

WINNERS

by

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"In this world, you must be a bit too kind to be kind enough." ~ Pierre de Marivaux

"I embrace my rival, but only to strangle him." ~ Jean Racine

"Question everything. Learn something. Answer nothing." ~ Euripides

"Know Thyself." ~ the Oracle at Delphi

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CHARACTERS

<u>FRAN</u>	19 and Goth, they/ish and then 29 years old fully they
<u>CALI</u>	15 then 25 year old blondish baby sister to Fran, she her hers - repetitive mannerisms around her hair, hands/nails/body, smoothings, shapings, calmings
<u>STU</u>	46 then 56, golfer biological father to Fran and Cali, cismale, (could be cast with trans masc actor if desired) repeats a mouth sound to punctuate his speech, something he thinks is just for fun, cool, but he can't control it, sometimes with a slap on his leg or a hand gesture like a golf swing
<u>RHODA</u>	44 (doesn't age) tennis-playing biological mother to Fran and Cali, a tough broad who serves fast and hard even against her own children, is a cisfemale (could be played by a trans female actor if desired) She's rather butch in spite of her serious attempts to present as female, heavyset, uses her racquet throughout to stim/fidget, cracks knuckles, exercises (squats/lunges) or plays with a tennis ball as if it's cool

All the characters are Jewish and neurodivergent. They all have repetitive gestures that are not constant - they rise and fall. Each production will have to find the truth of these repetitions for each character. This play would benefit from physicality/movement/choreography and fight direction. They might all do one stim alike, maybe sometimes they do absent-mindedly between beats. And they often echo each other in {} these brackets.

TIME: 10 years ago and then in the last scene Now

PLACE: Suburbia, in the United States

A lack of punctuation allows for a more conscious interpretation of the lines and with Jews a lot of statements are questions - make it yours.

/ for interruption

> to continue to your next line without listening to anyone else

{echolalia happens in these brackets and should be spoken}

[words in these brackets are not spoken, they are there to make sense of the line]

(stuff in parentheses is also not spoken)

... is a delay while trying to speak, maybe can be vocalized somehow, like on the sound of an N (different for each character) (this is shorter than ----)

---- is a delay in processing, perhaps from a wave of emotion or a missing of that wave, like a skip on a record, a delay in processing in a character's experience, an inability to move forward different from a dash --- indicating being cut off at the end of a line (if it happens at the end of a line, it's a stuckness for the character but not necessarily a delay in terms of cue.)

G-d is my way of writing this - please pronounce as usual, as if there's an o

WINNERS

SCENE 1 - LOVE ALL or Something Terrible About to Happen

AT RISE: FRAN, alone, awaits a tennis serve. FRAN may or may not be dressed for tennis. FRAN may be their regular Goth self, but FRAN probably has a tennis racquet even if FRAN's not sure how they got it. The sun is in their eyes. FRAN tries to anticipate the serve. It doesn't come. It's hot. The sun blinds. FRAN tries to stay ready, bouncing feet, aware of grip, ready for the serve. It doesn't come. FRAN gets carried away with bouncing.

FRAN

Tennis Tennis Tennis

FRAN repeats "tennis" as much as needed, until suddenly from some far away place:

RHODA (unseen)

Look alert, Franny!

FRAN may not know where the voice is coming from. FRAN may have been anticipating from the wrong direction. This freaks FRAN out and stops them bouncing. Like facing a firing squad.

FRAN (shifting toward the voice)

{Look alert, Franny!} What? Mom?! Where are you? ... I can't see! ----- The sun's in my eyes! Mom?!

RHODA

First serve in a new game. Love all. I'm not gonna make it easy for you. You know that, right?

FRAN

-----{right}

RHODA

Ready or not!

FRAN

{Not} Wait! ...No, not ready!

The ball comes hard at FRAN

FRAN

NO!

BLACKOUT

SCENE 2 - WINNING

Lights up on STU at a table in a family restaurant, the kind with a buffet. CALI arrives from the ladies room having fixed her face. Sits. Not too close to STU. FRAN arrives with a backpack from the parking lot. FRAN sits. Not too close to either. They all look super uncomfortable. They are dressed for a funeral. There's a long pause. As if no one knows what to say. It's really awkward. They don't touch, each in motion in different, odd ways. The pause makes it seem as if they've all lost their lines.

THEY cannot see or hear RHODA who is dressed for tennis. SHE hopes everyone will notice her bloomers embroidered with "Smartass." SHE has her racquet and balls. RHODA is the only character who can see the audience. SHE has no seat at the table. SHE is ungrounded, on another plane. She waits for STU or FRAN or CALI to say something. THEY don't.

RHODA

Someone's gotta start.

Tonight should be the first night of my shiva.

They never saw me. Too much flesh. Always too much and not enough.

(including STU, FRAN and CALI, coach-mode)

All right, listen up! I've only been dead since Friday, so I'm new at this. But everyone knows, if you break the rules, you cannot win.

(to audience)

I should be able to rest. But Art makes up his own rules. We were only married six months. But not anymore! Til death do us part! Not like Stu here. Talk about whiffing it. Complete failure, connected forever through the mixture of our DNA, Fran and Cali. I don't know all the Jewish rules about parenting. I don't speak Hebrew. I wanted to learn, but everyone said, "Don't be too Jewy." But I'm Jewish. So why not? I'm not allowed to know who I am? Why couldn't I be who I was?

(to STU, FRAN and CALI)

Get me to heaven! Sit shiva! Forgive me. For anything. For Everything. Game?

STU (to CALI and FRAN)

I ordered the buffet.

A staring match starts between CALI and FRAN.

STU

It's all you can eat!

Staring match continues.

I ordered for all of us. STU

I wouldn't call this an us FRAN

I win! CALI

Game, Cali. RHODA

Thanks, Dad! CALI

We haven't been an us in a long time RHODA

Why don't you call me Dad? STU

You don't act like one. FRAN

FRAN stands awkwardly dressed in funeral clothing, uncomfortable. FRAN grabs a backpack from under the table.

FRAN

I can't be in this. I can't be here. Why did you drag us out like this?

FRAN exits. CALI plays with her hair.

I thought you were hungry. STU

I'm never hungry. CALI

I thought we'd talk STU

Just the two of us? CALI

We have to figure things out STU

We should eat. I'm not eating, but we should eat, so CALI

{So} Why aren't you eating? STU

CALI hostile eyeballs STU

Are you dieting? STU

Does it look like I need to diet? CALI

{Diet} No. That's why I asked. You should eat. We could talk STU

{Talk} Hi. How's your new wife? If she was here, we'd be four and still not us. CALI

Point for Cali! RHODA

I'm sorry. STU

What's it been, a week? CALI (on the length of his new marriage)

I said it before. I'll say it again. I'm sorry. STU

Is there a reason you didn't invite us? CALI

STU

{Invite you?} To my wedding? You were at camp.

CALI

{Camp?} Oh, Mom was dying that day

STU

Your mother was dying for months. Yes, but ---

CALI

{But} Mom died the day you got married

STU

{Married} Yeah, but Cali, it's my third marriage.

RHODA

Point for Stu

STU

It's not as if your mother and I are newly divorced.

CALI

Since I was seven.

STU

{Seven?} So it's been a while

CALI

Eight years.

STU

and weddings are planned. You were seven?

CALI (not)

I guess I just love you so much for explaining that.

STU (earnest)

Thanks

RHODA

Advantage Cali

CALI
And when Fran comes back you can lecture us

STU
Talk

CALI
Diarrhea of the mouth.

STU
This is a table

CALI
So?

STU
We're going to eat here

CALI hostile eyeballs STU

STU
Do I have to spell it out for you?

CALI
I can spell. I'm good at spelling.

STU
We don't talk about bodily functions when we're eating.

CALI
But we're not eating.

RHODA
Cali's point!

STU
But we will be eating.

RHODA
Deuce!

CALI

I'll make it a rule. For when we eat. I'm not eating, but you can eat, eat.

STU

Why aren't you eating?

CALI snorts like a pig

RHODA

Maybe she can't eat - ever think of that?

CALI hostile eyeballs STU

RHODA

Some people lose their mother and their appetite at the same time

CALI snorts like a pig

STU

You're an animal now?

CALI

Homo Sapiens are animals. Is that a rule? No animals at the table?

STU

We could talk

CALI

Hi. Hi. Hi-hi-hi! Isn't that what we're doing?

STU

I just meant talk

CALI

As in? Oh, you wanna talk about her? You coulda brought her. What's her name?

STU

Prudence

CALI

Cute. I know her name. We all know her name. Why isn't she here? Dear Prudence

I'll say it again. I'm sorry.

STU

Everyone's so sorry right now

CALI

That's my fault

RHODA

I was only--

STU

FRAN returns in their regular clothing with
a plate of beets.

Oh.

STU (barely recognizes FRAN)

{Oh} They have canned beets. You know what happens when I eat canned beets?

FRAN

No one cares, Fran.

CALI

I pee beet juice like I got a UTI,

FRAN

Stop

CALI

and my poo comes out like slaughtered dogs,

FRAN

No more!

CALI

like my intestines scream with menstruation

FRAN

No bodily functions! Fran's breaking a rule!

