

CANOPY

By Rachael Carnes

CHARACTERS

FRANCES In their 70's

DANA In their 70's

SETTING

A modest kitchen — With a smallish breakfast nook — in an older home.

TIME

An unseasonably mild winter in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

Please note: Both characters are gender-neutral and to be played throughout the performance by a rotation of four performers of any ethnicity, so that from scene to scene, the play is about two men, two women or a man a woman. Costume choices will allow the audience to track who is DANA and who is FRANCES in that moment — actors tag-teaming the role of FRANCES might both wear a red shirt and jeans and the actors playing DANA might wear the same color sweater and khakis. Your choice. You'll see in the script that the actors will use a coin toss between each scene — To determine who's paired with who as the play progresses. In my mind, the alternates stay onstage, waiting, watching, dancing, lying on the floor, reading a comic book, knitting, painting, drawing, writing, pulling on a pair of socks, jumping, rolling, stretching, brushing their teeth, brushing their hair, doing high steps, playing peek-a-boo, writing on a clipboard, a card, a letter, reading a book, facing in towards the action, or at discreet times, out towards the audience to amplify the action, like a Greek chorus. Teams will discover what works, what aids the story. Maybe none of it works. But we'll just have to take that chance.

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Scene One

House lights dim, as though the play is starting. The two actors playing FRANCES and the two actors playing DANA emerge from the audience, either from seats, or from the back of the house, disrobing outer wear, etc., until it's revealed that they're wearing twin-like outfits. They seem a little out of place, but purposeful.

They should seem like everyday people. No stage makeup or extra-polished hair, no perfectly ironed khakis or shirts, they're like regular folks who wandered into the theater, or maybe came because someone had an extra ticket and they didn't have anything going on. So, here they are.

The four actors discard their jackets and belongings, their programs for the show, their beverages from concessions — And gather onstage, looking at each other, wordlessly greeting each other. One finishes a cookie while the others wait.

The two actors playing FRANCES and the two actors playing DANA maybe shake hands or high-five or hug — Something to show they know each other? Not sure what. TBD. Then the pairs each flip a coin and go to their places: FRANCES and DANA in the kitchen.

Lights up full. Morning. Coffee.

FRANCES

When you're done using that dishtowel, could you hang it up?

DANA

Excuse me?

ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA linger around the periphery, unsure if they're in — or out — of the play.

FRANCES

I said, when you're done using that dishtowel, could you hang it up?

DANA

Instead of what?

ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA might read the program to try to gain clarity, or they might try and fail to leave the performance space. Not in a dopey mime way —

FRANCES

Instead of putting it on the counter?

DANA

When do I do that?

Something about ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA's choreography expresses how the ride has started — Like that moment of inevitability on a rollercoaster when they bring down the safety bars. You're in.

FRANCES

You've always done that.

DANA

I always do that?

FRANCES

Yes, you always do that.

DANA

How long have you wanted to say something to me about that?

FRANCES

1963.

DANA

I don't do that —

FRANCES

You've been doing that since 1963.

DANA

I don't know why it would be a problem —

FRANCES

It's a problem for me.

DANA

But why?

FRANCES

Because I like it when they look neat.

DANA

I'm a very tidy person! I collect coins and currency.

FRANCES

No one "collects coins and currency" anymore.

DANA

Well, I do. I find numismatics soothing. And I like how the papers and coins look, all lined up.

FRANCES

If you can line up those — why can't you hang a dishtowel?

DANA

I do hang the dishtowel! Every —

FRANCES

Never! You never do. And that stirring —

DANA

This? It's a spoon in a cup.

FRANCES

Do you have to stir your coffee so loudly?

DANA

This is how I stir my coffee.

FRANCES

It's blended — The cream and the coffee are already together.

DANA

Not quite —

FRANCES

How many more times do you have to stir it to be done?

DANA stirs audibly.

FRANCES

The weather's nice.

DANA

Unseasonably warm for January —

FRANCES

Daffodils already coming up!

I saw that. Daffodils —

DANA

Like little soldiers. In January!

FRANCES

I always thought it looked like pansies have faces.

DANA

Me, too!

FRANCES

What's a seven-letter word for 'more impatient'?

DANA

I think I'm ready —

FRANCES

I haven't finished my coffee.

DANA

We should go.

FRANCES

We have plenty of time.

DANA

There's traffic and parking —

FRANCES

I know about those things and we have plenty of time!

DANA

But what if there's an accident?

FRANCES

We can't know if there's going to be an accident.

DANA

Exactly — So we should leave early.

FRANCES

What do you think would be a safe margin?

DANA

FRANCES

Three or four hours.

DANA

To drive across town to see your doctor.

FRANCES

Yes.

DANA

What are we going to do at your doctor's office for three or four hours?

FRANCES

They have fish there.

DANA

Fish.

FRANCES

And magazines — We can read magazines.

DANA

Doctor's office magazines are all germy.

FRANCES

Only the sick patient part. And you know what else is germy — A dishtowel that can't air dry.

DANA

But you're sick.

FRANCES

Not that kind of sick. The sick patient part is for germy people. I don't have germs.

DANA

Let me finish my coffee —

FRANCES

We don't know I'm sick. I might be sick. And when we're driving —

DANA

Yes?

FRANCES

I've noticed that the driver's seat of the car does this squeaky thing.

DANA

Squeaky thing.

FRANCES

When we're driving — When *you're* driving.

DANA

What squeaky thing?

FRANCES

It's when you're breathing — The seatback or something, it vibrates.

DANA

When I'm breathing.

FRANCES

It sounds like the car's breathing — Squeak, squeak, squeak. Like that.

DANA

You want me to stop breathing?

FRANCES

No!

DANA

Because that would be ridiculous.

FRANCES

I just want you to breathe in a shallow way. Little breaths, like a —

DANA

Like a what?

FRANCES

A small marsupial —

DANA

A marsupial. Like a possum?

FRANCES

It's *o*possum.

DANA

No, it's not. The "o" is silent.

FRANCES

When we drive in the car, instead of breathing so hard, I want you to be like one of those ancient tree-dwelling mammals who hid out while dinosaurs roamed the earth.

DANA

I don't think they were big drivers.

FRANCES

Just — Try to take little breaths, like there's a T-Rex nearby.

DANA

Why do I always have to drive?

FRANCES

Because I know how to get places.

DANA

Then why don't you drive?

FRANCES

Because I don't like to.

DANA

But you always complain about my routes. Maybe we should take your routes.

FRANCES

You pick the slowest way to get anywhere.

DANA

Marsupials are not hunters. We live in the trees.

FRANCES

You got lost on the way home from the grocery store.

DANA

I wasn't lost — I was exploring the arboreal canopy.

FRANCES

What do you think the doctor will say?

DANA

I don't know.

FRANCES

Do you think it'll be quick or —

DANA

She'll probably take you back to her office. That's how they handle it on T.V.

FRANCES

Do you think there'll be a mahogany desk?

DANA

I hope so!

FRANCES

I've always imagined getting this kind of news from someone behind a mahogany desk.

DANA

But we don't know what kind of news it is yet —

FRANCES

We're really just going there to look at the fish!

DANA

She's a good doctor.

FRANCES

But they couldn't tell me on the phone.

DANA

I know.

FRANCES

Do you think they practice?

DANA

What?

FRANCES

Delivering news.

DANA

They probably get better at it over time —

FRANCES

But what about in the beginning? That must be hard. Young doctor — “Oh, sorry, you're going to die! HAHAHA!”

DANA

I don't think they would say it like that.

FRANCES

But how would they know what to say?

DANA

We don't know if you're going to die. Let's enjoy this not knowing.

FRANCES

We should leave.

DANA

Do you think it'll be easier sitting in the lobby?

FRANCES

The waiting? Yes. I do.

DANA

We survived all of these things —

FRANCES

What? When?

DANA

Being broke. Cardboard dining table?

FRANCES

That first Thanksgiving — It kept wiggling when we tried to cut that dry turkey.

DANA

You never got better at cooking a turkey.

FRANCES

Neither did you!

DANA

We somehow survived having children.

FRANCES

I miss them —

DANA

I know. It's just so busy until the moment it's not.

FRANCES

Should I call them?

DANA

Let's wait 'til we talk to the doctor.

FRANCES

Do you think she'll wear her white lab coat? I would like that.

DANA

I bet she will. It seems important.

FRANCES

It does. I hope she just says it — No beating 'round the bush.

DANA

That's a weird expression.

FRANCES

What?

DANA

“Beating 'round the bush.”

FRANCES

Possums? Little game — Marsupials. They'd hit the trees.

DANA

Who would?

FRANCES

Old tree-hitters. I don't know!

DANA

I would do that for you. I'd hit trees to flush out little animals for you —

FRANCES

You would?

DANA

Yes, I would. I'd do anything.

FRANCES

I'm ready.

DANA

I know.

Lights down to half.

The performers break, dropping their characterizations, their choreography, they just become people again. One might go to his/her belongings to check his/her phone and send a quick text. The one who ate the cookie earlier has some water — So thirsty! One reads the play program — Comparing a too-youthful headshot in the program of another performer, with the performer onstage — Noting this with an audience member.

