesn’t belong here! Something...

*They both look for that something. Then,*

Oh, Ben. What am I doing here?

BEN:

Between spa days, you are doing a lot.

ANGEL:

Ohhhhhh I can’t even laugh at that!

BEN:

You said it: You are doing what needs to be done. But how will you feel when you *are* done? Here.

ANGEL:

You mean, when he's...

*Ben nods.*

I don't know. He's already said goodbye, right? And I think Lana's been trying to "prepare" me. Although she says you can never truly be prepared.

BEN:

She's right.

ANGEL:

So I'm just... waiting. For my next chapter?

BEN:

Angel?

ANGEL:

Yeah?

BEN:

You may be all over the place, but you are there when it really matters. No matter what, I've always known that you would be there for me, too.

ANGEL:

Oh, I want to be! And I'm sorry that—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* I know. Now, I have an important question: Will you be Stella's Godmother?

*Very short pause.*

ANGEL:

What?

BEN:

Neither of us is religious, but Simon's family is very old school and it's important for us to have—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Me? You want me?

BEN:

Yes!

ANGEL:

Ben! I... Of course I will! That is so... And I will learn to sign with her!

BEN:

Good!

ANGEL:

Oh! Man! I never—

*She's interrupted by her phone making a noise; she looks at it.*

ANGEL:

Shit!

BEN:

Not more shoes...

ANGEL:

I wish! No, it's pill time. Organizing the pills for tomorrow. Where's Lana?

BEN:

She went inside.

ANGEL:

But it's pill time!

BEN:

Shouldn't she be gone, already?

ANGEL:

She— Fuck! Pills are the nighttime person. And now the nighttime person is me!

BEN:

Do you have instructions?

ANGEL:

I do! There's a list. It's somewhere.

BEN:

I can help you!

ANGEL:

No. I can find it. I can do this. I'll be right back!

BEN:

Angel?

*But she is gone, inside the house. Ben sits back down and picks up his wine glass. The light in the kitchen comes on. We see the exaggerated shadow of Angel again, standing as if she's preparing to go into battle.*

*Ben looks out at the view then takes out his phone. Behind him, Lana enters the patio with a large watering can.*

*The shadow of Angel holds up a piece of paper in one hand, the silhouette of a rectangular pill organizer in the other.*

*Lana waters one of the dead plants.*

*The piece of paper in Angel's hand extends, becoming a stream of paper. She tries to reach the end but it keeps extending, circling around her.*

*Ben looks to see if there are any more chocolates. Or nuts.*

*The paper threatens to strangle Angel. She wrests herself from its clutches using the pill organizer—which has grown in size—as a weapon.*

*Lana moves past one of the statues to another plant; the statue grabs her ass. She turns and gives it a resounding slap. Then glares at it. It recoils.*

*Pill organizer in hand, Angel reaches for a cabinet that's just out of her reach.*

*Ben has finished up the last of the snacks. He checks if there's any more wine.*

*Angel drags the stool over to the cabinet, climbs up and opens it.*

*Lana waters another dead plant.*

*A bottle of pills falls from the cabinet. Angel unsuccessfully tries to catch it.*

*Ben pours the last of the red wine into his glass.*

*Another bottle falls from the cabinet. Angel steps down from the stool to grab it.*

*Lana moves to another plant, stopping another statue from accosting her with another fierce glare.*

*A much larger bottle falls from the cabinet, hitting Angel squarely on the head.*

*Ben decides to add the last of the white to his glass. Who doesn't love a good rosé?*

*As Angel massages her head, individual pills begin to spill from the cabinet.*

*Lana waters the last of the plants.*

*The stream of pills increases. Angel tries to get back on the chair to shut the cabinet.*

*Ben looks out at the view, enjoying it and his wine.*

*Angel is prevented from closing the cabinet by a fast-moving torrent of pills; she is swept off the chair.*

*Lana has finished watering and begins whispering to one plant, then the others.*

*The flow of pills has increased exponentially and they are now filling the kitchen, threatening to drown Angel.*

*Ben stands. What's that he sees, out there?*

*We hear howling again. Lana turns to look out at the view.*

*Angel desperately tries to paddle her way out of the kitchen, using the now giant pill organizer as a life raft.*

*The howling builds. Maybe there are other animal sounds. Is something getting close? Lana looks at Ben. Does he need saving?*

*Suddenly, the lights go off inside the house and a manic Angel appears, triumphantly holding the small pill organizer over her head. Her outfit is severely distressed; her hair is crazy, all over the place.*

ANGEL:

I did it! I got 'em!

*Ben turns to where Lana stood but she has disappeared.*

Ben! Did you hear me? I mean...

*She moves to him and grabs him, turning him toward her.*

Ben! Look! The pills! I put them in their right places! All the different bottles, I went through and put each one in its...