CALI

RHODA

That's so graphic - do you have to be so graphic?

STU

Fran, you don't have to eat beets

FRAN

{Beets} But I do. I have to.

RHODA

Don't tell us why, please

FRAN

Blood creates the universe!

CALI

Be upset with her! Breaking a rule!

STU

Fran, no bodily functions at the table.

FRAN

?

CALI

Why isn't she in trouble?

STU

Couldn't we just--

CALI

So it's just a rule for me?

STU

?

CALI

Do they have asparagus? I wanna pee ammonia!

CALI puts a point in the air and goes to the buffet.

FRAN

No one else has food yet? What were you talking about?

STU

I thought you two would have grown up by now

FRAN

Why? Have you?

RHODA (thrilled) and STU (not)

Nice

FRAN

Cali's only 15. You could do something good in the world. If only.

STU

If only what?

FRAN

Sorry?

STU

If only what? What comes after If Only?

FRAN

What

STU

Fran

FRAN

Stu

STU hostile eyeballs FRAN

RHODA (to audience)

Deuce!

FRAN

There's fried shrimp, all you can eat! You can have your fill of trayf before you get home.

RHODA

Advantage, Fran

FRAN

Oh, but Prudence means you can have your trayf at home and eat it too.

RHODA

Game, Fran.

STU

Fran

RHODA

I didn't even know she knew what trayf was!

FRAN

Does Prudence serve all the insects of the sea on a poo-poo pork platter?

RHODA

More Jewish than I thought.

FRAN

Shrimp! Pork Ribs!

RHODA

Go Fran!

FRAN

Isn't that why we're here? The ribs?

STU

We're not that Jewish, Fran.

RHODA

We are Jewish in spite of ourselves

FRAN

Ribs! To remind us. We're only parts made from the whole that is man! Take all the ribs you need. Since G-d used yours to make me in your image. Or are we strangers? Do you even see me as your own?

STU

Dammit Fran, I wouldn't be here if I didn't

RHODA

Divorce agreement! You have to be!

FRAN

Isn't there a hot young British thing waiting in your honeymoon bed?

STU

We postponed our honeymoon for the funeral

FRAN

"Don't be long, Toodles" or whatever she calls you. Are you wearing an ascot?

It is an ascot. CALI returns with a plate of almost no food

STU

Good. I thought we could figure a few things out, like where you girls / are gonna live now--

CALI

Asparagus!

FRAN

Folx!

STU

I'll go get some ribs.

STU goes to the buffet

RHODA (like a horse race)

And he's off!

FRAN (to CALI)

You did that.

CALI

Did what?

FRAN

Chased him away

CALI

Take a point then. Whatever you think, I'm not on your team

FRAN and CALI exchange hostile eyeballs.

RHODA

Girls! Sportsmanship!

FRAN

I could've compared his private appendage to your asparagus

CALI

{Asparagus} Please don't. I'm eating these

FRAN

Is that like a thing for you?

CALI

??

FRAN

Are you anorexic?

CALI

Would I tell you if I was?

FRAN

Bulemic?

CALI

What do you care?

FRAN

Sometimes sharing helps

CALI

Mom died - two days ago almost to the hour

RHODA

If they could see me now! Toned! Tan! Young! I've won!

FRAN

Ten thirty two PM

CALI

Three fifteen is close enough. It feels like midnight, doesn't it?

FRAN

It was ten thirty two. If you wanna know the actual time

CALI

What's that? A point for Fran? Cause you were there? You were there, you were there, youwerethereyouwerethereyouwerethere! I KNOW

FRAN and CALI stand up to fight.

FRAN

I don't think you can kill me with a butter knife

CALI

I can go back for a steak[knife]

FRAN

Right through the heart or it doesn't work

CALI

{Works} for vampires

FRAN (goes to "vampire bite" CALI)

Who says I'm not?

CALI

Get away from me!

STU enters with his heaping plate of ribs
wings and shrimp.

STU

Girls

Vampires!

FRAN

Fran!

RHODA

STU

I was only gone a minute. They have blue cheese dressing!

CALI

{Dressing} No one cares.

STU

I care

THEY eyeball STU. STU eats.

FRAN (to STU)

I don't think so.

STU (eating)

What's that supposed to mean?

FRAN

If you cared you would have gone fast enough, you woulda got her there on time.

RHODA

Advantage Fran.

CALI (to FRAN)

"Got her" as in me? You have no right to talk about me in third person. Include me in the conversation. If you're talking about me.

FRAN

I'm talking about him.

CALI

I don't want to be in your mouth

FRAN

If I put you there, you have no choice

CALI
 I'm telling you not to put me there

STU
 Fran, can you leave your sister alone?

FRAN (to CALI)
 Is that what you want cause I don't want to be left alone

STU
 Fran, please

FRAN (to STU)
 Is that your plan?

STU
 I'm only asking you to --

FRAN
 Do you have a plan?

STU
 Can we eat?

HE eats. CALI does something interesting with her asparagus that may or may not include eating. FRAN masks stims.

RHODA
 All the times we went out to eat and everyone ate but me. Always my weight. My waiting to eat. Waiting to be thin enough, pretty enough. Waiting to be wanted. By anyone. No hunger now! Eat whatever you want, and I won. I'm past all that. I won!

FRAN watches STU and CALI as if FRAN is at a tennis match as FRAN masks their stims as tension in FRAN builds til finally

FRAN
 There's an ancient tribe with a custom for whenever someone does something unspeakably horrible

Like what? CALI

Like kills someone FRAN

And STU

And? RHODA

And??? STU

And what? FRAN

She does this. Ignore her. CALI (to STU)

FRAN
They go on as usual for a year - maybe if it's really a bad thing, the person gets locked up somewhere but still fed and clothed and exercised

Like a dog? RHODA and CALI

FRAN
Well yes, but the way you'd be kind to a dog, not like a dog in a derogatory way

Do you have to be like this? CALI

And? STU

Don't egg her on, Daddy CALI

STU
What are you, 5? Dad. Can't you just call me Dad

CALI twirls her hair. THEY look at FRAN expecting FRAN to speak but FRAN eats beets. It's as if FRAN has forgotten what they were talking about or that they were even talking.

CALI

See what I mean? She's not normal.

STU

Fran, you were telling us about an ancient tribe?

FRAN

Huh?

STU

An ancient tribe, something you studied in college?

FRAN

Oh, right. Anthropology. Only I didn't get to finish, did I?

STU

Finish college? You can finish now. You can go back.

Oh, you mean finish what you were saying? Please, tell us, what happens after a year?

FRAN

They're brought to the sea - a terrible sea with sharks that eat you -

STU

Sharks! Cartilaginous. Jawed. Placoid scaled. Differently hearted. No swim bladders.

CALI

Dad, you're interrupting.

STU

Fran.

FRAN

The person who did the terrible thing is sent swimming into this shark-filled sea while the tribe decides whether or not to forgive them. And if they choose to forgive, they call out to the swimmer: Aaooo!

Aaaaaa!

FRAN and RHODA

You know this?

STU

What do you mean?

FRAN

{I mean} the sound they make

STU

{The sound they make?} I don't know. They gotta make some sorta sound.

FRAN

Why?

STU

To get the attention of the person swimming - it has to be a loud sound

FRAN

HEEEEEEEY! It could be Heeeeeeeey!

CALI

RHODA

Come baaaaaaack! How about coooooome baaaaack!

FRAN

Do you want to speculate?

STU

On what?

FRAN

What sound they make?

STU

I dunno. How about Yo!

CALI

Yo?

STU
What's wrong with Yo?

CALI
Gee, Dad, I dunno

STU
But what about the sharks about to eat him

FRAN
I never said it was a man

STU
Her then

FRAN
Is the whole world so black and white to you?

STU
Is there another possibility?

FRAN
There are non-binary people in the world.

STU
Okay whoever then. Whoever might be eaten by sharks. Unsaved by the yelling of Yo

FRAN
If the person who did the very bad thing is eaten by a shark before the tribe decides to forgive them, then the tribe attributes their shark-death to fate

RHODA
So some gruesome horrible thing this person did gets justified?

STU (pointed at Fran)
Can a gruesome horrible thing a person does ever be justified?

Silence. FRAN considers this.

FRAN
I don't know about justice. I was thinking more like forgiveness.

CALI

But wouldn't a group of - where are they from?

FRAN

A tribe okay. A tribe.

RHODA

Jews are a tribe. 12 tribes actually.

CALI

Wouldn't they know how to swim with the sharks?

STU

Obligate ram ventilators like great whites, makos, and whale sharks have to keep swimming in order to breathe.

CALI

That wasn't the question.

RHODA

Is the person who did the bad thing forgiven?

STU

If the tribe forgives the person, then what happens?

FRAN

They're brought back in. Re-integrated.

RHODA

If there's a tribe to be brought back in to

CALI

She's making this up. You know that, don't you? There is no tribe.

FRAN

There's a tribe.

CALI

Liar.

FRAN

Fishface.

Girls

STU

FRAN

At least say women - we menstruate. Are you aware we menstruate?

We're eating

STU

Not anymore

CALI

But it's all you can eat!

STU

EVERYONE falls out into completely non-naturalistic movements (which may or may not be as RHODA describes...)

