

SETTLING

by

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CHARACTERS

SARAH, *late 40s/early 50s*

EM, *18*

JACK, *25*

JONNY, *late 40s/early 50s*

Pauses are marked, but when a character takes a new line in a speech, this can represent a beat, a moment, a suspension, a hesitation, etc.

SCENE 1

A house in darkness. Birdsong. The sun slowly comes up. Roof tiles fall to the ground. Ivy and tree roots are growing on the walls, through the windows.

Lights up on the kitchen. Sarah's at the table, surrounded by receipts, folders and plants. She's on the phone.

SARAH

No please don't put me on - hold. Again. Bitch.

She gives the phone the finger and lets out a frustrated silent scream. She waits. She sings along to the hold music.

EM

Mom -

SARAH

Oh good, you're up. I need you to -

EM

Mom, I -

SARAH

I'm on hold. I need you to -

EM

Mom, I had a bad dream.

SARAH

Em, I'm trying to -

EM

Did you hear me?

SARAH

What is it?

EM

I had a bad dream.

Sarah hangs up the phone.

SARAH

Oh, I'm sorry baby. The same one?

EM

Yeah.

SARAH

Em, did you -

EM

Mom, don't ask.

SARAH

I have to ask.

EM

No, no you don't.

SARAH

I'm just looking out for you.

EM

I know, I just...

SARAH

What, baby?

EM

Don't 'baby' me.

SARAH

Sorry. So...

EM

I don't want to talk about it.

SARAH

Sorry to call bullshit but you started it, you talked to me, so I'm pretty sure you do want to talk.

EM

I don't want -

SARAH

Need, then.

Pause. Em is uncomfortable, but gives a small sign of affirmation.

SARAH

Well?

Em says nothing.

Shall I do the talking then?

Em nods.

So you had the dream again.

Em nods.

And you haven't had it in a while.

Em shakes her head.

Wait, is that a no?

Em is confused. She shrugs.

Is that a no you haven't or no that's wrong?

EM

Haven't.

SARAH

Ok. And do you think the reason you had this dream is because you took your meds last night?

Em seems embarrassed and speaks quietly.

EM

Yes.

SARAH

Now I'm not judging you, but I thought you said you didn't want to take your meds anymore? I thought you were doing fine without and that everyone involved was happy - wrong word - was satisfied that you were in a position to cope without them?

EM

Yes.

SARAH

So what changed, love?

EM

I felt... off. Like, not right.

SARAH

Ok. And how does right feel?

EM

I dunno. I just felt way off-balance all day yesterday and from the second I woke up all I could think about was closing the curtains again and crawling back into bed and putting the covers over my head and not coming out for a long time.

SARAH

Why didn't you talk to me? You didn't say anything at dinner.

EM

Yeah exactly. I didn't say anything. I didn't say a word.

SARAH

Honey, I'm sorry I didn't notice. I was too focused on my glass of wine and shutting out whatever crap your dad was talking. Work was rough, again, and the house is falling to pieces and... Sorry, babe, you don't need to hear this.

Shall I make an appointment with Dr Roberts?

EM

No.

SARAH

He said if you were going to start -

EM

I know. I don't want to see her.

SARAH

Well are you going to keep taking the meds?

EM

I don't want to.

SARAH

Well, what do you think is best?

EM

I don't know.

Pause. Neither of them are sure how to proceed.

SARAH

Well, shall -

EM

Stop saying 'well'.

SARAH

What?

EM

It's annoying.

SARAH

Oh. Well - fuck - it's hard to break. I'll stop saying 'well' if you stop saying 'like' all the time.

EM

I don't.

SARAH

You do.

EM

I don't.

SARAH

You do a bit.

EM

Fuck off, I don't! Don't assume I'm like everyone else, every other young person, because I'm not, ok? It'd be fucking easier if I was, but I'm not and that's not going to change.

Pause.

SARAH

Alright. I'm sorry.

EM

Ok.

SARAH

May I suggest we see how today goes and then decide what to do about the meds and Dr Roberts?

EM

I'm not seeing her.