*Angel is face to face with Ben. She begins to sob, falling apart in his arms.*

BEN:

Angel!

*He holds her. After a bit, she pulls away, trying to rally but not so much.*

ANGEL:

I'm sorry.

BEN:

It's okay!

ANGEL:

No, it's not. I'm not. None of this is at all okay. It's like my whole life has been full of placeholders until the next thing happens and now... Am I thinking someone will come and rescue me?

BEN:

I'm sorry I can't be your hero!

ANGEL:

Yeah! Fuck you, you already found your prince...

BEN:

And now my little princess.

ANGEL:

Ha ha. Yes. Yes. Your... Oh, Ben. You really want me to be her godmother?

BEN:

Yes!

ANGEL:

But I don't even recognize myself anymore! It's like I'm lost underneath all these layers of "should," you know? Didn't I used to be a grown-ass woman who knew where she was going and could take care of herself?

BEN:

You are still that person and you have become so much more!

ANGEL:

Then why do I feel like some little girl under a spell who wakes up in the forest and—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* Angel! For once, listen to me!

*The following is signed and not spoken.*

I wish you could see that you are one of the best people I've ever met. You drive me crazy, but you are one of those people who touches people in ways no one can understand. You are brave enough to let people in, all the way in. You say the wrong things but you what's under the words is worth so much more. That has always been you and whatever doubts you have now, you are here because you have to be, because you are you. And when you are done here, you will find a way to be there for yourself. As someone who loves you, I can see that.

*Silence.*

*Then Angel closes her eyes tightly. Ben moves to her.*

BEN:

*(speaking)* Do you remember, years ago, when you found out you were pregnant and I took you to the clinic, what you said?

ANGEL:

“Thank you,” I hope?

BEN:

You said, “I’m too selfish to have children.”

ANGEL:

Yeah, well, that’s true.

BEN:

I think the opposite is true.

*A moment, then Angel opens her eyes. She reaches out and touches Ben’s face.*

ANGEL:

Thank you.

*We hear the howling, again.*

There it is, again! What is that?

LANA:

Wolves!

*Lana has appeared carrying her bag, along with a box and a sweater.*

ANGEL:

Wolves?

BEN:

There are wolves here?

ANGEL:

I’ve never heard anything like that, before.

LANA:

Development is fairly recent in these hills.

ANGEL:

The wolves were here first?

LANA:

The wolves were definitely here first.

*She sets down her things on the table, puts the sweater on Angel’s shoulders.*



LANA:

It's getting a bit chilly out.

ANGEL:

*(noticing her bag)* Wait. You're leaving? Will you join us for one last glass of wine, pleeeeeeease?

*Ben gestures: There's no more wine.*

LANA:

I've already stayed longer than I should.

BEN:

And I have to be going, too. I'm late for family FaceTime!

ANGEL:

No! You can't—

BEN:

*(interrupting)* Angel!!

*Very short pause.*

ANGEL:

I cannot wait to meet Stella! *(signing and speaking)* I love you.

BEN:

*(signing, without speaking)* I love you. *(signing and speaking)* Nice to meet you, Lana.

LANA:

*(signing and speaking)* Nice to meet you! *(speaking)* Pe curând. Farewell.

BEN:

Ha ha. *(to Angel, signing and speaking)* See you soon, Angel!

ANGEL:

Yes!

*And he leaves alongside the house. Angel takes stock of herself, transformed into an unexpectedly wild, gorgeous creature. Then we hear the gate scraping followed by a final bang.*

ANGEL:

Ouch.

LANA:

I left you the number.

ANGEL:  
What?

LANA:  
The number for the guy. Who can fix the gate.

ANGEL:  
Oh! Thanks.

*Lana picks up her bag.*

LANA:  
Goodbye, Angel.

ANGEL:  
So... When are you back?

LANA:  
I'm not.

*Short pause.*

ANGEL:  
Not at all? Ever?

LANA:  
I'm afraid not.

ANGEL:  
Ooooooh, that's what I was afraid of! Can't you just... I can pay you? I could pay you whatever! Or not whatever, but...

LANA:  
Not necessary; you'll be just fine.

*She starts to leave.*

ANGEL:  
Maybe we could have lunch, sometime? I'm actually kind of hungry now! (*seeing the empty snack bowls*) I could grab a bag of... vaginal chips, or something?

LANA:  
Ha ha ha. Sounds delicious, but I'm good.

*She continues out and in the distance, we hear howling.*

ANGEL:  
Hey! Look!

*She picks up the pill organizer.*

ANGEL:

I figured out the pills!

LANA:

Congratulations!

ANGEL:

It was harder than I thought it would be.

LANA:

We are trained professionals.

ANGEL:

Of course! I didn't mean to—

LANA:

*(interrupting)* I was kidding.

ANGEL:

Yeah.