RHODA (to audience)

Fran is swimming into shark-infested waters. I thought she was talking about Stu, re-integrating Stu into their lives. But it's Fran swimming. This wasn't what I envisioned for myself when I dreamed of growing up and finding true love. But no one cares. I know that now. I know that Fran thinks of killing herself a lot more than I'd like her to. Cali thinks she's beautiful a lot more than I'd like her to. And Stu is the shark.

FRAN and CALI get ready to leave.

Fran.

STU

Stu.

FRAN

Bye!

CALI

Cali, wait! I'll drive you. I'll help you pack.

STU

FRAN (to CALI)

{Drive?} He has a history of speeding. Except when it matters.

I called an uber. CALI

You have a history FRAN (to STU)

And you don't? STU (to FRAN)

Not for speeding. FRAN

No, for standing still. 35 parking tickets in one summer STU

My mother was -- I was trying to take care of her. I was preoccupied FRAN

You're not a minor anymore, Fran. Pay your own way. STU

Car's in your name. FRAN

I know. I just had it towed. STU

You what? FRAN

Keys STU (demanding)

FRAN goes to look for their car.

I ordered an uber. I gotta go. CALI

Cancel it. STU

CALI
They're already charging you.

STU
I'll take you.

CALI
Will you take me back to camp?

STU
There's stuff we have to talk about.

CALI
You already paid for it. It's wrong to waste it. And Art left. The house is empty. Like howling, like haunted. I can barely stand to think of it. He couldn't wait two minutes. The movers were there all day. That's why there's no shiva. There's no furniture! We'll have to sleep on the floor tonight. He said, I'll leave you a towel.

STU
He said he was clearing out, but I didn't think---

CALI
He made us pack all day yesterday, on Shabbat

STU
We don't keep Shabbat.

CALI
So that's that. Everything. Gone.

FRAN enters.

FRAN
You had my car towed.

CALI
What the --

FRAN

He towed my car. This whole invitation to dinner after the funeral? Ooooh, there's no shiva? Let's get something to eat! A trick

(to STU)

Like when you lost your license for speeding and had to get mom to drive you places, and she was like

RHODA and FRAN

"no, that interferes with tennis."

FRAN

So you divorced her. Crushed her dreams. Made her get a real estate license.

STU

That's why you think we got divorced?

FRAN

It's not?

STU

What were you like 10?

FRAN

I thought you punished her for not driving you around. No?

STU

So these tickets are payback? For divorcing your mother? 8 years ago? You couldn't find a legal place to park and spent the past two months getting parking tickets?

FRAN hostile eyeballs STU

STU

35 tickets.

FRAN

There's more coming. Your glove compartment. Your car.

STU (demanding)

My keys

FRAN takes out the keys for STU.

FRAN

These. Yes. Yours. So I could have mind-blowing sex on South Street.

CALI

Ew! TMI, Fran!

FRAN

So I could do something to make someone happy, two people happy

STU

I hope you were one of them

FRAN

It's hard to park there, legally.

STU

To be clear, you parked in an alley.

FRAN

You know this?

STU

The sign says move by 7am, but you slept late every morning.

FRAN (innuendo)

Who says I was sleeping?

STU

What else would you be---there's a girl there.

FRAN

A person.

STU

I saw the two of you.

FRAN

You saw us?

STU

Franny, I only wanted to understand

FRAN
Spy! Invader! / Checking up on me?

STU
The DMV was sending me late notices

CALI
Fran?

STU
All for the same infraction. All at the same address. I thought you were at your mother's.

CALI
Fran, are you a lesbian?

RHODA
Lesbians make the best tennis players.

CALI
Are you, Fran? Are you?

STU
Oh, oh! I didn't realize! Cali, that's enough.

CALI
Enough what?

STU
Fran? Is it true?

FRAN
The sex or the parking?

RHODA
I've been dead since Friday. It's Sunday. And no one has cried.

STU
So you...

FRAN
Have sex with people.

STU
 She's a girl

FRAN
 A person

STU
 with pink hair. I saw you

FRAN
 So?

STU
 {Persons} do things over and over - we're creatures of habit. If you speed, you're gonna get caught, so you need a game plan. I've got a game plan. I can get so many tickets, then I have to stop until they come off my license. Otherwise they take your license away. Game over. Sometimes I speed cause I can, and other times I can't. That's why I couldn't fly up to summer camp to pick Cali up in time.

RHODA
 Why is he like this?

CALI
 What?

FRAN
 What does that mean? I got parking tickets. I'm a lesbian. You are a disaster of a cismale on your third wife. You can't even imagine a nonbinary gender.

STU
 A what?

CALI
 That's really unfair, Fran. He's old.

FRAN
 You want to defend him? The guy whose greatest joy is driving as fast as he can! And he couldn't get you to Mom's deathbed to say goodbye in time?

CALI begins to hyperventilate.

CALI
 What are you saying?

STU
 I did my best, Cali, I'm sorry, I --

CALI starts to laugh

CALI
 I can't hear this.

STU
 You don't want to know my reasons

FRAN
 You have reasons?

STU
 {Reasons} I got reasons. All you can eat!

CALI dances with breathing issues -
 like she's being strangled while
 needing to pee and laughing.

STU
 You don't know what I did, you weren't there.

FRAN (not mimicking, about themselves)
 You don't know what I did, you weren't there

RHODA
 Deuce

STU
 That's not a tie - that's two different games. Don't do this!

FRAN
 What am I doing? You're the one who was late.

STU
 Cali, stop that!

STU slaps CALI to calm her. SHE stops rather mechanically and freezes for a bit.

FRAN

You ... that is so... you can't hit us!

STU

It worked, didn't it? And don't talk to me, Fran. Driving isn't murder

FRAN

{Murder} Driving could be murder

CALI (slower than the rest of them)

Why are we talking about murder?

FRAN (to Stu)

It takes 3 hours to get to camp. I called you at 2 in the afternoon. I told you it was happening

RHODA (to audience)

{Happening} My death, like an event, a soiree!

FRAN

You drive fast. You think you could help your own daughter, your special baby Cali,

CALI

Hey!

FRAN

you coulda listened. Believed me. I was repeating what I heard from the doctor

STU (sotto voce)

All the women in this family ...

FRAN

What's that?

CALI

So he was late - does it matter?

RHODA

It matters

FRAN (to Cali)

{Matters} Yes it matters. You weren't there for her death.

CALI

Does that matter to me?

STU

Let's go. I'll drive you to the house. Did you cancel the car?

FRAN

It matters. The nurses said it helps to be there

CALI

{Be there?} Maybe I didn't want to be there.

RHODA

Maybe I didn't want you there. Howdya like them apples?

FRAN

But your experience would be different if you'd been there

CALI

You don't know that - you don't know my experience

FRAN

{Experience} No one knows anyone's experience - that's why there's kindness!

STU

Girls.

FRAN

People. Humans. Folx. Everyone. All. Why girls? It's so demeaning!

CALI

It's not demeaning if you embrace your girlness. What's wrong with being a girl?

FRAN

A girl is not an adult.

CALI

You're a girl.

FRAN

I'm a person.

CALI

You're doing slippery things with other girls.

FRAN

Women. With agency. With consent. With love!

CALI

{Love?} This is so like you! Making problems. Always Making Problems!

FRAN

I am a person who makes decisions. Good, bad, awful decisions they have to make! No choice!

CALI

If you have no choice, that's not a decision.

FRAN

I'm standing up for you too!

STU does that thing he does. A gesture and a mouth sound.

FRAN

Go, just go, Stu. We don't need you. She called a car.

STU

You want me to go? I'm going!

CALI hangs onto STU

CALI

You can't leave me!

FRAN

{Leave} We don't need to know: what you think, where we'll live, / the rest of our lives, just go.

CALI

{You can't go} Don't leave me stranded! I might as well be left for dead!

CALI poses for a dead selfie

STU

You're not dying. I said I'd take you, help you pack.

FRAN

And I'm supposed to sleep where?

STU

Your friend with the pink hair

FRAN

You took my car. Art's packing up.

CALI

Art left already. He hired people to pack.

FRAN

He said he couldn't bear to sleep there. Where they did their cis-hetero-fornication.

FRAN and CALI both react with vocal
vomit sounds

RHODA

Is that what we did?

FRAN

He took an apartment last month in Center City.

CALI

He hasn't been home. I've been alone, unsupervised!

STU

You're fifteen.

CALI

He took all the new jewelry he gave her.

STU

What do you want me to do about it?

CALI

A gift is a gift.

I'll go slow. STU

Where are you? CALI (wanting a hug)

Here STU

Where've you been all these years? CALI

You see me, STU

You left us with her CALI

I'm right here STU

and now and now ----- CALI

CALI starts to push STU

Stop it. Cali. STU

I see you now. I see you this minute. So what? CALI (laughing)

It isn't funny. STU

I'm not tryinga be funny, Daddy. Dad. CALI (trying not to laugh)

Stop it! STU

Nothing's funny anymore.

CALI (laughing)

Take the damn uber! I'll go. I'm going.

STU

STU pries her away and exits. CALI recovers herself as if SHE didn't just get oddly physical with her father.