SARAH

Ok, ok, we'll see how you feel later and you can decide if you want to continue with your medication. Ok?

EM

Ok.

SARAH

Good.

Do you want some breakfast?

Em shakes her head.

You should really get something in your stomach.

EM

Mom, please.

SARAH

Ok.

Pause. Em sits down at the table.

EM

Where's dad?

SARAH

He should be back. He went to the farmers' market. Spending money we don't have.

EM

Right.

Mom?

SARAH

Yes, honey?

EM

The more we know, the sadder we feel.

SARAH

What's that?

EM

I've been thinking, a lot, about how knowledge just makes us sad. It's supposed to be empowering, but it just makes me feel even more helpless and small.

SARAH

Ignorance is bliss, huh?

*She laughs a little. **Em** doesn't.*

EM

Yeah. Like -

SARAH

You said 'like'.

EM

Mom.

SARAH

Sorry.

EM

Like... *like like like like like*... I don't want to grow up. I want to jump in puddles and kick crispy brown leaves.

SARAH

You can still do that when you get older.

EM

Can you?

SARAH

Of course you can.

EM

Doesn't feel like it. Feels like play has to give way to work. Feels like you can't be taken seriously if you admit to still liking the things that used to make you happy.

SARAH

The things that made you giggle until you almost peed your pants, with boogers running down your nose.

Em is more animated now.

EM

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Like popping bubble wrap or the sound of cello tape or dogs sneezing. Look at the toys, the memories we throw out. What once was a happy thing is now a thing of sadness.

SARAH

It's all part of growing up, baby.

EM

Well I don't want to grow up.

SARAH

I know exactly how you feel.

EM

Do you?

SARAH

Of course I do. I was young once.

EM

Alright, here we go...

SARAH

No, but seriously. It feels like yesterday. All the clichés are true. You look back on something, a memory of a good day and you think 'That just happened, I was just 19'. Then you realize 'Fuck, that was 25 years ago.' Closer to 30 actually... Fuck.

EM

Sounds like I've a lot to look forward to...

SARAH

Ah, it's not all bad. You just have to make sure the good days outnumber the bad ones. And don't count the days, but make the days count.

EM

Did you read that on a fridge magnet? Bumper sticker?

SARAH

Alright, asshole.

EM

I know what you mean though. The days go by so fast. Just when I think I have a grip on them, they're beyond my reach.

SARAH

And you think that's due to your...

EM

My what?

SARAH

You know...

EM

My depression? You know, mom, you're allowed to say it.

SARAH

I know.

EM

Pretending it's not there doesn't make it go away.

SARAH

I know baby.

EM

Don't 'baby' me! Give it a rest with the 'babe' and 'honey' and 'sweetheart' -

SARAH

I don't call you -

EM

You know what I mean though? You get it? I know that I'll 'always be your baby' but don't treat me like one. Please. I'm so sick of being a teenager. I hate it I hate it I fucking hate it.

The pressure to fit in, to be like every other fucking... drone. It's all so fucking ordinary. I don't have the capacity for ordinary. That's too... large for me. I'm under-ordinary. I'm not special. I'm less-than, you know? There's only so much in me and, any more than that, I'm not up to. And don't dare fucking tell me I can be anything I want to be. If I 'put my mind to it', I might just fucking survive, and that would be enough. I just want to... fucking...

SARAH

The world is not perfect and neither are we. But I believe in you, Em. I won't leave you in the dark.

EM

I just -

SARAH

It's my job to tell you that you can do anything you want if you put your mind to it.

What? What do you want?

EM

I want to be a superhero.

SARAH

Um. Ok.

EM

I don't mean - I mean - I don't know what I mean. I want to fix things. I want to do some good. But everything just feels too big, you know? Like I'm too small to make a difference.

SARAH

We all feel like that sometimes. It's overwhelming. Life. Just existing is like breathing, easy if you don't think about it. Difficult and scary if you do.

EM

Why do we bother trying? What's the point when it won't matter?

SARAH

Won't it?

EM

Well, what is there? What is there left?

SARAH

There's love.

EM

But why can't it be easier?

SARAH

I ask that all the time.