*Lana continues out and the howling continues.*

ANGEL:

Oh! I'm going to be a godmother. Ben asked me.

LANA:

Congratulations!

ANGEL:

Yeah! It's great! But... can I tell you something?

LANA:

Yes?

ANGEL:

I am a little afraid of children!

LANA:

Rightly so. They can be terrifying.

ANGEL:

I know! My nieces and nephews! I love them, but I never know what to say to them and I don't imagine they have any interest in me.

LANA:

I doubt that's true.

ANGEL:

And the other day, I was out shopping. There were these beautiful girls all dressed in pink. Looking at me. Giggling. I smiled back. But then I thought... are they laughing at me? I think they were mocking me!

LANA:

Well, teenage girls these days—

ANGEL:

*(interrupting)* Oh, no. These girls were like, five!

*The howling gets closer.*

*(shouting)* Will you please shut up? We're trying to have a conversation, here!

*The howling stops.*

So how am I going to be a goddamn godmother?

LANA:

Trust me. You'll be perfect.

ANGEL:

Being a fairytale adjunct to someone else's child?

LANA:

Don't knock it until you've tried it.

*As Lana continues out, Angel looks around the patio and sees the box on the table.*

ANGEL:

*(picking up the box)* Lana! No! Wait! You left this!

LANA:

No, that's yours.

ANGEL:

I don't think so.

LANA:

Open it.

*Angel does, and pulls out pair of timeless red shoes.*

ANGEL:

Oh! They're beautiful! But I didn't order these.

LANA:

No. I hope you don't mind, I found them with your mother's things.

ANGEL:

Really? I... Oh, goodness, yes! Yes, she wore these when I was little!

LANA:

And your grandmother, before her. Look in the box...

*Angel pulls a photograph out.*

ANGEL:

Wow! That's amazing!

*She sits and puts on the shoes; they fit perfectly.*

I remember I loved these shoes. At one point, she stopped wearing them... and I don't think I ever knew they were her mother's...

*She stands and looks at the photo.*

LANA:

In my book, that's not a bad legacy.

ANGEL:

No! Not at all.

*Wearing the red shoes, Angel begins to move around the space in a new way—with more freedom, a sense of exploration.*

ANGEL:

So then... for my mother, my grandmother—my father—it's like legacy is laid out, passed down, a straight line for the next generation to follow. Achievements and bequests, guiding our next steps.

LANA:

That sounds about right.

ANGEL:

But what about for me? For me, if there is no next generation—of me—what will my legacy look like?

*The light inside goes on, and we see the silhouette of the old man; maybe he's searching for someone. From that far-away place, we hear a somewhat simple, haunting melody. ("Nature Boy?")*

I mean, I'm here, doing my due daughter diligence, and I can't help but think, when I'm gone, who will there be to collect my photos and files and greeting cards and index cards and books and treasures... Who will value them, because they were mine?

*The old man begins to slow down; each move takes more and more effort. He retrieves his walker or cane.*

ANGEL:

But honestly, do I even need that? Do I want to burden someone with that? Assigning worth? Weight. Import to... stuff?

*The old man manages to move to the stool, then sets himself on top of it.*

What if my legacy is not some big accomplishment or objects or even memories that demand someone keep them. What if my legacy is something that can't be captured. Bits of energy. Like the stars we can't even see most of the time. Or those twinkling lights out there!

*The lights inside begin to fade, and the kitchen fills with tiny, moving lights. Now curled up on the stool, the silhouette of the old man appears small and childlike.*

Why can't the proof that I was here and had an impact be the permission to let go. To hold things in an entirely different way and then allow them to burn out and become invisible and silent and somehow it will all still be there. It will still matter. It will still... be.

*And the window is dark.*

LANA:

A great poet once said, "Legacy is every life you've touched."

*Short pause.*

ANGEL:

Was he Romanian?

LANA:

Ha ha. No, she wasn't.

ANGEL:

Ha ha. Those poets. They know shit, huh.

LANA:

And now I really have to go.

ANGEL:

You're really going to leave me alone?

LANA:

*(indicating the shoes)* You are so far from alone.

*She starts out again.*

ANGEL:

Lana! Thank you!

*Short pause.*

LANA:

You're very welcome.

*And Lana is gone. All is silent. Angel breathes in deeply. She switches off the outside light; the patio is now bathed in moonlight and more magical than frightening.*

*As she heads to the kitchen, we feel movement around her, maybe hear rustling. The plants are sprouting green leaves, producing vines. The statues dig it.*

*Inside the kitchen, the lights come on and the shade has been pulled up. Angel opens the window. She breathes in the night air again, then leans out and she begins to howl. First on her own, then the wolves join her. It's a marvelously satisfying chorus. And the look on Angel's face... perhaps we get a glimpse of who she is ready to become.*

**End of Play**