Wait

CALI

CALI checks her phone for her uber.

I was trying to make it okay for you, don't you see that?

FRAN

{That?} I'm as important to you as our bird you strangled

CALI

I never strangled a bird

FRAN

Yes you did. Mom said you did.

CALI

Oh no!

RHODA

Pretty Boy

CALI and RHODA

{Pretty Boy} The cockatiel?

FRAN

You were the only one home.

CALI

So?

FRAN

CALI

When we got there

(performs a broken neck)

Pretty Boy's neck. Broke. Twisted between the bars of his cage.

FRAN

I never touched that bird

CALI

Fran, you're just bad. Mom said it.

RHODA

I'm sorry I said that.

CALI

I know it's true. You're a killer. Killer Fran.

RHODA

I'm sorry Fran

FRAN (to CALI)

Don't you see I was trying to help

CALI

By killing our bird?

FRAN

You! I thought he'd - I don't know what I thought he'd do, not this

CALI

You coulda left me at summer camp.

FRAN

You woulda missed mom's funeral

CALI

So?

RHODA

Cali?

It's not like it changed anything.

CALI

We had to pack!

FRAN

You coulda packed for me. You know what I like. All the fancy stuff.

CALI

You had to be here.

FRAN

And her trophies, especially that sick one, the heavy one she was so proud of.

CALI

Yeah!

RHODA

Like another child, only better. That's what I want. Here's my uber - bye!

CALI

...Wait, I -- are you going to Mom's?

FRAN

CALI exits. FRAN deflates.

FRAN

----- I. Needed. A ride. Too.

FRAN

BLACKOUT

SCENE 3 - PACKING

Later same day. Shell of a house. Taping up boxes makes a horrible sound. FRAN and CALI are in RHODA's house packing. But there's almost nothing left. They have their suitcases packed and some boxes. CALI tapes a box shut with screeching tape. FRAN reacts physically and vocally. (No one ever mentions FRAN reacting or even seems to notice.) RHODA is there still ungrounded.

RHODA (to her daughters)

Everything's on the truck. Poof! I disappeared. That's all right. Ignore me. Just like when I lived here. At least I don't have to take your silence personally. Maybe your silence is grief. Maybe you're thinking about me, missing me, wondering where I am, what I'm up to. Or not wondering. Maybe you think death is cold and wet, but it's not. Maybe you're just feeling my absence.

FRAN (with enormous energy)

I'm so tired!

CALI

You don't sound it.

FRAN

I have angst. I have agita.

RHODA

You sound so Jewish. You could just say it. You miss me. Say it.

CALI (to Fran)

You sound old.

FRAN

I'm not old. Just tired.

RHODA

Grief makes you tired.

CALI

If you're tired, go lie down.

FRAN

On what?

CALI

The beds are in the truck.

FRAN

I can't lie down in a truck. They'll shut the doors and take me to the auction house. Who wants lot 48, 19 year old orphan!?

CALI

You can't be an orphan - you're grown. Plus you still have Daddy.

RHODA

What is she thinking?

FRAN

Daddy?

RHODA

No one has Stu.

FRAN

Why does the house need to be sold in half a minute?

RHODA

So Art can move on.

CALI

You saw him. Stumbling around crying, "Disaster! Disaster! I gave up my life for her! My whole life!" As if he regretted ever marrying her. How many years were they cheating?

FRAN

Three I think. At the funeral home, he told me, "we always had simultaneous orgasms,"

CALI

EWWWW!

FRAN

"we came together every time!"

CALI

I do not need to know that!

FRAN

{That} Please, Cali. I said, "Art, that proves it!" He goes, "that proves what?" I go, "she was faking. She was faking every time."

FRAN scores a point in the air. STU enters.

FRAN

No one has simultaneous orgasms every time. No one!

RHODA

Game, Fran.

STU

Hi girls

FRAN

People - you just walk in like that?

STU

{Just like that} Door was open. Movers. Hi People!

RHODA

He never understood boundaries.

STU

How's the packing?

FRAN

Do you remember when I had that rectal abscess in my ass?

STU

Fran

CALI

Redundant! It's redundant to say "rectal abscess in your ass" when rectal means ass!

STU

Cali

FRAN

At the hospital they filled me with packing - like someone rolled up the New York Times and shoved it up there. How's the packing? The packing's ridiculous. How's your asshole?

STU

Sometimes I think you are my asshole.

FRAN

{Asshole} Okay, I lost that point. Double or nothing?

STU (to CALI)

{Nothing} Cali, where will you sleep tonight?

CALI tapes a box - it makes a horrible sound.
(FRAN reacts. NO ONE mentions it or notices.)

STU

Cali?

CALI

I already said I wanna go back to camp

STU

Fine. I'll take you tomorrow. What about tonight?

RHODA

Far away from him.

STU

Cali?

CALI

Mariah's

RHODA

Oy.

FRAN and STU (surprised, to CALI)

Where?

CALI

Mariah's

FRAN and STU and RHODA

Why there?

CALI

She likes me. We get along. Plus she said I could.
You used to love her.

FRAN

Ex wife number 2! The nice one!

RHODA

What's that supposed to mean?

STU

There are other people in the world who could take you in.

CALI

You mean instead of Mariah? What's wrong with Mariah?

FRAN

Take us in? Why does someone have to take us in?

CALI tapes a box (and FRAN reacts unnoticed.)

STU

Are you staying there too Fran?

FRAN

Mariah doesn't want me.

CALI

Fran killed her cat.

RHODA

Go Fran!

FRAN

I did not.

CALI

You made her cat mute. And then it keeled over dead!

FRAN

I didn't do anything to her cat

CALI

But it meow-meow-meowed so hard, all alone with you. She said by the time / they got back --

STU

The cat died the day after we got back

FRAN

You were gone two weeks. I fed the cat. I watered the cat. I took care of the cat.

CALI

Took care of it? Two weeks of Fran, it meowed its last meow!

FRAN

That's not my fault.

CALI

Even Dad knows you did it.

STU

I don't remember that

FRAN

How is that possible?

STU

Aging

FRAN

You're not that old

STU

You were doing so well at college. What happened?

FRAN

Mom happened. I came home to take care of her.

STU

Why couldn't Art do it?

FRAN

{Les?} I had to help her use the toilet.

He couldn'ta hired a nurse?
STU

She had nurses. And me.
FRAN

And where were you?
STU (to CALI)

Ew.
CALI

You'll go back to college!
STU (to FRAN)

I withdrew.
FRAN

You can go back. You can live on campus.
STU

It's summer - there's no college now
FRAN

But there could be college.
STU

Like a mirage in the distance?
FRAN

He's trying to get rid of you!
CALI

You could go to summer school.
STU

Of course she can! Summer school! What a perfect solution!
RHODA

I can't imagine taking a class right now.
FRAN

Why not?
STU

I don't know. I'm tired.
FRAN

She keeps saying that.
CALI

You're only 19. How tired can you be?
STU

I wanted to sleep through the whole funeral. I want to sleep right now. The floor looks comfortable. I could fall asleep on the stairs.
FRAN

Are you sick?
STU

What?
FRAN

I just wanna understand.
STU

He doesn't understand anything
CALI

His mother is still alive.
FRAN

What are you saying?
STU

I don't know if I can go back in the fall.
FRAN

Why not?
STU

It feels stupid. Like nothing I planned means anything anymore.
FRAN

STU
 You're dropping out of college?

RHODA
 Oy, Franny

FRAN
 {College} I don't know if it's forever, I just

STU
 What? You just what?

FRAN
 {What?} I don't know

CALI
 Don't you wanna know what I'm gonna do? Cause this fall's my junior year. The most important year of my life. I'm gonna need a stable environment where I can excel at my tests and ace all my classes. I'm taking 3 APs. My friends and I are starting a non-profit. We're raising money to research the cancer that killed mom. So I'll need a place to live. Cause I have plans.

STU
 We're sending you to boarding school.

CALI and RHODA
 What?

STU
 It's a great boarding school. Top notch!

FRAN
 Who's we?

STU
 Prudence and I. What did you think? It's a great school and you'll / make new friends there

CALI
 Wait, what? Whisked away from all I know? From my entire support system? The only people who understand me? The only ones who care/

STU and RHODA
 Cali

CALI

with all that happened this year? I'll be dropped? Dropped? As if from a swinging rope ladder? Beneath a storm of helicopter blades! Dropped into a strange environment! With an entirely new set of expectations! At the most crucial time of my life! Seriously?

STU

You can't expect to stay with Mariah.

RHODA

That's true

STU

AP classes are the same everywhere.

RHODA

Another point for Stu

CALI

Are you kidding me? He's joking. Fran? Fran, do something.

FRAN

If I kick him in the balls he gets upset.

STU and RHODA

Fran

CALI

Daddy, take it back.

STU

It's a very good school

FRAN

Prudence might be a very good bride, but that doesn't mean I want to "go there"

STU

That's enough

RHODA

Point for Fran.

FRAN puts a point in the air.

Not enough! Not enough!

CALI

Calm down

STU

{Calm} Don't talk to me

CALI

CALI begins texting frantically.

You can't blame her.

FRAN

You're on her side now?

STU

{Her side?} What?