Coin flip.

The two performers playing the FRANCES and DANA in the next scene exit, while ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA remain onstage, waiting nervously.

Scene Two

Lights up full.

Later the same morning. DANA and FRANCES returning. There are a few dishes to do — And that coffee pot to wash.

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES are relieved and exhausted throughout this scene. One might take a quick nap.

	DANA
So, you're fine!	
	FRANCES
Right as rain!	
	DANA
And the doctor didn't say what it was —	
	FRANCES
She said it was an anomaly.	
	DANA
How did that make you feel?	
	FRANCES
It made me feel special.	
	DANA
Those fish are nice.	
	FRANCES
That tank is so clean.	
	DANA
Do you think they clean it every night?	
	FRANCES
Not the doctors —	
	DANA
Of course, not the doctors!	
	FRANCES
They're too busy.	

DANA

The nurses — Maybe they clean the tank.

FRANCES

Nurses don't clean the fish tank. There must be a service.

DANA

I've always imagined that when doctors leave work, that they all go play racket ball.

FRANCES

You hungry?

DANA

I used to play racket ball, remember? My knees —

FRANCES

I said are you hungry?

DANA

I wanted to stop on the way home and get a sandwich.

FRANCES

It takes as much time to stop for a sandwich as it does to make a sandwich.

DANA

But I like it when someone else makes the sandwich for me.

FRANCES

I can make you a sandwich.

DANA

I don't like the way that you make sandwiches.

FRANCES

I make good sandwiches! I can make you turkey and cheese.

DANA

But I like ham. When we go out, I always get ham.

FRANCES

You like ham? I hate ham. It's so *pink*.

DANA

You never buy ham because you hate ham.

FRANCES
Why don't you go grocery shopping then?

DANA
I always offer, you never say yes.

FRANCES
When do you offer?

DANA
Every morning.

FRANCES
I don't remember that —

DANA
I've been offering to go grocery shopping since 1963.

FRANCES
Do you want a turkey and cheese sandwich?

DANA
Okay. It's just —

FRANCES
What now?

DANA
Can you do the mayo thicker?

FRANCES
Thicker mayo —

DANA
When you make a sandwich you just skin the mayo across the bread, like this is war time.

FRANCES
No one needs too much mayo.

DANA
I need it. I like a thick carpet of mayo. A sedimentary layer.

FRANCES
How thick?

Good quarter inch.

DANA

That's not good for you.

FRANCES

And I like those sliced pickles — The ones that are thin.

DANA

Those are called Bread and Butter pickles.

FRANCES

Why don't we ever buy those?

DANA

I don't like pickles.

FRANCES

But I do!

DANA

Put them on the list.

FRANCES

Where's the list?

DANA

In my head.

FRANCES

Please buy pickles.

DANA

Pickles, got it. Next time I go to the store, I'll buy pickles.

FRANCES

Not just pickles, buy Bread and Butter pickles.

DANA

The thin ones —

FRANCES

They're good on sandwiches. Can I have white bread?

DANA

FRANCES

No fiber!

DANA

Why are you so obsessed with fiber? We have this jug of it — These things.

FRANCES

Those are fiber pills.

DANA

Then I'll have white bread with a fiber pill.

FRANCES

That would be like the bread and the fiber pill cancelling each other out.

DANA

Why can't we have the fiber gummy chews?

FRANCES

What are fiber gummy chews?

DANA

They make everything into a gummy chew now — Multivitamins, fish oil —

FRANCES

You're not seven. Vitamins are not candy!

DANA

They make gummy chews that have fiber! I tried one. I tried a bunch.

FRANCES

When?

DANA

I was at the pharmacy, filling your prescription, and they had samples. I ate six or seven.

FRANCES

Aren't they —

DANA

Had the most robust shit since 1963.

FRANCES

You're disgusting.

DANA

It was glorious.

FRANCES

This is why I'm no longer attracted to you — This. This right here.

DANA

Remember your old colon?

FRANCES

What?

DANA

Used to be, I could digest *anything*!

FRANCES

If it weren't for me, you'd eat like a raccoon.

DANA

Nacho cheese sauce — I loved that stuff! But it's so binding. I just can't.

FRANCES

Maybe a goat — They'll eat a tin can.

DANA

I could eat nachos if you'd get some gummy fiber chews.

FRANCES

I'm not buying you candy!

DANA

An anomaly.

FRANCES

That's what she said.

DANA

All that run up.

FRANCES

I didn't sleep last night — Not really.

DANA

Me neither. Should we tell the kids about this?

FRANCES

Tell them I *might* have had a terminal illness?

DANA

Just tell them about the testing.

FRANCES

Tell them about me getting tested for a disease I didn't end up having?

DANA

I just think they should know —

FRANCES

Why would they want to know that?

DANA

They're our children!

FRANCES

They have lives of their own — Their own worries.

DANA

It's not a worry, though — It's fine! You're making sandwiches!

FRANCES

Okay — Let's call them. You're nearest to the phone —

DANA

Sure —

FRANCES

Then call them.

DANA

I know their numbers!

FRANCES

You don't know your own children's phone numbers?

DANA

Sure, I do!

FRANCES

What are they?

DANA

You've covered it up on the fridge, so —

FRANCES

We have two grown children. Knowing their numbers is just about the only parental responsibility you have left.

DANA

They have responsibilities to me!

FRANCES

They're busy! They drive minivans. Soccer gear —

DANA

Their numbers are always changing! We've had the same number since we bought this place.

FRANCES

That's not true. What about the ten-digit area code?

DANA

Our number's easy — 484-6633. So simple!

FRANCES

Now we have to put a 5-4-1.

DANA

I hate putting the 5-4-1.

FRANCES

Me, too. I hate it so much. The ten-digit number can blow me.

DANA

I'm glad you hate it. We have that in common.

FRANCES

I also like birds.

DANA

They're okay.

FRANCES

I'm going to call — I'll call one kid, they can call the other.

DANA

To say what?

FRANCES

They can say, “Everything’s fine.”

DANA

Then why are we calling?

FRANCES

It’s ringing — This was your idea! Be quiet.

DANA

I bet doctors love those days when they get to deliver good news.

FRANCES

It’s not really good news — It’s still ringing.

DANA

Probably going to go to an answering machine.

FRANCES

“Good news! You’re not dying.” It’s still ringing — Going to voicemail —

DANA

Voicemail. I bet doctors go play a great game of racket ball after this kind of news!

FRANCES

Shh — Hi sweetie! It’s me. I’m just here with — We’re just calling because we wanted to let you know that I had some tests done, but *everything’s fine*. Nothing to worry about. Well, there was something to worry about, I might have been dying but the tests revealed that it was —

DANA

An anomaly.

FRANCES

An *anomaly*. I’m sure you know what that means in this circumstance. It’s not a circumstance — I don’t want to worry you. I just thought since you’re an adult that you would want to be informed about our pending mortality. Give us a call, sweetie. Love you! Bye!

DANA

The north our home — The sea our friend.

FRANCES

What? The north —

DANA

Our Family Coat of Arms — You didn’t say our Family Coat of Arms. Our crest!

FRANCES
We don't have a Coat of Arms.

DANA
And You forgot to say call the other one.

FRANCES
It's assumed. They're very close.

DANA
Boreas domus —

FRANCES
Okay.

DANA
That's Latin — The north is our home.

FRANCES
But this is our home. And it has been since 1963.

DANA
Mare amicus — The sea is our friend.

FRANCES
What sea?

DANA
I just like the idea that what's out there is okay — That we won't fall off the edge of the world.

FRANCES
It's Yard Waste Day. Did you put the can out?

DANA
There was nothing in it.

FRANCES
You still have to put it out.

DANA
I forgot.

FRANCES
We pay for that service.

DANA

I'm glad the kids have each other. It's really good news!

FRANCES

It's more like neutral — Like everything's fine.

DANA

What's wrong with fine?

FRANCES

I don't know, it's silly but, I had worked this out in my head to go another way.

DANA

In what way?

FRANCES

I just had resigned myself to — It was a lot of build-up.

DANA

It's good news!

FRANCES

I know it is! Then you just go back to —

DANA

To what?

FRANCES

To this.

DANA

What's wrong with this?

FRANCES

Nothing's wrong with this.

DANA

Then why did you say that?

FRANCES

I didn't say anything.

DANA

Yes, you did.

FRANCES

Would it kill you to put the Tupperware away so that the containers and lids are together?

DANA

I do that.

FRANCES

You do not do that. You never do that.

DANA

I did that yesterday.

FRANCES

But if you're going to put the lid with the container you have to air dry the two parts — Or you trap the moisture! Look at this —

DANA

Look at that moisture.

FRANCES

Now I have to open it up, get a paper towel — Wipe it out —

DANA

You could use a dishrag.

FRANCES

I don't like that word.

DANA

Dishrag?

FRANCES

I can't —

DANA

Dishrag.

FRANCES

Stop!