EM

Who do you ask?

SARAH

Why do you mean?

EM

Who do you ask why it can't be easier? God?

SARAH

No, no. Myself, I suppose.

EM

Do you get an answer?

SARAH

Never.

EM

Thought so.

SARAH

But that doesn't mean we admit defeat. We have to keep going. One foot in front of the other.
That's all we can do. In the end, all we can do is make the most of it.

EM

Are you making the most of your life, mom?

Pause. Sarah is visibly hurt.

Oh, mom, I'm sorry.

SARAH

No, baby, it's okay. I'm - I'm not, honey. I'm not making the most of it. I haven't for some time now.

EM

Wait, are you getting a divorce?

SARAH

What? No. Where'd that come from?

EM

I don't know, I just panicked.

SARAH

Does it scare you that we'll get a divorce?

EM

A little.

At least wait until I'm at college...

She smiles a little. Sarah laughs, then Em joins in.

SARAH

Come on, let's get some breakfast.

EM

Ok.

A crash at the back of the house. The sound of glass breaking. More roof tiles fall.

SARAH

What the...

Jack appears, blind drunk, from the back.

SARAH

What the fuck happened?

Jack looks at them all, steadies himself, then runs to the sink and throws up. He looks up. They're waiting for an explanation.

JACK

You're all waiting on a joke, but all I have are punchlines.

Em runs off to the back to see what's happened. Jack groans and drinks water straight from the tap.

SARAH

You look like shit, honey.

JACK

Not so bad yourself, Momma Bear.

I'm not doing so good, mommy.

SARAH

Jesus, Jack, it's ten in the morning. You're stinking of alcohol.

JACK

Is it?

SARAH

Where the hell have you been?

JACK

Out. All night. Haven't been to bed.

Em comes back in and nods to Sarah.

SARAH

And you fucking drove here?

JACK

What? Oh, yeah.

SARAH

You fucking idiot!

JACK

Hello to you too.

SARAH

Jack, what's all this about?

JACK

She's left me, mom. She's gone.

SARAH

What do you mean?

JACK

Alice, she's fucked off. It's over.

SARAH

But why?

Jack's crying like a kid who's fallen and cut their knee.

JACK

She doesn't love me anymore!

SARAH

Oh baby...

Jonny staggers in, bleeding from his head.

EM

Dad! Are you alright?

SARAH

What happened? Sit down.

JONNY

I'm fine, I'm fine. Hello son.

JACK

Dad, sit down. I'll get a towel or something.

SARAH

Jonny, what happened?

JONNY

There was a kite. Stuck in a tree.

SARAH

You're a terrible liar.

JONNY

Alright, alright, I got mugged.

SARAH

Mugged? Where?

JONNY

Well, there was a fight.

SARAH

A fight?!

JONNY

Right well, I was walking to the car with the groceries and saw these kids kicking the shit out of someone on the ground. I drop the bags, run over, shout at them, thinking they'll clear off. They turn on me, telling me to fuck off and mind my own business. I see the kid on the ground is younger than they are, I try to protest, then one of them pulls a knife on me, tells me to shut the fuck up, I don't, so another of them punches me, hence the blood, and the one with the knife demands my wallet. I realize they're not fucking around, so I hand it over and they run off. You try to do the right thing! By this point, someone else finally appears and checks on me and the kid on the ground. I told him I'm fine, he saw the kid off to the hospital and I drove back. Left the groceries though. Forgot about those.

SARAH

Don't worry. You shouldn't have driven though.

JONNY

I'm fine, don't worry about me.

SARAH

That's not fine! That's a nasty little gash.

JONNY

I said it's fine.

SARAH

And I said it's not. Come on, I'm driving you to the doctor.

JONNY

Ugh, fine!

She helps him up, walks him toward the front door.

SARAH

Get some sleep Jack, we'll be back in a bit.

JONNY

Nice to see you, son.

JACK

You too, dad.

Sarah and Jonny leave.

Fuck.

EM

Yeah.

JACK

Teen gangs? Round here?!

EM

I'm more surprised dad stepped in.

JACK

True.

EM

Do you want some water?