FRAN

Do what you want.
(to Cali)
You can't stay with Mariah.

STU (to Fran)

Why not?

CALI

She threatened to kill me. You know that, don't you?

STU

FRAN

You stole her BFF Prudence! People have hearts. People have feelings.

STU

{Feelings?} Sorry, Franny. I have a hard time with those.

FRAN

You've said that. We've all heard about your lack of feelings.

STU

It's not a lack. I do not have a lack! In September, you'll go where I send you

I'm ignoring you!

CALI (to Stu)

Good for you Cali

RHODA

Tuition doesn't just happen.

STU

{Tuition} Threats! I don't hear you!

CALI (continues texting)

CALI resumes frantic texting

Where am I supposed to go?

FRAN

I don't really care.

STU

STU moves to leave

What? You can't just leave

FRAN and RHODA

You can't not care

RHODA

I'm trying to help you

STU

FRAN

How can you help me if you don't even understand what I need or want or feel, when I can't even explain it to you

STU

You should go back to college.

FRAN

How? My life is over.

STU

You're overreacting. You should go

FRAN and CALI and RHODA

You should go!

Jinx! 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10! You owe me a coke!

STU

Fran, you're being unfair. I haven't been... involved here in almost a decade. I barely know you, or your sister. We don't talk. We don't spend time together. I send checks. Birthday cards with checks. I get bills. I pay them. This is my honeymoon. I'm trying to make this work. I'm doing the best I can. I don't know what you want from me.

FRAN

If you'd taken your honeymoon, we coulda stayed at your house. Watered your plants.

STU

Killed our cat.

FRAN

I never killed a cat!

STU

No, you've moved on to bigger kills.

FRAN

What are you talking about?

STU

You know what I'm talking about

FRAN

All I mean is I'd have a place to stay instead of camping out with strangers.

STU

She didn't look like a stranger. You were arm in arm.

FRAN

You didn't even register what you were looking at.

STU

Okay, you win that one.

FRAN

What am I supposed to do now?

STU

I thought lesbians just moved in together.

FRAN

That's a stereotype, and I don't want to squat in a basement on South Street.

STU

Then what do you want?

FRAN

... I don't know. Everything's changed.

STU

It only seems like that because your mother died,

RHODA

It kills me when he says that

STU

You'll get used to it.

FRAN

Like a missing limb? I'll never get used to it.

RHODA

Aw, thank you, Fran!

STU

I'm sorry, but I didn't kill her.

FRAN

What's that supposed to mean? You wish you did?

STU

No. I mean I'm sorry. I'm sorry she's dead. But it's not my fault.

FRAN

{Fault} You think it's mine?

STU

You know what I'm saying

FRAN

You think I'm heartless? You think I killed her?

STU

You did what you did

FRAN

What about what you did? You broke her heart

STU

If I did, that was years ago.

RHODA

I wouldn't go that far

FRAN

Maybe you killed her little by little. You don't know what you did. You don't know what you do right now right here. / You don't understand

STU

Fran, I will / not be lectured

FRAN

No, you just go. Your M.O.!

RHODA

Go!

FRAN and RHODA

Walk away.

FRAN

Leave me here with the house getting sold right out from under us.

STU

Just because I'm Jewish doesn't mean I take guilt trips.

CALI emerges from texting (masked as)
calm

CALI

Is there anything I can do to change your mind?

STU
About what?

CALI
Boarding school.

STU
That's taken care of. It was late enough and hard to get you in.

CALI
But I have friends I can live with

STU
I am not prepared to grant guardianship

FRAN
Why not? You don't want her.

CALI
Fran, shut up.

FRAN
You don't want to pay child support

STU
Wherever she lives I have to pay and fund her education. It's in the divorce agreement. I am liable for all those payments until she drops out. Or finishes. So I'm doing that. That's what I'm supposed to do. By law.

FRAN
By law. But what about love?

RHODA (with racquet)
Love, we all know love means nothing.

STU
If she, or you, drop out, all bets are off.

FRAN
Is that in the divorce agreement?

STU (yes)

It's a one time thing. You don't get another shot. So if you drop out, I'm done supporting you.
And if she drops out

FRAN

So you're threatening me?

CALI

Are you threatening me?

STU

I'm just saying, what am I saying, I'm saying fine, Fran, don't go to college. It saves me a fortune. I'm thrilled for you Franny, you gotta better idea how to live your life, you go do that. Cali goes to boarding school.

CALI

But WHY? I have friends. Their families will take me. They don't even want your money.

STU

It's not about the money

CALI

They'll feed me. I won't starve.

FRAN

Then what?

CALI texts.

STU

She's my daughter

FRAN

And I'm not?

STU

You're an adult. I'm not responsible for you.

FRAN

So now I'm an adult?

CALI stops texting.

STU

Legally. Yes.

FRAN

So even though Cali's a child, you won't let her live with you?

STU

Cali, do you want to live with me?

Beat.

RHODA

Will wonders never cease

Beat.

CALI

You don't want me. You have Prudence. Mariah says you'll keep trading down til you're doing it with kids my age.

STU would slap CALI but FRAN stops his arm and holds onto it.

FRAN

I got him!

RHODA

You keep him, Franny!

STU

Let go of me

STU struggles with FRAN as CALI smoothes and soothes herself

FRAN

You don't get to act like this.

RHODA

You tell him!

STU

Let go of me Fran or I'll --

FRAN

What? You'll tear my arm off and leave? I will not let you go!

RHODA

Don't let go, don't let go!

FRAN

You're supposed to be the father here. That's supposed to mean something

STU pulls his arm away from FRAN

STU

I haven't been your father in - what do you want?

FRAN

Love, comfort, a home, a hug, a lotta hugs, and ice cream, and presents, and pick me up and toss me in the pool, and tell me we'll be okay now, we'll be a family again, anyway, somehow, even though Mom's gone. Don't you even realize? Okay, you don't get feelings. Or register pain, the pain I'm in, the pain Cali must be in even if she doesn't show it. Even if her hair's perfect. She must feel something. Cause I feel as if I swallowed a sharp poisonous blade that tears my insides. You should care!

STU

I care

FRAN

No matter how long it's been. No matter how little you think you know me. There's blood between us. It's up to you to try. Do something. Do the adulting, be useful! You know, parent!

STU

... I'm not really good at-----

FRAN

Say you love me. Say it's gonna be okay. Say you'll try to make it better. Say I got you. Say Fran, Cali, pride of my life, love of my heart! Say something, anything, like there, there. There fucking there!

STU (overwhelmed)

I gotta go

STU leaves

FRAN

You don't deserve us! You should rot in hell, you bastard! We don't need you! We don't need your help! We don't care if you go! Run! We don't want you here. We don't want you!

CALI

He's gone. You stupid -- you ran him off with your mouth, Fran! He's leaving!

CALI runs after STU

CALI

Come back!

CALI is gone

FRAN

Love 15. I'm losing right from the start. You've got me down. You're gonna beat me. I know I'm nothing, just something to beat, to prove you're great, you're all great, winners. You are. You're everything --

FRAN experiences enormous pain as
uncontrollable laughter

RHODA

Fran? Franny? What's happening?

FRAN

I can't stand it - I can't stand this -

RHODA

What is this? Franny?

FRAN (to Rhoda as a concept)

what did you mean when you said you were counting on me?

RHODA

What it sounded like - I'm counting on you

FRAN (not hearing RHODA)

I can't deal with this

RHODA

Of course you can, you will.

FRAN

What you said before your coma, I don't worry about you, Fran. You're the strong one.

RHODA

You are strong.

FRAN

Why would you say that?

RHODA

It's the truth.

FRAN

But I want you to worry about me.

RHODA

I can't tell a nontruth.

FRAN

I want to know you're out there worrying about me, watching over me, but you're not.

RHODA

The truth is, you've already survived the hardest part.

FRAN

This is the hard part. Living. How am I supposed to do this? How can I go somewhere and do something when you'll never know about it? I can't ask you or tell you anything, ever. And you won't be here to tell me. What's the point? I have no idea what to do, and I'm doing it alone. When we used to play board games and a question came up, we'd check the rulebook, but this? Who dies at 44? No one said this could happen. We didn't cover it in school. What am I supposed to do now? -----

CALI enters, different somehow

CALI

He's gone

RHODA

Of course he is

FRAN

{Gone} Did you get him to reconsider?

RHODA

{Reconsider} He'll never do that.

CALI (lying and stimming)

He was gone when I got out there. The driveway's so hot my soles stuck

FRAN

So you just stood there in the heat all this time?

RHODA

Maybe she cried

CALI (lying and stimming)

No, I ----- forget it.

FRAN

Forgotten

FRAN tapes a box shut and the tape makes a horrific screeching sound, (and FRAN reacts hating themselves for doing the thing to themselves.

CALI

I wish I could box up her whole life. Take everything. Shrink it. Keep it with me forever. Everything she ever touched.

CALI picks up the heavy trophy.

CALI

Mom's best trophy. The heavy one she beamed about. Who'd she beat for it?

FRAN

I don't remember. Let's go.

BEAT

CALI

He told me what you did.

RHODA (warning)

Cali

FRAN

He who?