DANA

What don't you like about it?

FRANCES

It just sounds dirty. This dish — it's gray and — What are these — Little bits of egg?

DANA

I made eggs.

FRANCES

You're not supposed to have eggs.

DANA

I can have eggs if I want!

FRANCES

No, you can't. I'd just like you to commit to working on this Tupperware —

DANA

I don't think they call it Tupperware anymore.

FRANCES

It's one of those words — Like Band-Aid, or Kleenex — It's just what it is.

DANA

Windex. That's another one. I say Windex, you know just what I mean.

FRANCES

What would you know about Windex? I do all the cleaning.

DANA

They must Windex the heck out of that fish tank every night.

FRANCES

Here's your turkey and cheese on whole wheat with light mayo.

DANA

Thanks.

Lights down half.

Break — Just people. Someone unwraps and chews gum. Chews it fast 'til the flavor's out. Looks around for a garbage can. This performer looks under the kitchen sink, but this is a fake kitchen in a theater, so there's no garbage under there, even though that's where garbage goes in most houses in America. This gum-chewing performer is a little lost, unsure what to do next. The rest of the performers become impatient. I mean — Come on. Gum chewer puts the chewed gum in a theater program, the rest shrug their approval. Okay.

Coin toss.

DANA places a coins and currency collection book on a flat surface in the kitchen area and exits, taking the sandwich.

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES pull a canoe downstage, with two oars. They put on the life vests that are in the canoe and get in it, after flipping a coin for who sits in front and who sits in the back.

FRANCES remains onstage.

Scene Three

Mid-afternoon. Lights up full on FRANCES, with a spray bottle and a sponge, wiping the counters.

Throughout the scene, ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES paddle the canoe across the stage. They stop along their way, to look through binoculars, maybe study a map, argue about which way to go. At some point, they have to portage the canoe, flipping and carrying it overland as the onstage action continues. That's not fun.

FRANCES

I see you.

FRANCES sprays cleaning fluid.

FRANCES CON'T

Die!

FRANCES wipes again.

FRANCES CON'T

You think you can hide? You can't hide.

FRANCES sprays cleaning fluid. DANA enters.

DANA

Just getting a banana.

FRANCES

We have ants.

DANA

Again?

FRANCES

We have ants this time every year!

DANA

Where are they coming from?

FRANCES

I don't know —

Ew — They're on this banana!

DANA

Here — Help me spray.

FRANCES

I don't want to just kill them, I wanted to figure out where they're coming from.

DANA

They're everywhere! Help me kill them!

FRANCES

There are just going to be more —

DANA

Here's their highway. See —

FRANCES

Stop spraying —

DANA

No!

FRANCES

You're disrupting their pattern.

DANA

Good!

FRANCES

But if you do that I can't follow their road.

DANA

They don't have a road.

FRANCES

Yes, they do — They're all walking in the same direction, see, it's like a one-way street.

DANA

What are they carrying?

FRANCES

Looks like raisin bran.

DANA

Oh, God. FRANCES

Did you buy raisin bran? DANA

Because you need more fiber. FRANCES

But I hate raisins! DANA

You can pick them out. FRANCES

If they're carrying raisin bran then that means — DANA

Don't say it. FRANCES

They're in the cupboard. DANA

Oh, God. No — Just — You look. FRANCES

Why should I look? DANA

You're better at that than me. FRANCES

I'm better at opening cupboards? DANA

You're better at coping with infestations. FRANCES

You're actually admitting there's something that I'm better at than you? DANA

Yes! Vermin — Bugs — That's your department. And high-up things. FRANCES

I don't mind ladders.

DANA

I hate ladders!

FRANCES

Okay — Stand back!

DANA

It looks like they're coming from —

FRANCES

From here.

This might get ugly.

DANA

I can't look.

FRANCES

DANA pulls cupboard door open slowly, while holding the cleaning spray like a gun in a movie. Looks. Sprays wildly and closes the cupboard again quickly.

Oh — It's bad!

DANA

What kind of bad?

FRANCES

They're everywhere.

DANA

Everywhere?

FRANCES

It's a Code Orange.

DANA

Oh, God!

FRANCES

I'll get an ant trap. Don't worry —

DANA

But if there are so many, one trap won't do it!

FRANCES

DANA

Where are the ant traps? We used to have a bunch.

FRANCES

You used the last one last year when this happened.

DANA

Why didn't you get more?

FRANCES

You didn't put it on the list.

DANA

Please buy more ant traps. There!

FRANCES

They're so smelly. What's that smell?

DANA

What smell?

FRANCES

Smell that — When you squish them.

DANA

I don't want to squish them, I want to kill them.

FRANCES

Maybe we could redirect them.

DANA

With what?

FRANCES

I could make them a piece of toast!

DANA

They already have raisin bran —

FRANCES

But if we could figure out where they're coming from and put a piece of toast there with that jam I made last summer, maybe they would go to the toast and leave the cupboard.

DANA

You could try?

I'm going to try —
FRANCES

Or we could go get more ant traps.
DANA

No time!
FRANCES

I don't like this new toaster.
DANA

It's so complicated.
FRANCES

I like a toaster with the arm you press down. Simple.
DANA

This one is stupid.
FRANCES

It is a stupid toaster. All these appliances are stupid.
DANA

And they're supposed to be "smart" —
FRANCES

They're not smart.
DANA

Doesn't it seem like this toast should be done by now?
FRANCES

I put a piece in and it only cooked one side yesterday. Brand new toaster — Only cooks one side.
DANA

They don't make 'em like they used to —
FRANCES

That's just a thing people say people say — No one really says that.
DANA

Look at that. It just toasted side.
FRANCES

FRANCES puts the toast right on the counter. DANA notices.

DANA

I'll return it when I buy more ant traps.

FRANCES

Do you think they like butter?

DANA

Who?

FRANCES

The ants — Should I butter this toast?

DANA

I don't really understand the Big Picture idea here. I came in for a banana and my currency book.

FRANCES

How can you do numismatics when there are ants in the house?

DANA

I'm engaging in my soothing hobby *because* there are ants in the house! And I killed a bunch — And I offered to go to the hardware store. I'm helpful! You don't want any help!

FRANCES

They sell ant traps *everywhere*. You don't have to go to the hardware store.

DANA

Yes, but I thought I'd get a new toaster. And they don't sell ant traps *everywhere*.

FRANCES

Where are you going then?

DANA

To the hardware store.

FRANCES

But that's where this bad toaster came from.

DANA

It's probably just an anomaly. I'll get a different one.

FRANCES

Get one with the arm you push down. And not so many settings. Like this one — Does the little orange piece of toast on the side of the toaster mean it's more done if you put it that way or less?

DANA

Just jam for the ants I think — But not the good raspberry jam from our berries.

FRANCES

What jam should I use?

DANA

Use store-bought jam.

FRANCES

Then I have to open a new jar! I'm not opening a new jar.

DANA

WHY WOULD YOU PUT THE TOAST RIGHT ON THE COUNTER?

FRANCES

Excuse me?

DANA

Where is the plate? Why don't you get a plate?

FRANCES

It's for the ants — They don't care about a plate.

DANA

But look at what's there now —

FRANCES

What's where?

DANA

On the counter —

FRANCES

Where?

DANA

Where the toast was.

FRANCES

Here?

DANA

Yes!

FRANCES
Next to the Ant Super Highway?

DANA
Toast sweat!

FRANCES
I didn't know that bothered you.

DANA
That bothers everyone.

FRANCES
Not me! I don't —

DANA
Toast sweat and crumbs — I don't understand why you're always wiping the counters but —

FRANCES
I wipe the counters to clean the water droplets off — And the rings.

DANA
The rings?

FRANCES
From your coffee. When you drink, you spill over the edge of the mug and the coffee runs down the edges and it pools and makes rings.

DANA
That's the mugs. You bought these mugs! They have a round edge — Too round!

FRANCES
I don't spill when I use them.

DANA
Our old mugs had a nice firm rim — A person knew what their mouth was doing!

FRANCES
Don't blame the mugs for your mouth!

DANA
I liked our old mugs — and one day I come home and they're gone and all these new ones are here and you never asked me.

FRANCES
Our old mugs didn't match.

No one's mugs match!

DANA

I want our mugs to match.

FRANCES

Why do we need matching mugs?

DANA

So that when people come over we have matching mugs.

FRANCES

But no one ever comes over — It's just us.

DANA

The kids visit — It looks good in photos when all the mugs match.

FRANCES

Fine! You can have a dozen of these make-you-drool mugs and can there at least be room in the cupboard for one mug I can drink from? Maybe one that says, "I'm with stupid"?

DANA

Close the drawer!

FRANCES

What?

DANA

The junk drawer —

FRANCES

What about it?

DANA

You never close drawers.

FRANCES

I do close drawers!

DANA

I close them for you all the time. And cupboards.

FRANCES

I can't believe you are making such a big deal about this.

DANA

And you — Toast sweat!

FRANCES

This is what this is!

DANA

What *what* is?

FRANCES

One U.S. dollar equals two Belize dollars!