JACK

How about some whisky?

EM

Are you serious?

JACK

Yes.

EM

No.

JACK

What?

EM

No way.

JACK

Fine. Beer then?

EM

Not a chance!

JACK

Come on, just to take the edge off.

EM

You need to sober up.

JACK

I'll go to bed after the beer.

EM

Promise?

JACK

Promise. And besides, we need to catch up!

EM

Maybe later.

JACK

I need to know what the lil sis has been up to!

EM

Will you have a glass of water with it?

JACK

Huh?

EM

With the beer.

JACK

Sure. Why not? Make it a double!

Em doesn't laugh. She goes to get him a water. He gets a beer from the fridge.

EM

Question. Have you used more tissues in your life to jerk off or to blow your nose?

JACK

Well that's a dumb question...

EM

You're disgusting.

JACK

You asked!

EM

Ok, there's the ice broken... So why'd you come home big broseph?

JACK

Weren't you listening?

EM

Yeah.

JACK

So why you asking?

EM

I just want to hear you say it.

JACK

Right, well, I'm a fuck-up and my wife left me.

EM

Sounds about right.

JACK

Last week I had a job and a wife. This week I have nothing. I just stare into the abyss and scream
"it's not fair!"

EM

Oh stop being such a drama queen.

JACK

Are you enjoying this?

EM

No. Of course not.

JACK

Good. Cause my life is falling apart.

EM

Bit dramatic.

JACK

Fuck off.

EM

That's better.

JACK

What?

EM

I don't like you feeling sorry for yourself. I'm not used to it.

JACK

Okay. I'll do my best not to.

EM

Okay. I love you.

She hugs him.

JACK

What the fuck? Get off me!

EM

I'm being nice, you piece of shit.

So do you think she'll take you back?

JACK

No.

EM

Ok.

So what now? What's next?

JACK

I'd like to meet a girl as pretty as you.

EM

Are you hitting on me?

JACK

No!

EM

Ugh, that's gross. Are you in love with me?!

JACK

No!

EM

It's like some Greek tragedy or something.

JACK

I'm -

EM

Are you going to kill dad and marry mom?

JACK

Alright, smartass. I was trying to be nice.

EM

Well, don't. It doesn't suit you.

JACK

Nor you, by the sounds of it.

EM

You can't be sad forever.

JACK

Yes. I can. Definitely. I intend to.

Say something funny.

EM

When life gives you melons, you're probably dyslexic.

JACK

When life gives you lemmings, kill yourself.

She's not impressed.

What? It's a joke!

You know, sometimes I sit and daydream of smashing my teeth to pieces.

EM

Jesus.

JACK

Yeah, like, with a hammer.

EM

That's dark.

JACK

It's also not true.

EM

Oh fuck you!

Jack finishes his beer and gets another one. He makes a show of it, and pours the water down the sink.

JACK

So what's new? Really. I want to know.

Pause.

EM

There's this dream. My dream. It's beautiful, but it scares me. It's like I'm being called by God. Like Noah and the Ark. Like I can see everything that ever happened, all at once. I'm afraid and -

JACK

What? You believe in God now?

EM

No, I don't. I don't think so.

JACK

Of course you don't.

EM

Well, I'm entitled to my own thoughts you know.

JACK

I know, I know. Just don't become a religious freak on me.

EM

Whatever.

What do you think it means?

JACK

Well is that it?

EM

No, there's more. A lot more. Want me to tell you?

JACK

Not now, please. Later. Later, yeah?

EM

Ok, but do you think it means something?

JACK

Dunno. No, probably not.

EM

All dreams mean something.

JACK

Only if you attach meaning to them.

EM

No, it's science. There's science behind it.

JACK

Right then, what's the science?

EM

I dunno, read a book.

JACK

Thank you for that scintillating insight into the world of education.

EM

And you're the big authority on school? What was your greatest educational achievement?
Writing 'boobs' on a calculator?

JACK

I actually wrote 'boobies', which is far more complex.

EM

Oh, I'm sorry...

JACK

Yeah, give me some credit.

Pause.