{Who} Stu - Daddy - Dad

CALI

What did I do?

FRAN

{Do} You know what you did

CALI

Cali, I don't like this game.
Wait, you said he was gone.

FRAN

He is now

CALI

But he wasn't? He talked to you? Wha'd he say? Wha'd he say to you?

FRAN

What you did to Mom.

CALI

{Mom} I'm gonna go.

FRAN

FRAN has a rolling bag and a backpack. All the boxes are CALI's.

Where?

CALI

I dunno. Train to the city?

FRAN

You really don't know, do you?

CALI

Does it matter?

FRAN

I know what you did. I know

CALI

FRAN
What are you talking about?

CALI
You killed her.

FRAN
Wha'd he tell you?

CALI
Killer Fran stikes again

RHODA
Cali, don't say that!

FRAN
So now I have to kill you too? Don't worry. I won't. Not like the way you kill me all the time. You really do, Cali. You're a slap in the face, a gut punch. Why would he say that to you?

RHODA
Point for you, Fran.

FRAN
No one killed Mom. She died of complications from cancer.

RHODA
Respiratory failure.

CALI
Did you strangle her? Make her choke to death? What did you do?!

FRAN
You don't know what you're talking about! You weren't there. He wasn't there. He's messed up, Cali. He wants you to hate me, to think what he says is true.

CALI
You already hate me. And you hated Mom.

FRAN and RHODA
Cali --

You killed her. You killed Mom.

CALI

Cali, stop this.

RHODA

You don't understand.

FRAN

I know what he said. I know enough, Fran.

CALI

CALI knocks FRAN out with the trophy

Cali, no!

RHODA

BLACKOUT

SCENE 4 - LOSING

STU, 10 years older, dressed for golf, practices putting on a green.

RHODA, as before, in tennis whites, enters. (Even after STU begins speaking, he's not speaking to RHODA, it could be to the audience or to himself, except for when he is speaking to Rhoda. Go with what's weird yet plays.)

RHODA (to STU)

Stu! It's me! Rhoda! Look! In 10 years! Not one pound! Not one wrinkle! But I've had some trouble with G-d. Since I never got to learn much about being Jewish, when they sort you, they sorta expect you to know who you are, I mean who you were. So I'm learning. I can fill you in if you want. Ready for your funeral?

STU (not to RHODA)

Three things to think about for putting: Stance, Setup, Stroke!

RHODA

Wanna teach me to putt? I'm game!

STU (not to RHODA)

You think putting's gonna be easy, but it ruins your whole game. I can drive the ball straight down the fairway. I can drive! But on the green, I'm chasing it: Here, There, and Everywhere. Hey, a Beatles song!

STU laser-focuses and putts.

RHODA

There's a whole buncha rules here. You teach me, I'll teach you. We can help each other

STU

Putting ruins everything

STU sets up the next putt.

RHODA

I get so wound up. I can't stop thinking about all the things I want to be forgiven for. So much, Stu, so much it hurts. Don't look. I mean look all you want cause I look great now, but inside I'm a dumpster full of regret. Trying to find forgiveness. I follow them. I hope. I pray. At least Cali doesn't seem mad.

Lights reveal they're in a funeral home's private family room with buttons with strips of fabric to tear.

CALI enters and uses her phone as a mirror to fix her hair and face. (CALI can't see or hear RHODA or STU, but they can see and hear her.)

RHODA

Do you think about the girls at all?

STU putts.

RHODA

Cali loves me, but it's up to Fran. Killer Fran. Our plush baby shark.

STU

{Sharks} are really good at hiding and can be impossible to track. Yep, sounds like Fran.

RHODA

I didn't think you were listening. I love you, Stu!

STU

Can we keep love out of this?

RHODA

Sorry. Didn't mean to upset you.

STU

{Upset} Not upset. Don't get upset.

RHODA

No, of course you don't. Just like in tennis. Love means nothing

STU

Whatever you learned, Rhoda, your rules, you make stuff up.

RHODA

You think I got it wrong?

STU

Think is not the word.

RHODA

I'm pretty sure they said you gotta be forgiven. I take the rules seriously. When I was alive, I sucked in my gut, I plucked all the stray hairs, I shoehorned myself into shapewear. I lifted my breasts. I learned to walk in those heels. All that dainty crap they want to cripple us with. I did it! Cali did it, didn't mind. I expected Fran to do it too. Insisted. She saw right through me. Called me a fossil in heels! Called me a drag show! I've got big bones. I've got this tush. You loved my tush!

STU works on his game.

STU

I Love Golf. Solitude. You play against yourself. No talk. If you practice wrong, you learn wrong, and then you gotta relearn it all from scratch. How it feels. Yeah, I feel it.

RHODA

I forgive you.

STU

Do I need forgiving?

RHODA (about the funeral, the kids)

If they do this right, you'll go straight to heaven.

STU

{Heaven?} They don't even speak. I haven't seen Fran since you died.

RHODA

Yeah, I wasn't gonna mention

STU

I paid her medical bills.

RHODA

If you get forgiven, you can take someone with you, someone stuck here, like me.

STU

Nightmare of a concussion, skull fracture. And therapy.

RHODA

You can teach me! I'll let you stand behind me, show me how to hold it. Like when we first met...

STU

Not a word of thanks. But then I hafta wonder.

RHODA

You can win every time, forever!

STU

We mighta got the Killer wrong.

RHODA

Killer Cali? I don't think so. Do I seem more Jewish now?

STU

Sssssh. I'm trying to focus.

RHODA

{Focus} Uch, if we can get to heaven, they got coaches to help you change your tone of voice, coaches to help you feel calm.

STU

I'm calm

RHODA

Then me. Maybe I wouldn't need to play 3 sets of tennis just to think straight. I ran myself ragged. A list as long as my arm. And it never ended til I got sick. I never said no to anyone. About anything. Who knew I wanted to say no? And then it was over! Poof!

CALI finds a ribbon and tears it, pins it on, seats herself in a natural-like position. Then reconsiders a different pose, a different spot... until she feels more life-like.

RHODA

I should not pin my hopes on you. After what you pulled! Why would you turn them against each other? Why would you do such a thing? They were all they had! You'll never get forgiven! Your putting will never improve!

STU

It won't?

CALI plays a video game on her phone in spite of her manicure.

STU

I can't work on my putting here?

RHODA

Cali, tell Fran to forgive us! We knew not what we did! Well, maybe we knew, a few things, but not really! We did the best we could with what we had! Better than our own parents, better than what we got! Doesn't that count?!

STU

Do you have to be so loud?

RHODA

They never hear me. I'll never be loud enough! Ooh, she's here!

FRAN enters with a backpack. CALI has been playing a video game and notices FRAN and plays harder. FRAN stims to discharge some of their discomfort.

FRAN

Wow. Hello. Hi Cali, how ya doing? I'm fine, Fran. How are you? Glad we got that over with. Moving to the tough stuff. I'm here alone if you want to know. But that doesn't mean I don't have friends or a life or a job or all the things people have. I didn't invite anyone. Like, what do you say? Who wants to subject anyone to this? But maybe they'll show anyway. Who knows? They could be out there right now. People surprise me. And it was in the paper with that ridiculous picture of the four of us playing mini-golf. You must have picked it. What was I, ten? But he looks happy. We all look happy then. No, I'm not in a relationship. Thanks for asking. Relationships are hard for me. I didn't have good role models.

RHODA

You hear that?

STU

I heard.

FRAN

I live in Abington. It's fine. I like my place. I like my life. I'll be 30 next month, and I'm not freaking out about it. I had some tests done. I found out I'm autistic. I'm pretty sure Mom and Dad were too, in their own specific ways.

RHODA

What's she say?

STU

We're artistic.

FRAN

Cali, did you hear me? Autistic as in boys with trains who memorize schedules.

STU

I love trains. I love schedules.

FRAN

Only not like that.

STU

Oh

FRAN

That's a stereotype.

STU

So then what?

FRAN

I'm really good at research and noticing patterns and changes in patterns. I chew my fingers and scratch my scalp. I have a hard time if people move my stuff like in the fridge at work.

RHODA

Oh my G-d, that's me, that's -- if you move my stuff I'll kill you!

STU

Killer you

FRAN

My reactions aren't always what you'd expect. I might laugh instead of cry. Mostly I might feel sick instead of cry. I've struggled with a lot of illness, comorbidities, but I have an amazing memory. I can get places even though I'm usually so anxious I get there too early. I have a busy mind. But you were the one who was always so normal. You still look normal. Like this was easy for you. Maybe it is. Small talk, in case you don't know, small talk for most autistic people, especially me, feels like I'm a frog in boiling water, jump-outta-the-water-now kinda thing. So I'm. Nonbinary. In case you didn't notice. Changing my name to **Ebyn**. It's Hebrew.

CALI loses at her game, reacts, and plays again.

FRAN
Or maybe Fran--k!

CALI
Frank?

FRAN
Just trying to get your attention. **Ebyn** with a y.

CALI
Because why?

FRAN
Because **Eben's** male and I'm not trying to be that. I'm in Rabbinical School.

CALI
Rabbi Fran?

FRAN
Rabbi **Ebyn**.

CALI
Ebyn Levin? That's ---

FRAN
Awesome.