DANA

Who cares?

FRANCES

For several decades now the Belize Dollar has been tied to the U.S. dollar at an official rate of two Belize Dollars to one US dollar!

DANA

I don't want to hear about your new Belize Dollar!

FRANCES

I bought it off EBay. There was a bidding war and I won!

DANA

I'm so happy for you.

FRANCES

Lights fade to half. Alternate DANA and FRANCES push the canoe offstage and return, breaking character. Everyone breaks character.

One person reads a comic book. One gets out some dental floss and flosses — Which is kind of embarrassing, so after a quick beat, this person turns their back to the performers and audience. One person does some push-ups and sit-ups. One person squirts a dollop of lotion from a bottle on the kitchen counter and moisturizes their hands.

The coin toss — The four performers go to their places.

Scene Four

Lights up full on FRANCES sweeping the kitchen, DANA arranging coins and currency.

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES fix something, something tangible, throughout. A coin toss determines who fixes what: Maybe one of them fiddles with a broken lamp — Going through the process of elimination one does to determine if it's not working because of a burnt-out bulb, or some kind of wiring issue, or maybe it's just unplugged. How 'bout the latter, then that ALTERNATE character can look at the other ALTERNATE character accusingly, for having unplugged the lamp, and forgotten. The other glues a broken (but stupid) mug back together.

FRANCES

What do you want to do for your birthday?

DANA

My what?

FRANCES

Your birthday.

DANA

Nothing special.

FRANCES

75 is a big one!

DANA

No, it's not —

FRANCES

Halfway!

DANA

Halfway to what?

FRANCES

To 150.

DANA

I am not going to live to 150 — I wouldn't want to.

FRANCES

I would want to. Why wouldn't you want to?

DANA

I don't like these pants.

FRANCES

You don't want to live to 150 because of the pants of the future?

DANA

No — These pants. I don't like them.

FRANCES

I want to see how things change —

DANA

Remember when you had to go to the bank to get money?

FRANCES

The gizmos — The whole Instant Pot thing. We got one from the kids.

DANA

I know.

FRANCES

It's in the cabinet.

DANA

I know.

FRANCES

Are we going to use it?

DANA

I don't know.

FRANCES

The kids say it will bake a whole cheesecake in 15 minutes.

DANA

But the doctor says I can't have cheesecake.

FRANCES

They also say — Here it is — They say it's good at soups. Makes soup really fast.

Why do we need fast soup?
DANA

I don't know.
FRANCES

Maybe today's the day to try it.
DANA

Today's the day!
FRANCES

How do we start?
DANA

Plug it in?
FRANCES

Okay — Where are the instructions?
DANA

It is so like you to want to follow the instructions.
FRANCES

Of course, I want to follow the instructions — We're making a cheesecake.
DANA

We don't have the ingredients for a cheesecake.
FRANCES

Then why did we get this thing out?
DANA

I just wanted to look at it —
FRANCES

This thing is just going to be a passing fad — You watch. It's like those Fat-Free cookies.
DANA

I loved those Fat-Free cookies!
FRANCES

Everyone did. And where are they now?
DANA

FRANCES

They're gone.

DANA

The kids should have waited — Pretty soon, the thrift stores will be choked with these things.

FRANCES

I think we should try it!

DANA

You try it — I like things the way they are.

FRANCES

The way they are?

DANA

I like the way we do things now.

FRANCES

The way *I* do things. I'm the one who cooks every day!

DANA

I haven't seen Ina Garten use an Instant pot to cook anything for Jeffrey.

FRANCES

Ina doesn't have to —

DANA

Neither do we!

FRANCES

Ina has interns.

DANA

What are you saying? Ina is a great cook!

FRANCES

Ina has interns to trim all her green beans.

DANA

What time is Ina on today?

FRANCES

Anytime —

DANA

Anytime?

FRANCES

The kids got us that new system last time they stayed here. The recording system.

DANA

It's called "On Demand" —

FRANCES

That's the one! So — Now you can watch Ina anytime.

DANA

Can I watch the episode where Ina makes a cheesecake for Jeffrey?

FRANCES

Which one? There are so many cheesecakes for Jeffrey.

DANA

Jeffrey has it so good!

FRANCES

Are you saying you don't have it good?

DANA

It's fine —

FRANCES

What about your birthday? You want a cheesecake?

DANA

But not a fast one — A real one.

FRANCES

I could go to the store.

DANA

A real homemade one. Like Ina would make for Jeffrey.

FRANCES

I am not the Barefoot Contessa!

DANA

I know that!

FRANCES

I'm not even barefoot. And what is a Contessa, anyway?

DANA

I think it's like a czar or something.

FRANCES

Czarina — That's the feminine. All those PBS shows make me want to take a cruise.

DANA

Not me.

FRANCES

Why not?

DANA

Legionnaire's disease.

FRANCES

Oh —

DANA

Trapped on that boat with dysentery.

FRANCES

But the buffets!

DANA

Why would I want a buffet if I had diarrhea?

FRANCES

Don't say that word! Say a word to negate it! You know I have a shallow gag reflex.

DANA

I just said 'diarrhea' — How can that be triggering you to vomit?

FRANCES

Don't say 'vomit'!

DANA

Cheesecake! That's my negating word —

FRANCES

No — It has to be neutral — Something that sounds like candles or air freshener!

DANA

Yankee Doodle!

FRANCES

It's Yankee Candle. God, you're so stupid. Get me a bucket!

DANA

Throw up in the sink! How can you have raised two kids and —

FRANCES

Don't! Air freshener words!

DANA

Spring rain!

FRANCES

Okay —

DANA

Spring rain! Mediterranean breeze —

FRANCES

Better —

DANA

Angel kisses.

FRANCES

That's just weird.

DANA

Clean linen.

FRANCES

I'm fine now — Thank you.

DANA

No problem.

Lights down half. Character break — But fast — Maybe everyone runs in a circle really quick. Energy!

Coin toss — To places — FRANCES exits, DANA remains onstage, with ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA.

Scene Five

Mid-afternoon. FRANCES enters with photos printed on 8 ½ X 11” paper, that (they) trims to size with scissors during the scene.

DANA works with (their) coin book — Taking coins out to admire, dunk in cleaning solution, rub with a dry cloth, and put away.

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES flip a coin between them — The loser makes a bag of microwave popcorn for the winner during the scene. Pop-pop-pop. They watch it cook and wordlessly argue about when it’s done — When the popping slows? But before it burns? By the end of the scene, they open the bag and eat a few kernels. DANA and FRANCES ignore all of this.

FRANCES
Separate duvets.

DANA
What’s a duvet?

FRANCES
It’s one of those comforters you put another comforter in.

DANA
It’s a blanket?

FRANCES
No — It’s like a big pillowcase you put a comforter in.

DANA
Why does a blanket need a pillowcase?

FRANCES
That’s what they do in Norway.

DANA
We’re not in Norway.

FRANCES
Norway is the happiest place on earth.

DANA
That’s the free healthcare and education —

FRANCES

And the separate duvets!

DANA

How do you know about the separate duvets?

FRANCES

I read about it on the internet. I'm cruise shopping.

DANA

I don't want to take a cruise!

FRANCES

I found one that goes up the fjord and back down again.

DANA

What fjord? Where?

FRANCES

In Norway — They have so many fjords!

DANA

Is that why they're happy?

FRANCES

I think so. We have no fjords.

DANA

Fjords do make me happy to think about. There's just something about the idea.

FRANCES

I know — And from our cruise ship!

DANA

I don't want to take a cruise.

FRANCES

But each little state room — First of all — State room.

DANA

Why is it called a 'State' room?

FRANCES

It's a ship thing — Like starboard and port.

Which is which?
DANA

And bow and aft.
FRANCES

I think it's prow —
DANA

It's definitely not prow.
FRANCES

Are you sure?
DANA

In the pictures of the state rooms all the beds have separate duvets. I printed pictures!
FRANCES

That uses a lot of toner.
DANA

See how the beds look so nice — Each with a little duvet and a cute little pillow?
FRANCES

It especially uses up the yellow toner — And you need yellow to make green.
DANA

Well these pictures are mostly of the fjords so no problem there! Fjords are blue!
FRANCES

Why do you think we need separate blankets, anyway? We've always had the same covers.
DANA

How much time do you have?
FRANCES

I'm just pinning this Croatian Kuna into place.
DANA

That one's pretty —
FRANCES

Got it off EBay. Why do we need separate blankets?
DANA

FRANCES

Why do you think I need to clip coupons but you can just buy foreign money off EBay?

DANA

This Kuna was only \$20!

FRANCES

How much is it to the dollar?

DANA

I don't know!

FRANCES

Why don't we *visit some places* and you can bring home some money? Like Norway!

DANA

We're not going to Norway!

FRANCES

Why not? They have separate duvets and they're very happy people.

DANA

I think that's the cheese — And those open-faced sandwiches. One time, Ina made Jeffrey a smorgasbord of open-faced sandwiches. Little schmears of soft cheese on dark breads and those crackers — Those rectangular crackers — With the tomato and the cucumber.