EM

There's this other dream, I have, where I actually feel pain in it and -

JACK

Em, sorry, I think I need to go to bed.

EM

Oh, ok.

JACK

It's been a long - well, it's been a long life. I need some rest.

EM

I'm in a phase right now where I'm really aware of my tongue.

JACK

Huh?

EM

I don't know why I said that. Sorry. But I am. I'm kind of obsessed with it.

JACK

Ok...

EM

Anyway, go get some rest.

JACK

Ok.

Jack makes to leave.

EM

Jack?

JACK

Yeah?

EM

Everything is going to be alright.

JACK

Is it?

Pause.

EM

Sure. You can't die from a broken heart.

JACK

You can if you commit suicide.

EM

Hey!

You don't mean that.

JACK

No. I don't.

EM

You can't live life like a death sentence. You can't control death but you can control life.

JACK

I'm not. I'm just hurting. And that's okay. I don't know how long it'll last. I don't want to hurt. I'm sure it'll stop. Sometime.

Jack is almost out the door.

You know, you should listen to your own advice. It's good.

He leaves. Em stands there, taking in everything that's just happened. It's quiet. Then, more roof tiles fall.

SCENE 2

Evening. Jonny, with bandaged head, Em and Sarah eat at the dinner table.

JONNY

International relations, much like sex, requires an element of give and take.

EM

Very funny...

I just think we should be nicer to each other. It's as simple as that.

SARAH

And as difficult.

EM

But why does it have to be so difficult? I know I sound naive but when it comes to it, how hard is it to get along with someone else from someplace else? What's with all the mistrust? Distrust?

Which one do I mean? Anyway, you know what I mean.

What do you think, dad?

SARAH

Why are you asking him? He knows nothing. He played lead bass in a prog rock band. He's clueless.

EM

You know nothing, Jonny Snow...

JONNY

I don't know much, but I do know to always write down any good idea you have at night, 'cause you will never remember it in the morning, no matter how much you try to convince yourself you will. That's my advice. And at least I played lead bass. There were three of us...

EM

Thanks for that one, dad. I'll be sure to write it down..

JONNY

See, you're learning!

Jack appears from upstairs. The others boo and jeer at him.

SARAH

Here he is!

JONNY

The prodigal!

EM

Look at the state of him!

SARAH

We catch a glimpse of the fallen beast, in his native habitat -

JACK

Yeah, yeah, laugh it up, bitches.

JONNY

How's the head?!

JACK

How's yours?

SARAH

Feel better?

JACK

Worse. A bit out of sorts. Not quite sure if I'm not quite there. Here. I don't know.

SARAH

You're tired honey, that's all. And hungover, I imagine.

JACK

Oh yes indeed.

SARAH

Grab a plate and tuck in.

JACK

I'm not hungry.

SARAH

You have to put something in your stomach.

JACK

I honestly don't think I could eat.

SARAH

Oh come on, have -

JACK

Mom, stop being such a mom.

Jonny picks up a bottle of wine.

JONNY

Want some wine then?

JACK

Oh yes, I love you dad.

JONNY

Love you too, son. Red alright?

Jack bows down in front of Jonny.

JACK

I am not worthy...

He stands up straight, feels dizzy.

Oh no, that was a bad idea.

SARAH

Come here, sit down. Eat your... wine.

Jonny pours Jack a glass and he joins them at the table.

JACK

Em?

EM

Yeah?

JACK

Question. When they scrape dead skin off in a pedicure, do they use a pedo-file?

SARAH

Darling, don't be a dick.

JACK

'Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible. And don't be a dick.'

JONNY

Who said that?

JACK

Dalai Lama.

EM

No he didn't.

JACK

Yeah, he did.

'B-sides and Rarities' album I think.

SARAH

Dick.

JONNY

So, son, what's new with you?

JACK

Not now, dad.

SARAH

Give him a minute, he's just woken up.

EM

Yeah dad, give the man a break.

JONNY

What's it to you?

EM

Nothing, I just felt left out.

JACK

You can stay out of it.

EM

Fuck off.

SARAH

Hey!

EM

You of all people are not going to tell me off for swearing! Come on!