CALI
People will mispronounce it. Call you **Ebyn Levin** or **Ebyn Levin!**

FRAN
I can correct them.

CALI resumes her video game.

FRAN
Okay. Why be a rabbi? Well, we're Jewish, aren't we? I mean, what does it mean to be Jewish? I can't answer that without becoming a rabbi, and I want to know. I want to be all the things I am. Thanks for asking. I tried to be late. I didn't wanna hafta talk to Prudence, but she's not here? No, Ebyn, she's not. Thanks, Cali. Thanks for letting me know.

CALI
{No} She threw him out.

STU
{out} I tried - I ---

FRAN
What?

RHODA
Could be the autism

CALI
I created this funeral long distance from Vegas. Me.

FRAN
Is that where you live now?

CALI
Gaming capital of the world. I flew in yesterday to make sure it would all go smooth. Without your help.

FRAN
We didn't keep in touch.

CALI
Is that how you put it? When people say, hey Fran, Ebyn? How's your fam? You don't tell them how you always hated me and wanted me to die

FRAN
What?

CALI
Killer Fran

RHODA
I never shoulda started that.

FRAN
I never hated you. Not even after you knocked me out. You cracked my skull.

CALI

You deserved it.

FRAN

Cali, no one deserves it. Or how Dad treated me. Mom too if you wanna go back that far.

CALI

You be you, Fran, Ebyn. You're still whatever you are, right?

FRAN

What's that supposed to mean?

CALI

Incomprehensible. Rageful. Queer. Distant. Unreadable.

FRAN

CALI

Maybe you're autistic from the concussion?

FRAN

Not how it works.

CALI

But autism's a brain thing.

FRAN

It's genetic. You could be too.

CALI

That's absurd.

FRAN

Or ADHD - I'm that too. Audhd. Stop smoothing your hair. People might think you're stimming.

CALI

Am not!

(can't stop whatever stimming she's doing)

I can do this if I want.

FRAN

Remember how Dad always had to have his sandwich fixins evenly piled?

CALI

No.

FRAN

Come on. He couldn't eat the wrong ratio of meat to cheese!

STU

And the lettuce the right height to match the tomato

STU stims and makes a sound.

FRAN

Don't you think his dyslexia and his --

(quotes STU's stimming gesture and sound)

How he never wanted to be around any of us and only came to dinner if Mom would yell

RHODA

I don't have a button for volume!

STU

And this is why

CALI

I don't remember.

FRAN

He'd scream about how everything had to be the same. Just not her same. Only his.

CALI

Fran, I was little.

STU

What did she call it?

RHODA

Autism or Audhd. Pay attention!

FRAN

He could recite from memory every golfer and all their stats back to Walter Hagen

STU

She remembers Walter Hagen!

RHODA

Stu, I think she's a they now.

FRAN

Or how he couldn't understand our feelings about anything ever

CALI

Mom had tons of feelings. Constant feelings!

FRAN

Don't you wonder why?

RHODA

I do. I feel everything! All the time!

CALI

That doesn't mean ---

FRAN

I have feelings. Big feelings, but I can't tell you how I'm having them cause they hit me like waves. They knock me down. It's physical. Like I'm turning into Mom ranting. It's exhausting.

RHODA

She understands me!

STU

They

RHODA

{They} Finally! I feel seen. I feel like, I feel so many things all at once. Stu, I want to kiss you!

STU

Don't.

RHODA

{Don't} She's right about us. We're what she says!

STU

You can't speak for me

RHODA

{You can't speak for me} either. I don't need you. I am forgiving myself. Forgiving myself! And the heavens will open, because I see now. I had a whole lifetime of being me and trying not to be me. Working always working so hard on my game cause I had to. I feel such a weight lifting, like I could drift away, fly, be free. Finally! Thank you Franny, Franky. I like Franky, almost like I had a boy. Ebyn? Eh!

STU

Can you stop? Can you stop for one second and listen?

RHODA

I coulda been like that too. They them theirs. Who knew?

CALI

So I guess you won't be speaking then?

FRAN

Out there? About Dad? I wasn't planning on it.

CALI

You're the oldest. Don't you have any happy memories?

FRAN

... He tried to teach me to fish once.

STU

True sunfish.

FRAN

I caught fish after fish.

STU

Lepomis.

FRAN

First I thought I was lucky.

STU

From the Greek meaning covered with scales.

FRAN

It was great!

Freshwater bluegills!

STU

Then, after I caught a few, I thought I had a skill

FRAN

Rod and reel, tackle.

STU

Then I thought I had a superpower!

FRAN

Bobber rigs and worms.

STU

Then he says, it's a stocked pond

FRAN

FRAN stims.

I wanted her to win!

STU

You set her up.

RHODA

So? He loved fish, Fran. He never shut up about fish.

CALI

Bony, mostly bony. Plated skin, mostly extinct. And cartilaginous, like sharks!

STU

He took me there to show me I could win. He cheated!

FRAN

{Cheated?} You could look at it another way. You could say, he wanted you to love what he loved, so you'd want to do it, with him, cause he loved it too.

CALI

Like you know that?

FRAN

CALI

I'm getting my PhD in Early Childhood, and we try to make it easy for kids to learn, cause no one gets anything right right away. So we use bigger balls, fatter crayons. Maybe he was trying to inspire you.

STU

Yeah!

FRAN

O-kay.

CALI

People aren't supposed to be so literal, Ebyn. Always another way to look at it.

FRAN

And how should I look at what you did?

CALI

I knew you'd bring that up

FRAN

You assaulted me. Hello. Cali. You assaulted me.

CALI

I hit you with a trophy.

FRAN

People apologize. People forgive.

CALI

Forgive me, and I'll think about apologizing.

FRAN

Cali, that's the wrong way round.

CALI

Seems fair to me. You're the one who always wanted me dead. Killer Fran.

FRAN

That is not true-----

CALI

You killed mom. You killed her! I had to hit you!

RHODA may hit STU throughout this exchange while STU defends himself without hitting back, a kind of flapping.

RHODA (to STU)

You see? >

STU

I didn't know >

RHODA

You stupid awful >

STU

I'm sorry! >

RHODA

mindless jerk.

STU

I'm sorry okay?

RHODA

No it's not, it's not okay!

STU

Not mindless, too much mind!

RHODA

G-d!

RHODA, done hitting, maybe hugs him, but if this happens STU extricates himself.

STU

I'd take it back if I could.

FRAN
Dad wasn't there. He didn't know.

CALI
Then why would he say that?

STU
I wanted her to love me.

FRAN
You think I can read his mind. I can hardly read my own.
Do you want to know what happened at the hospital?

CALI
No.

FRAN
The night she died? You don't want to know?

FRAN stims visibly and doesn't care that CALI sees. CALI, not noticing FRAN, fixes her hair, her clothes, does whatever masked stims she has built into her presentation of self, and finally changes her mind.

CALI
You can tell me. But I'm only gonna see it as your side.

FRAN (continues to stim)

CALI (noticing)
What are you doing?

FRAN
Stimming. You said you knew-----

CALI
Are you gonna do that out there?

FRAN
Uh. Yeah. It's what I do.

CALI

You shouldn'ta come.

FRAN

No? I should stay away? Now that I know who I am. Now that I know what I'm from. Now that I can see myself and understand why I am the way I am. The way you are too, Cali --

CALI

I'm nothing like you.

FRAN

No, you're like you. We're born from the same people. Stuck in their bodies like we're stuck in ours. With wildly firing neurons. Nothing ever prunes away. So I'm 3 and 9 and 19 and 29 all at once!

CALI

What are you talking about?

FRAN

I thought you said you knew about autism. Or maybe you downloaded a bunch of stereotypes? When I found out it changed everything. I thought you wanted to know the truth.

CALI

I do.

FRAN

Then I have something for you.

FRAN rummages in their backpack. FRAN finds and brandishes the trophy.

CALI

Mom's trophy! The heavy one!

RHODA

My trophy! The best one!

FRAN

So precious, Mom's biggest win. I always wanted her to think **of us** that way.

RHODA

Oh --

FRAN

Not just me. Both of us.

RHODA

I didn't realize---

FRAN

I thought we coulda been her special interest. Her championship.

RHODA

Is that autism too? If I'd known, I might have--I'm sorry, Fran, Cali.

FRAN

Don't worry. I cleaned off the blood.

CALI

There was blood?

FRAN

{Blood} Hell yeah. Head wounds bleed the most.

CALI

RHODA

Put it down, Fran.

STU

Franny

FRAN

Do you remember the hospital? The endless days sitting by her bed while she was comatose

CALI

I was at camp.

FRAN

{Camp} No. I brought you home when she first went into the coma.

CALI

{Coma} That's right. I forgot about that. You made me sit there

FRAN

But you refused. Made Art drive you back. So I sat there alone.

CALI

{Alone} No. Grandma and Grandpa were there.

RHODA

My parents, they were devastated. Such a loss!

FRAN

When they were there, they could barely stand to look at her. They'd sit down the hall in the lounge. Wringing their hands. I sat with her.

CALI

Nobody cares, Fran.

FRAN and RHODA

I do.

RHODA

Thanks Fran.