FRANCES

Lots of open-faced sandwiches when you search for Norwegian cruises on the internet.

DANA

I like sharing a bed with you.

FRANCES

What?

DANA

I'm used to it — Your talons.

FRANCES

I do not have talons.

DANA

Yes, you do — Your toenails are like a hell-hound's.

FRANCES

They are not!

DANA

When did you last file those things down?

FRANCES

My toenails are perfectly kempt.

DANA

They're like the devil's own pedicure. Scraping me in the night — Just as I'm drifting off —

FRANCES

Chalk one up for separate duvets! The Norwegians have figured this out. At least I don't roll myself up like the Boston Mangler.

DANA

Who's the Boston Mangler?

FRANCES

Serial killer — Rolled his victims in a carpet.

DANA

I think that was strangler? Because he strangled people.

FRANCES

I'm pretty sure it was Mangler — This guy rolled people — Like pasta dough. Squished them between two rollers — That's why the 'mangle' —

DANA

It doesn't sound like he mangled them at all. Mangling would be like tearing someone apart, right?

FRANCES

Do you even know what a mangle is?

DANA

Yes, I do!

FRANCES

A mangle is that thing they used to use to wring out clothes —

DANA

Then why name a serial killer after that? Strangler — I get that — That one's clear. The Boston Strangler — Straightforward. But Boston Mangler — It's just misleading.

FRANCES

I don't know why they called him that — Ask the City of Boston!

DANA

Why are all serial killers men?

FRANCES

Norway has no serial killers.

DANA

Except boredom.

FRANCES

You think Norway is boring? You've never even looked at pictures of it on the internet!

DANA

I saw a Rick Steeves travel show about Norway and it looked boring.

FRANCES

If I had my own duvet I could —

DANA

All those fjords — It just — At some point. You know?

FRANCES

If I had my own duvet I could bring the covers up to my chin without uncovering your raptor claws.

DANA

But what about the soap?

FRANCES

The Irish Spring?

DANA

You know I need the Irish Spring soap in the bed for my restless legs.

FRANCES

Do you really though?

DANA

We've had that bar of soap in our bed since our honeymoon! Because you said my legs were jumpy.

FRANCES

They are jumpy — I don't know if the soap is helping.

DANA

It sure is shiny after all these years.

FRANCES

It sure is!

DANA

Our Irish Spring. It feels like a third child.

FRANCES

It does.

DANA

Whose blanket would it live in, if we got separate ones?

FRANCES

You're the one with the restless legs.

DANA

But if we had separate blankets — Why would my restless leg bother you anymore?

FRANCES

You think we should take the bar of Irish Spring soap out of our bed?

DANA

I don't know — Maybe?

FRANCES

I'm not sure I'm ready for that.

DANA

Me, neither.

FRANCES

What's Ina cooking for Jeffrey for dinner do you think?

DANA

Something delicious. They'll probably eat it on the porch.

FRANCES

She'll have flowers.

DANA

Fresh flowers! Now there's a wasteful expense!

FRANCES

If we had no money issues I'd have fresh flowers in every room of the house.

DANA

We don't have money issues.

FRANCES

Yeah, but — We have a budget.

DANA

Of course, we have a *budget*.

FRANCES

But don't you ever just want to say 'Fuck it'?"

DANA

Say "Fuck it" to what?

FRANCES

What would you do?

DANA

Money's no object?

FRANCES

Yeah —

DANA

I'd buy more foreign currency —

FRANCES

There's something wrong with the washing machine.

DANA

And I'd donate money to the animals at the zoo so I'd get a plaque.

FRANCES

You want a plaque?

DANA

A bench plaque — One of those signs — From my family, saying how much they love me and how I liked lemurs — That kind of thing. With a poem — And a picture of a flower.

FRANCES

Why not enjoy our money while we're here on earth?

DANA

But what if something happens?

FRANCES crumples the pictures of Norway. DANA ignores this.

Lights fade. Quick coin toss, everyone goes where they need to be.

DANA exits, with the coin book. FRANCES starts hauling Tupperware onto a counter. Alternate DANA remains — Unsure of what to do. Maybe sits in a chair? Alternate FRANCES remains, watching FRANCES.

Scene Six

Mismatched Tupperware appears on the counter. 40-50 different sizes of containers and lids, all separate, all in a big annoying pile.

Lights up full on FRANCES, sorting it.

FRANCES sorts Tupperware in total silence. Alternate FRANCES looking on, watching, concerned.

Alternate DANA clips fingernails. Clip-clip-clip. Alternate FRANCES notices, FRANCES ignores. No place for the clippings. Hmm. Puts in pocket. Okay — Fine. Whatever.

FRANCES turns on the radio — An old one.

FRANCES rolls the dial around — The radio lands briefly on different stations — Classical, news, country, one station with someone reading Bible verses. FRANCES stares at all the Tupperware and reacts to the different stations as they go by.

A song comes on —

“Surfin’ U.S.A.” by the Beach Boys. Alternate FRANCES starts dancing. First a little, then more and more — Until Alternate FRANCES is dancing all over the stage.

As the song plays, FRANCES sorts Tupperware, organizing the different sizes like nesting dolls, smallest in the center, then medium, until it’s all stacked beautifully. FRANCES is pleased.

FRANCES puts the Tupperware away. FRANCES picks up a dishtowel off the counter, folding it neatly and hanging it from the handle on the oven door.

FRANCES picks up the kitchen sponge from the sink, squeezes out the water from it, smells it, and puts it away where it goes.

When the song ends, lights dim. The Tupperware disappears.

Coin toss — Places for next scene.

Scene Seven

Lights up full on FRANCES baking a studying a boxed cake mix.

Alternate FRANCES pours a glass of milk, spilling some, (they) look around and wipe it with the inside of (their) shirt, sits at the table. Alternate DANA gets a plate, wipes and polishes it with the inside of (their) shirt, puts it on the counter, opens a fresh pack of cookies — plastic rip-rip-rip — pulls out three cookies, puts them on the plate — plink, plink, plink. Sits at the table.

DANA enters.

DANA

I thought I'd make a nice cup of tea.

FRANCES

That sounds nice.

DANA

I like a cup of tea in the afternoon.

FRANCES

I got a new oolong. Isn't that a fun word? Oolong.

DANA

Too smoky. Tastes like bark.

FRANCES

I thought you liked oolong?

DANA

I've never liked oolong. I like herbal teas.

FRANCES

Herbal teas are like water.

DANA

Do we have any peppermint?

FRANCES

Why don't you look?

DANA

You don't need to have a tone.

FRANCES

(Again, more sing-song.) Why don't you look?

DANA

You did it again — That's so rude!

FRANCES

What is?

DANA

The way you said I should look. That singing thing you do.

FRANCES

Well, you should look for yourself! I can't get everything for you!

DANA

I just asked if we had peppermint tea.

FRANCES

I don't know — I think so! Look in the tea drawer.

DANA

This really is living.

FRANCES

What is?

DANA

Having a tea drawer. Look at this — All the teas in one place.

FRANCES

Sure — We don't ever do anything — But we have a tea drawer.

DANA

I didn't know you wanted to do anything.

FRANCES

Everyone wants to do something.

DANA

Like what?

FRANCES

I don't know.

DANA

How can we do anything if you don't know what you want to do?

FRANCES

We could take an acrylics class.

DANA

Acrylics? Look at that — Peppermint tea!

FRANCES

They have classes at the —

DANA

And the box is empty. Who would put an empty box back in the tea drawer?

FRANCES

The recreation center — Here's the brochure — It might be fun!

DANA

Well, I know I didn't put away an empty box.

FRANCES

I'll get more at the store.

DANA

I just put it on the list — Did you hear me?

FRANCES

Hand me a bowl. Two bowls.

DANA

Why do you need two bowls to make a boxed cake?

FRANCES

One's for wet and one's for dry — They have to be separate or the things react.

DANA

What things?

FRANCES

The different baggies. The wet and the dry baggies. This cake has pudding. It reacts!

DANA

You don't need to make me a cake.

FRANCES

It's not for you.

DANA

But it's my birthday?

FRANCES

No, it's not — It's mine. Check the calendar!

DANA

What calendar?

FRANCES

The one with the grandkids — The wall calendar. The new one —

DANA

This is cute — Look how they synched up the photos with the month of the year.

FRANCES

Good planning. Clever —

DANA

New Year's — Valentine's — Saint Patrick's Day — And the grandkids in their outfits.

FRANCES

You can just look at January. Look at today in January!

DANA

Huh. Here we are. It says 'Book Group' — Did you write this in Sharpie?

FRANCES

I love Sharpies.

DANA

It's just this calendar was a gift — It was the one gift that the kids gave us —

FRANCES

That's because we're in that phase of our lives —

DANA

What phase is that?

FRANCES

When everyone decides you're done with worldly possessions.

DANA

Well, I'm not. I just bought a drachma off Craigslist.

FRANCES

This cake is for my book group.

DANA

Did you know that the Greeks called their coins drachma from Ancient times 'til the Euro?

FRANCES

I hope there's time for this cake to cool so I can frost it.

DANA

I hate the Euro. Where's the romance in the Euro?

FRANCES

Where's what?

DANA

Where is your book group?

FRANCES

Out.

DANA

Out where?

FRANCES

Why does it matter to you?

DANA

Because I have to drive you.

FRANCES

You don't have to drive me.

DANA

Yes, I do — You don't like to drive at night.

FRANCES

I *like* to drive at night — But I'm not supposed to.

DANA

So, I'll drive you. Where is the meeting?

FRANCES

What meeting?

DANA

The book meeting —

FRANCES

It's called a book *group*. I've always wanted to be in a book group. It's at someone's house.

DANA

I'll take you and wait in the car.

FRANCES

I'll just — What do the kids do — I'll call an Uber.

DANA

You can't. You need one of those special phones to call an Uber.

FRANCES

But it's like a taxi.

DANA

It's not a taxi — And our town doesn't have Uber.

FRANCES

Why doesn't our town have Uber?

DANA

I don't know! Even if we did, you couldn't call one!

FRANCES

But I want to have the option. You'll have to drive me and wait in the car.

DANA

Can I have a piece of cake while I'm waiting?

FRANCES

I'm not going to cut into the cake I'm bringing.

DANA

Why not?

FRANCES
Why are you making tea like that?

DANA
Like what?

FRANCES
In the microwave?

DANA
I found this old packet of Harvest Spice and I'm making tea with one of the dribble mugs in the microwave because that's what our kids do — No time!

FRANCES
You have no time?

DANA
Busy-busy.

FRANCES
With what?

DANA
Stuff.

Microwave beeps. DANA takes the tea out. Drinks.

FRANCES
I just think boiled water from the kettle tastes better. We have honey.

DANA
I don't need honey.

FRANCES
Or milk? Or soy milk? The kids say milk-milk has a lot of mucus.

DANA
Milk is mucus, isn't it? Isn't that what milk is?

FRANCES
Milk is not mucus. It just *has* mucus. That's what the kids think.

DANA
Why don't we have Uber here?

FRANCES

We couldn't call for one anyway.

DANA

You don't call *for* an Uber — You just call an Uber. You can't hail an Uber.

FRANCES

That's the problem — No romance.

DANA

What?

FRANCES

Is this pan eight by thirteen inches?

DANA

I think so?

FRANCES

Sheet cakes are easy.

DANA

One pan.

FRANCES

That's right! And you frost it right in there — And the transport.

DANA

I'll drive you.

FRANCES

And people like sheet cakes because when you get a slice it's small — Just one layer.

DANA

People like that for sure.

FRANCES

No one wants a big monster-sized piece!

DANA

No one does.

FRANCES

Do you think they'll like yellow cake at my book group?

What flavor is it?

DANA

It's yellow.

FRANCES

Everyone likes yellow cake — Especially with chocolate frosting.

DANA

I got white frosting.

FRANCES

What flavor white? Vanilla? Cream cheese?

DANA

Cream cheese frosting doesn't go with yellow cake! This frosting is white.

FRANCES

Oh.

DANA

Oh, what?

FRANCES

It's just —

DANA

Just, what?

FRANCES

Yellow cake with white frosting sounds kind of —

DANA

Kind of what?

FRANCES

Kind of bland. No risk! No — Joie de vivre.

DANA

Cakes don't need surprises.

FRANCES

In many cultures, they bake a surprise right into the cake. Like the King Baby.

FRANCES

The who?

DANA

The King Baby! I saw it on Rick Steeves. He went to New Orleans for Mardi Gras and they have this King Cake there and they bake a baby into it.

FRANCES

That's horrible!

DANA

It's not a real baby —

FRANCES

Good!

DANA

It's the baby Jesus!

FRANCES

Still not okay!

DANA

Why don't you make a King Cake — It's three colors — Blue, orange and —

FRANCES

I do have food coloring. The kids said I should throw it out.

DANA

See? You're organized! All that saving!

FRANCES

Last time they visited, they said, "This food coloring's so old — It's in glass bottles!"

DANA

Antiques! Look at that typography. No one cares anymore about package design.

FRANCES

Get me three more bowls.

DANA

For what?

FRANCES

For the King Cake!

DANA

I don't think the cake has colors — Just the frosting.

FRANCES

Three more bowls — Four!

DANA

Why four?

FRANCES

They give us four kinds of food coloring — I'm gonna use them!

DANA

People say this is the phase of our lives when we use up our larder.

FRANCES

No one even has a larder anymore! Dried beans —

DANA

Those little food coloring bottles are cute.

FRANCES

I used to play with the caps with the kids.

DANA

You did? I missed everything.

FRANCES

I'd put the little caps on my fingers — Like this. Don't they look like little dwarves?

DANA

Or gnomes.

FRANCES

(Speaking like a tiny dwarf.) Gnomes and dwarves are the same thing.

DANA

What's the plan here?

FRANCES

One red cake, one blue, one yellow and one green.

DANA

That's not a traditional King Cake —

Fuck Ina Garten. FRANCES

What are you reading for your book group? DANA

Reading? FRANCES

It's a book group? Are you reading a book? DANA

They are — I'm new. FRANCES

What are they discussing? DANA

I don't know. FRANCES

How will you participate? DANA

I don't know! FRANCES

Are you worried about that? DANA

I wasn't until now. FRANCES

You don't want to seem stupid. DANA

I am not stupid! FRANCES

I didn't say you were stupid! DANA

Okay — Four bowls of four colors of batter — Now hand me a really big bowl. FRANCES

DANA

For what?

FRANCES

The biggest bowl — No — Not a salad bowl. A big mixing bowl! That one —

DANA

This one? Under all the others?

FRANCES

Yes. Next to the Tupperware. Did you notice how nice it looks?

DANA

Here you go.

FRANCES

I'm going to combine all these batters into one.

DANA

I don't think —

FRANCES

I'm taking a risk.

DANA

It's just —

FRANCES

You wanna lick the bowl?

DANA

No thank you.

FRANCES

Then put this in the sink for me. You have to let that soak.

DANA

Red and blue — That's a pretty shade. Look at that! Kind of purple.

FRANCES

It sure is. Now the yellow.

DANA

Okay?

FRANCES

Huh. It's alright — It's like the color of sunset.

DANA

Russet — Burnt sienna!

FRANCES

I've always liked the sound of that color. "Burnt sienna" — Hand me the green.

DANA

Are you sure? I don't think anyone likes King Cake.

FRANCES

I want the green now.

DANA

King Cake is about putting something in the batter — It's about the baked baby!

FRANCES

It's about doing *anything new*. Green. There.

DANA

Huh. Look at that.

FRANCES

I made gray. I made a whole lot of gray cake. Are you done greasing that pan?

DANA

Was I supposed to?

FRANCES

Fine — I'll do it. You look for something to be the baby Jesus.

DANA

Masking tape?

FRANCES

Something inert. Bake-able!

DANA

This knock-off Hummel statue of the girl with the dog?

FRANCES

The kids gave me that.

Thumb tacks?
DANA

Don't be stupid.
FRANCES

My wedding ring?
DANA

I like that idea. Let's use both of our wedding rings!
FRANCES

It's what Ina and Jeffrey would do.
DANA

This is a phase of our lives when we're supposed to be shedding material possessions.
FRANCES

FRANCES and DANA take their rings off and FRANCES stirs them into the cake batter. FRANCES puts the cake into a hot oven onstage. It bakes for the rest of the play.

Will you bring me a piece in the car?
DANA

Blackout All the bowls and cooking implements disappear. FRANCES exits.

Coin toss.

Scene Eight

Late-afternoon. ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES play cards.