FRAN

I didn't want her to be alone. Art would sit on his way home from work. Check in. But I'd stay til the end. Every night.

CALI

And that's why you killed her?

FRAN

I didn't kill her. That day, it was a Friday, the doctors and some social workers and a hospital lawyer, a whole team, surrounded me. "At the rate her blood pressure's dropping, we can be pretty sure she'll be dead in a few more hours. Unless you want us to put her on life support. Do you want life support?" I had to decide, me, the whole hospital on top of me.

CALI

Where was Grandma and Grandpa?

FRAN

They said, "we can't make a choice like that..." and they left. So I called Art at work. He said, "I've only been her husband six months. You're next of kin." Because I happened to be so grown up. Do you remember 19?

CALI

My 19 was never like your 19.

FRAN

An avalanche, falling downhill. With one of those decisions I hope you never have to make. You can flap your arms to make a pocket of oxygen, but it's no good. You can't breathe. She's in a coma. All her opinions, all her feelings, all her never-ending info-dumping about how to dress-eat-look and play the games! Silence. And no you.

CALI

I was at camp.

FRAN

They took me into a little room. Set up with documents to sign. They said, "take your time." But her blood pressure's dropping. "Think about it." On the one hand, she's our mother.

RHODA

And I will always be your mother, girls.

STU

People.

FRAN

On the other hand, she's dying. They could have kept her alive forever. In a coma. Would you make a different decision?

CALI

I don't know

FRAN

You smashed this trophy into my head. I was out cold. I didn't kill anyone

CALI

All my life you were Killer Fran, trying to kill me. More than once. They had to put a latch on my nursery door. Cause you did that!

FRAN

Did not!

CALI

You tried! They caught you

CALI and RHODA and STU

Dragging your chair from outta your room

to climb up to undo the latch
 all by your tiny four year old self
 With pigtails!
 And dimples!
 The smart one! Killer Fran. Grab me outta my crib like a dollbaby!
 CALI illustrates being physically dragged as if by an arm and then a leg...
 You climbed up on the bed and opened the window and just as you were about to toss me out --
 Boom! They'd catch you!
 Boom! We'd catch her!
 {boom}
 "Franny!"
 You'd squeeze me
 "Franny!"
 And hug me to your chest! As if I could protect you!
 "This itty bitty!"

CALI

RHODA

STU

RHODA

CALI

CALI

RHODA and STU

FRAN

CALI and RHODA and STU

CALI

RHODA and STU

CALI

RHODA and STU (about CALI)

FRAN

You don't remember Mom's coma, but you remember this?

CALI

I don't have to remember. They always told it. They loved to tell it!

RHODA

When she dropped her / plop!

CALI and STU

Plop! Down on the bed!

RHODA

And Cali slid to the floor

CALI and RHODA and STU

and landed, splat!

STU

Good thing that diaper was full

RHODA

She coulda cracked her coccyx!

CALI

Remember that?

FRAN

Stories, stories! I know that now. Since I found out I'm autistic.

CALI

What are you saying?

FRAN

I believed them. I took it all literally. And they were literal too. They saw what they saw. But I know I was squeezing you for love.

CALI

You wanted me outta that house.

FRAN

I was trying to save you. I loved you.

CALI

You don't know that.

FRAN

Yeah, I know. Cause I still love you.

CALI

Funny way to show it.

FRAN

I've gone over the past with a fine tooth comb. The way Mom used to go over my scabby scalp.

RHODA

You always had a part like Ridge Avenue. Every which way but straight

FRAN

Picking at myself. But I never killed Mom, and I never tried to kill you. I don't even kill waterbugs!

CALI

Ew! You have waterbugs?

FRAN

My life is not as pretty as yours.

CALI

Maybe you don't work hard enough to make it pretty. Not tryinga be mean, Fran, I just don't think you care

FRAN

I care. That's why I'm here.

CALI

That's why I'm here.

FRAN

Really? Feels like you just wanna rub my face in your pretty

CALI

No. I always look like this

FRAN

I want to make it right between us. I wanna forgive you for what you did.

CALI

What I did?

FRAN

I've been autistic my whole life. So have you probably. Or some other kind of neurodivergence. And Mom. And Dad. All of us in different ways. All of us unable to communicate the way I wish I could ... The way I'm trying. ----- We missed each other every step of the way.

CALI

I don't know what you're talking about.

FRAN

Apologize for hitting me with this trophy, and then you can have it back. I want to let go of my childhood, bury Stu and be done with it

CALI

Yeah, that's nuts, Fran, no one can do that.

FRAN

I can try

CALI

Aright, aright, I hear you.

I, Cali, officially apologize, because you insist, for busting your head open with that trophy. Are you happy now?

FRAN

That is a shitty apology, but I'll take it. Thank you. I forgive you.

FRAN gives CALI the trophy.

CALI

Tennis tennis tennis!

Are you gonna say anything out there or what?

FRAN

Like a eulogy? I don't think so.

STU

Please Fran, say something nice. I don't wanna be stuck with your mother.

RHODA

I'm not stuck. I'm forgiving myself. You're right. I got the rules wrong. I didn't realize I could forgive myself.

STU

Can you take me with you?

RHODA

I'll think about it.

CALI

It's not like we got all day, Fran. There's people out there.

FRAN

So it's just me? There's nothing you want to forgive them for?

CALI

I love them!

RHODA

You're good with Cali.

FRAN

When I think of them now, in a world where they didn't fit-----
When I found out, it was like the heavens opened

RHODA

Yeah, for me too - literally!

FRAN

The first thing I did was forgive us all. Especially myself. Really truly. With compassion. I built a compassion practice. For all the awful parts of my life that played over and over in my mind. Especially for signing those documents. I want you to forgive me for things I never did. And I forgive Mom for trying to make me someone I never wanted to be. What she thought would save me. To give me skills. Her fake femininity, her tough tennis. The only game plan she had. There's so much we don't know, Cali, so much we'll never know. Why not try to forgive? All I want is to belong. To them. To you. Yes, you, Cali. I want them to be ours together. Both of them. Slippery as eels.

FRAN stims and CALI stims in her masked way. RHODA swings her racquet and stims. STU stims (and speaks) so they are all moving about in a strangely disconnected yet familiar way.

STU

Eels are fish. Anguilliformes. Long, wormlike bodies. Predatory, carnivorous. They swim in fresh, salt or brackish waters. Which means they can adapt. They can transform!

RHODA

Come here, you big eel! Heaven awaits!

RHODA grabs STU to leave for heaven

STU (to RHODA)

You'll leave me alone there, when they let us in? I gotta work on my game.

RHODA and STU exit.

FRAN

Can you help me with this?

CALI helps FRAN to tear the fabric ribbon that makes FRAN a mourner. CALI pins it on FRAN.

FRAN

Do I seem different now?

CALI

{Different how?}

FRAN

I don't know.

CALI

It's been so long. I think you're right about not knowing. We might as well forgive them. And each other. I'm sorry. I got carried away. I shouldn'ta hit you.

FRAN

Thanks.

CALI

Can we go out there now?

FRAN

??

Lights shift and FRAN is alone in front of the audience.

FRAN

There are a lot of you. Wow. More than I expected. Cali?

FRAN gestures for CALI to join them. There's a silent back and forth of gesture here including flapping stims from FRAN and masked stims from CALI until FRAN has to start without CALI who may have joined the audience.

FRAN

Thank you all for coming. I remember growing up my dad was always like

FRAN does a perfect imitation of STU gesturing and making the sounds he'd make with his mouth in a sequence we have seen previously often in the play.

FRAN

He was socially awkward and shy and dyslexic. He could tell you anything about golf or fish like an encyclopedia. Our mom was kinda similar in a totally different way, like always like

FRAN does a perfect imitation of RHODA stimming saying tennis tennis tennis.

FRAN

tennis tennis tennis. Socially awkward like a bulldozer. So Cali and I - can I say that? Cali and I?

CALI allows this.

FRAN

Cali and I grew up with these two very intense people. Who didn't really get along. And we weren't the best fit, and we weren't understood. Because we didn't know. We're neurodivergent.

CALI denies this, upset with FRAN.

FRAN

Okay, I am. I'm autistic. Audhd. And Cali's whatever she is. It's genetic. Some of you are related to us. So, you might start to wonder. But before you freak out, imagine living your whole life suspecting but not knowing you're different. A zebra in a cowshed. A Mac in a world of PCs. Not wrong, different. Like being queer. So many autists are also nonbinary and trans. My folx inspire me now. Their lives were full of repetitive movement, motion they performed to create a kind of safety. A ritual for comfort and ease. Religious ritual also offers this. Who really believes we do this funeral stuff for the dead? *Zichrono livracha v'zichrona livracha*. May their memories be for a blessing.

CALI joins FRAN and FRAN takes CALI's hand.

FRAN

These rituals are for us. The living. Knowing who and what we are is a gift! It's good to be part of a tribe. We understand each other. We get to belong. It feels like this!

FRAN stims in a big, inclusive way - like loud hands - and FRAN tries to get CALI to stim too and CALI does. Then FRAN tries to get the audience to stim too, and maybe they do.

FRAN

Oh! One more thing, later tonight, there will be shiva!

END OF PLAY