DANA

I changed the batteries in the smoke alarm. Honey? Can you hear me? They started beeping so I changed them ahead of schedule. Should I write that down? Where do we write that kind of thing down? Is it on the fridge? Or on this calendar? I want to do what you want me to do — To do it right, you know? I want to be helpful! They were chirping — This one was — It started chirping and its light was flashing and that means its battery's dying so I changed this one, but not the other ones so now this one is on a different cycle than the others and I just want you to tell me how you want me to record that? Where is it writ? Where is it noted? Is it with the birthdays? Sweetie? Where is the birthday calendar, for the kids and the grandkids and my sister? Where do you keep that? Should I put this pertinent new smoke alarm information with the birthday calendar? Can you hear me, honey? I just want to follow your rules — I want to be successful. I can't do that if you don't tell me what to do — Okay. Since you're not saying anything I'm just starting my own new calendar. I'm doing it. Right here on the dog one. Right on this calendar! I'm getting a pen. Honey — I'm flipping ahead six months! And I'm doing it — June — I'm writing 'smoke alarm batteries' on this day in June. Huh — There's nothing else in June. Honey, is this where we keep things? Is this calendar where we keep appointments and such? There's nothing on here! This calendar is from last year. Sweetie, why do we have a dog calendar from last year? Well — I am still going to put 'smoke alarm batteries' on June for this year — Even though it's last year. Because somebody has to. You're not going. I'm the one who does stuff like that. I remember the roof — We're on our third roof! Did you ever call them? No. I did. And our taxes — I do our taxes. And I don't know when our grandchildren's birthdays are but I have a vague idea — So I'm putting them in last year's dog calendar, honey! There — The girl's in the spring sometime and the boy's in the fall. Done. Do you ever worry? You know — That you might just go away? Like a smudge. I do — I worry all the time. I'm like a grease spot on a window, I haven't done anything, really — At least I don't feel like it? I went to an office. We went on some vacations — The kids grew up — I wrote checks for them. I cheered them on from the sidelines but there was always something I thought I'd become. Do you feel that way, sweetie? Do you wish things were different? Do you have regrets? I mean — I'm not special — I don't really deserve to have 'regrets' — It's not like I made choices that had consequences for anyone but myself. Maybe that's the point? If I'd lived bigger — I might be dead or in jail or famous for something or maybe all three! But I played it safe. I scheduled the roof maintenance. I paid our taxes. We paid off this house — The kids will get it. They'll probably sell. They'll take all our stuff to the thrift store — They told me that — Said there was nothing here they wanted. They like new things — From Target and Pottery Barn. New things — They don't last, but they look good, I guess. The kids say antlers are having a moment. They had a moment — So did beards. Beards are back — Everyone — All the kids look like dwarves from the 1940's now. I feel like I missed out. You were here — You saw them grow up more than I did. I was in an office. I was in meetings. I was writing memos and — It's fine. Everything is fine. Honey — I don't know how to fill my day —

Lights dim. Coin toss.

Scene Nine

Mid-afternoon. The cake is baking. Lights up on FRANCES, pouring birdseed into a birdfeeder, DANA reading the newspaper.

Alternate DANA and alternate FRANCES dump out a 1,000-piece puzzle on the floor — Whoosh! — and do their best to work it. The pieces remain for the remainder of the play.

DANA

The kids say print is dead but look at this.

FRANCES

I've got to get my birds fed.

DANA

City Region — Best section. They're not *your* birds.

FRANCES

They live here — They over-winter. They stay.

DANA

So many people commit crimes with the middle name "Lee" — Why is that?

FRANCES

I know which birds are my birds. I recognize them.

DANA

Like look at this guy — Runs an opioid operation out of his burrito cart.

FRANCES

He doesn't even look like he knows how to make burritos.

DANA

What are you saying? The kids would say you're being racist.

FRANCES

I'm not racist — I just think they should leave the burritos to the experts.

DANA

What experts?

FRANCES

Local experts.

DANA

You know the birds on sight?

FRANCES

I count them — I fill their bird bath which is more than I can say for you.

DANA

But all we have is house sparrows. And starlings — Both invasive.

FRANCES

They are not!

DANA

They are! City Region: Page Three, Section B: “The House sparrow is an invasive species introduced from Europe.”

FRANCES

I THINK THEY’RE CUTE.

DANA

“No other North American wild bird is so associated with human settlement as this introduced House sparrow.”

FRANCES

I like to watch them take baths in their birdbath.

DANA

“Its foods are nearly all imports, and its nesting and cover requirements are also human-derived.”

FRANCES

They couldn’t over-winter without me.

DANA

Maybe they shouldn’t. Stop feeding them.

FRANCES

But they expect me to feed them.

DANA

It’s all house sparrows and starlings out there — All imports.

FRANCES

I can’t stop now.

DANA

Why not?

FRANCES

It's not fair — They wouldn't understand.

DANA

They don't know you feed them. Their brains are the size of a lentil.

FRANCES

They know me! When we have a cold snap, I warm up their water.

DANA

I know you do — Maybe you shouldn't. Give the native species a leg up.

FRANCES

If the house sparrows and starlings are better adapters, maybe they deserve what they get.

DANA

Maybe they do.

FRANCES

They deserve it!

DANA

If you're comfortable with species destruction.

FRANCES

I don't do that. I'm filling a bird feeder!

DANA

Polar bears — Emaciated — Wandering aimlessly on ice floes.

FRANCES

I am not making the ice caps melt! That is not me!

DANA

But it's the same thing — Is all I'm saying.

FRANCES

The same as what?

DANA

The kids would say check your privilege.

FRANCES

I was thinking maybe now that it's legal, we could grow pot in the basement.

DANA

Excuse me?

FRANCES

Make extra money — For cruises and things like that. There's a really nice birdfeeder at the hardware store I have my eye on. It looks like Cape Cod.

DANA

You've never been to Cape Cod. Back up —

FRANCES

This birdfeeder I have my eye on looks like a birdfeeder Jackie O would have. It's white —

DANA

You want to grow pot?

FRANCES

Marijuana?

DANA

I know what pot is.

FRANCES

I know you know what pot is.

DANA

I read the paper!

FRANCES

So, maybe to make extra money, now that it's legal — We could go hydroponic.

DANA

Not many people in Oregon even have a basement.

FRANCES

So much flooding. Floods every year!

DANA

We're lucky we live on a hill. I don't know anyone with a basement except us.

FRANCES

Having a basement in this pot-growing State is like having a license to print money.

DANA

And if we made extra money — I could buy more foreign money with it?

FRANCES

Sure — Why not.

DANA

The basement is full of the kids' stuff — Their school work, their toys and things.

FRANCES

It's all moldy.

DANA

What is?

FRANCES

The kids' things — All musty. The damp gets into things.

DANA

They are? I was down there last week to check on something.

FRANCES

But your knee — I don't like the idea of you on those steep stairs with that knee.

DANA

But you want to become basement farmers? Wouldn't that require a lot of trips up and down the stairs?

FRANCES

I thought we could get one of those rides.

DANA

What rides?

FRANCES

The stair ride thing — It's a seat. You sit in it and you ride up and down the stairs. They sell them in magazines.

DANA

So — We'll ride up and down the stairs with these pot plants?

FRANCES

I bet Ina and Jeffrey have their eye on one of those rides. We'll need water, too — If we're going hydroponic. And a carbon filter so we don't tip off the neighbors.

DANA

There's water in the basement.

FRANCES

Hooked up to the washing machine! But you wouldn't know that.

DANA

I can't do laundry — My knee.

FRANCES

You never did laundry before your knee either.

DANA

I did — I do. I sort it.

FRANCES

Sorting is not the same as washing, drying and folding.

DANA

It's a start, though.

FRANCES

I can't be a pot farmer with you!

DANA

Because I don't help with laundry?

FRANCES

Because you don't help with anything!

DANA flips to the crossword puzzle.

DANA

99 across. Seven-letter-word — As-yet-un-deciphered Cretan script?

Coin toss — Exchanging places.

Scene Ten

DANA, chopping vegetables. FRANCES near.

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES wordlessly seduce each other, coming in closer and closer until they are oh so very gently kissing and beginning to disrobe. They sit together, tenderly being together, physically. This should be played straight — Not for laughs.

FRANCES

I want to see the aurora borealis.

DANA

Why?

FRANCES

The canopy — The lights.

DANA

Where? When? I'm making soup.

FRANCES

You don't need to make soup.

DANA

I have carrots, celery and onion — That's a mirepoix. So I'm making soup.

FRANCES

But the northern lights —

DANA

What about them?

FRANCES

Did you know the earth is spinning all the time?

DANA

Of course — Everyone knows that.

FRANCES

But we get used to it and so we don't feel it anymore.

DANA

That's probably a good thing — I don't like rides.

FRANCES

Me neither. Why would anyone pay to go fast?

DANA

I have no idea.

FRANCES

They have the lights in Norway in the Summer —

DANA

I think it's winter. The lights are in Winter.

FRANCES

They are?

DANA

Yes —

FRANCES

Are you sure?

DANA

Pretty sure.

FRANCES

Then we have to go.

DANA

Why would we go to Norway in the middle of winter?

FRANCES

No time!

DANA

No time for what?

FRANCES

For any of it.

DANA

I'm making soup.

FRANCES

Doesn't it ever making you sad that we're all spinning on the earth and we won't see everything?

What do you want to see?
DANA

Machu Picchu.
FRANCES

You want to see Machu Picchu?
DANA

With a llama. Yes — I want to climb Machu Picchu and I want a llama to carry my stuff.
FRANCES

They eat groundhogs there.
DANA

I think it's guinea pigs —
FRANCES

Anyway, you can go there on your own.
DANA

That's what you always say.
FRANCES

I've never said you could go eat guinea pigs on your own.
DANA

Peru's where they have the llamas.
FRANCES

I know about llamas.
DANA

I want a wool poncho. Is it wool if it comes from a llama? I want a llama hair poncho with llamas woven into it. And I want to wear my poncho on Machu Picchu.
FRANCES

Okay — Where else do you want to go?
DANA

Paris.
FRANCES

We went to Paris.
DANA

FRANCES

But we were so young and broke.

DANA

Isn't that the best way to see Paris?

FRANCES

I want to eat ice cream and walk by the Seine and I want to climb the Eiffel tower, but get there early like Rick Steeves — Before all the tourists.

DANA

But my knee —

FRANCES

And I want to see the aurora borealis.

DANA

I heard you the first time.

FRANCES

I don't think you did.

DANA

What do I have to do to assure you I hear you the first 10 times you say something to me?

FRANCES

Aurora means dawn —

DANA

That's nice. That has a nice sound —

FRANCES

Like the dawn of the — Of the what? What's borealis?

DANA

Boreas.

FRANCES

What's that?

DANA

Six letter word, starting with B. The ancient Greek personification of the north wind.

FRANCES

The north wind — The God of the north wind.

DANA

That's what they call it.

FRANCES

I bet they were frightened. Never seen *that* before.

DANA

Seen what?

FRANCES

Does it ever frighten you that there aren't any more things to find?

DANA

Borealis — Eight-letter word, pertaining to the north. It's happening all the time.

FRANCES

What does?

DANA

The lights — We just can't see it.

FRANCES

It does not happen all the time.

DANA

Same as the spinning — We can't feel it anymore.

FRANCES

Do you think that's why babies cry so much?

DANA

Maybe?

FRANCES

They're getting use to the earth rotating and it makes them cry?

DANA

I've heard that imagining the northern lights is better than seeing them.

FRANCES

Who have you heard that from?

DANA

People. It's something people agree on.

FRANCES

No one thinks that.

DANA

But they accept it.

FRANCES

I don't want to accept it! I want to see the northern lights.

DANA

There's still time.

FRANCES

I don't fly — We don't fly.

DANA

I'm sure you can find a show about the northern lights on TV.

FRANCES

That's not the same thing at all.

DANA

A travel show — About the Blue Mosque or those caves in China. The ones with the statues.

FRANCES

The soldiers?

DANA

The soldier statues — That's the one. I saw a show the other day about how they found this underground cistern in Istanbul — From the Romans. Really old city. Some guy was exploring there and he heard about people who could fish in their apartments.

FRANCES

Fish in their apartments?

DANA

Drop a line — Right there in their homes! Catch their supper.

FRANCES

When was this?

DANA

A few hundred years ago — They used that — What's that called, when they have actors?

FRANCES

Creative re-enactments.

DANA

They used creative re-enactments and showed this sailor — Not a sailor — His boss, walking around near the Blue Mosque and then he stops at a small apartment where they're fishing through a hole in the floor.

FRANCES

That did not happen!

DANA

Turns out — There's a big cistern under there! Huge! With heads of Medusas carved into pillars and water and fish —

FRANCES

The Romans built aqueducts.

DANA

That they did.

FRANCES

But what have we done?

DANA

I'm making soup.

FRANCES

Romans spoke Latin.

DANA

They invented Latin.

FRANCES

Isn't it weird to imagine people used to speak it, though?

DANA

What else would they do with it?

FRANCES

It doesn't seem like a language anyone speaks.

DANA

No one does anymore.

FRANCES

Why not?

DANA

It's dead now. We moved on. The earth spins —

FRANCES

I wish we could fish here in our kitchen.

DANA

At first — No one believed the sailor. He went back to his boat to tell them all about someone fishing in their apartment in Istanbul, and they didn't believe him.

FRANCES

I could just lift a trap drawer by the dishwasher and throw down a line. Hello down there!

DANA

It's only happened once.

FRANCES

What has?

DANA

The underground cistern. It's an anomaly.

FRANCES

How do you know? The world could be covered with things people forgot about.

DANA

Are you scared?

FRANCES

Scared of what?

DANA

Of what happens next.

FRANCES

It can't be worse than —

DANA

I don't know — It seems pretty bad. The not knowing. Do you mind the not knowing?

FRANCES

I try not to think about it.

DANA

Lucky for you —

FRANCES

You don't have to think about it if you don't want to.

DANA

But we're putting tape on our things — Look at this. How am I supposed to not think about what happens next when you're putting our kids' names on the bottom of our things with tape?

FRANCES

That's a good blender.

DANA

I know it's a good blender. I blend.

FRANCES

I don't want it to go to Goodwill.

DANA

Why don't poor people deserve a good blender?

FRANCES

There are a lot of people who aren't poor who shop there — Just cruising for a good blender.

DANA

What do you care who gets it? You'll be —

FRANCES

I'll be on a cruise. In a state room. I'll be eating open-faced sandwiches with sprigs of dill.

DANA

Who eats dill?

FRANCES

Norwegians. They eat it on everything and they're very happy people.

*Lights dim. Coin toss. People go to their places, depending.
FRANCES and DANA exit.*

Scene Eleven

ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA haul out a slide projector — A big, beefy old one — And pull down a projector screen that's hidden in the ceiling.

ALTERNATE FRANCES turns on the radio, rolling the dial. It settles on the classical station — Johann Sebastian Bach, Double Violin Concerto in D minor (2nd movement, Largo).

This music begins quietly, as if from a single source. Maybe ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA try to keep it hushed, so as not to disturb? Not sure.

They reach into their pockets and pull out slides — About ten per person, that they've been carrying around this whole time — And they show these two each other briefly.

As the music grows, ALTERNATE FRANCES and ALTERNATE DANA plink their slides into the slide projector carriage.

Lights dim further. Coin toss — The winner flips on the projector.

The first picture the audience sees is an upside-down moose or maybe an upside-down chipmunk on a stump — Ha-ha. They fix it.

The slide show: Photos from ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES' lives — working chronologically from start to finish — A baby picture, a photo from childhood, early adulthood, middle age, and one from now. The slideshow goes back and forth between the two characters as the music continues.

None of these photos should pull us out of the universe of the play, but should be identifiable as these actors who play these roles. (DANA and FRANCES have these slides in their pockets, too, in case they're the ones in this scene.)

As the slideshow continues, timed with this music, ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES get out some milk and cookies. The only light we see comes from the projector and from the open fridge.

As the music and slide show continue, a coin toss: One character pours a glass of milk, the other picks up a cookie, and dunks it, depending. This character gives the cookie to the other one.

Scene Twelve

Lights up to half.

FRANCES and DANA enter. ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES offer them some milk and cookies.

Everybody has milk and cookies.

It should be hard to tell if these are the actors or their characters.

Coin toss — People go to their places.

Depending on the coin toss — FRANCES or DANA remains in the kitchen, hauling out a smallish cardboard box — A package!

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES start to bundle up again — Like they're getting ready to leave the play. They move further and further away from each other.

FRANCES or DANA (depending)

The kids sent us a present! Do you want to help me open it? I said, do you want to help me open it? Honey? Okay — I'm just going to open it myself! Where is the paring knife? I like it when we keep it with the vegetable peeler and the cheese grater. Can you try to remember that? I wonder what it is. A present! Are you sure you don't want to see it? I mean, you can see it later, but do you want to — should we call the kids to tell them we got it? We should — Let them know it arrived safely. Why don't you do that? Let's do that together after I open it. So much packaging. It's not gift wrapped — Here's the card. It's printed — Not hand-written. It's a little piece of paper, honey. It says, "We love you." That's all it says. I guess if that's all it says, that's a good thing to say. Here's the present. It's a white noise machine. A white noise machine — Now, why would they? I'll plug it in. Do you want to be here when I plug it in? That cake is smelling done. Do you think the cake is done? Should I test it? I feel like I could use some help here! Do you think I should look at the cake? Will that effect it? It probably won't. Boxed cakes are sturdy. They're — What's the word? Foolproof. Not many things are these days. Lots of fools. Lots of things getting by lots of fools. The cake looks good. Golden on top — A little gray. I'm going to get it out and test it — unless you want to? Okay — I will. Should I do the finger test or the toothpick? Where are the toothpicks? Did you move the toothpicks? Okay — Honey, when I press it, it springs back. I'll just let this cool. White noise machine. I'm plugging it in! So much packaging. Here are the instructions. Do you want to see them? I'll put them in the folder for those — You can look at it when you want. It says it has 20 soothing sounds! I guess this cord goes here — I'm going to unplug the toaster for now. Is that okay? I'm just going to do it. We can plug the toaster back in later. White noise — What a world! Okay — Ready? This one's called 'Snow stream' —

Presses the Snow Stream button.

FRANCES or DANA (depending) CON'T
Do you like that? How 'bout this one? It's called Ocean wave.

Pushes the Ocean Wave button.

FRANCES or DANA (depending) CON'T
This one's Rain Forest —

Pushes the Rain Forest button.

FRANCES or DANA (depending) CON'T
Oh, that one's nice. Can you hear it honey?

ALTERNATE DANA and ALTERNATE FRANCES move further away from each other, looking back, and eventually walking back out into the audience and exiting as DANA or FRANCES (depending) finishes the scene.

The rainforest sounds develop, becoming richer and louder.

FRANCES or DANA (depending) goes to the doorway where FRANCES or DANA (depending) exited.

The rain forest sounds fade to nothing.

FRANCES or DANA looks — Sees.

Blackout. End of play.

Curtain: J.S. Bach's Violin Concerto No. 2 in E Major, Allegro.