SARAH

No, but I can tell you off for being rude.

EM

So unfair.

JACK

Stop being a baby.

EM

I'm not a fucking baby!

SARAH

My children are assholes.

JONNY

Let's - not -

JACK

What do you want to be when you grow up, sister?

EM

Could ask you the same thing, brother.

JACK

Go on, what you gonna be?

EM

I don't know. A poet.

JACK

So, what, you're going to write fucking haikus for a living?

EM

Yeah, why not?

JACK

You can't make a living out of that.

EM

So, what, you're going to be a fucking asshole for a living?

JONNY

Okay, okay. Time out. Pun of the day. Let's go. Suggestions?

EM

Band names as types of food!

JONNY

Any objections?

They shake their heads.

Alright, let's go!

JACK

Okay, okay...

EM

Fleetwood Mac and cheese!

SARAH

Pate Smith!

JONNY

Nice!

JACK

Mayonce!

EM

That's shit.

JACK

Fuck off.

SARAH

Hey!

JACK

Sorry.

EM

Catfish Stevens. Count it!

JACK

Cats in some places too.

EM

No, that's dogs.

JACK

It's both.

SARAH

Pearl Jam.

EM

Doesn't count.

SARAH

How?

EM

It just doesn't!

SARAH

You can't just -

EM

You're not punning if you don't -

SARAH

Jam is food, Em.

EM

Yeah, but you're not riffing on -

SARAH

Oh, I'm not riffing?!

JONNY

Alright!

SARAH

Fine. Pearl Ham. Suck it.

JONNY

Sarah!

EM

Mom!

SARAH

Sorry, moving on...

JACK

You know, you can jump in anytime dad...

JONNY

I'm thinking!

EM

You'd think a music journalist -

JONNY

Well I'm too busy refereeing you animals, aren't I?!

SARAH

Got one.

JONNY

Go on.

SARAH

Salmon and Garfunkel.

JONNY

Shit, that's good.

EM

Pitbouillion.

JACK

Wu Tang Clams.

EM

R Jelly.

JACK

Katy Piri-piri.

EM

Mackerelmore.

SARAH

Tuna Turner.

JONNY

Celine Dijon.

EM

Finally dad!

JONNY

Worth the wait, eh?

JACK

The Yeastie Boys.

EM

You're a yeastie boy.

JACK

Shut up.

SARAH

Bean Martin.

JONNY

Falafel Kuti.

SARAH

I feel awful after that one...

JONNY

See what you done there...

JACK

Filet Collins.

JONNY

Bread Zeppelin.

JACK

Food Fighters.

EM

Nope!

JACK

What?

EM

You can't have that.

JACK

Yes I can.

EM

No you can't.

JACK

Yes I can.

EM

No you can't!

JONNY

C'mon guys. Stop -

JACK

No, wait, why can't I -

EM

Types. It's types of food, moron. You can't just say food.

JACK

Bullshit.

SARAH

Why does this always end in an argument?

JONNY

Yes, children, why can't you play nice?

JACK

I can play nice, daddy. I'm afraid the runt of the litter -

EM

Hey!

SARAH

Enough! That's enough.

JONNY

Yes, that's enough for today.

EM

But -

JONNY

We said enough. Class dismissed.

EM

Ugh, fine.

(to Jack)

You ruin everything. Asshole.

JACK

Back at ya.

EM

You're as useful as the first 'r' in February.

JACK

You're as useful in an argument as fucking Switzerland.

EM

You are to conflict what, fucking, Sweden is to conflict.

Jack can't think of a comeback.

Told you.

JONNY

Was that really necessary?

EM

Yes, it was fucking imperative.

Long, awkward silence. Em realizes she was out of line.

Who wants to hear a poem?

Silence.

Oh, come on!

SARAH

Go ahead, sweetie.

EM

It's a haiku.

It doesn't rhyme.

JACK

We know.

EM

Okay. Here goes...

'It is said that God
Moves in mysterious ways
Perhaps like a crab.'

Pause.

JACK

Ok...

EM

It was supposed to be funny...

SARAH

Ohh! Right.

JONNY

Very funny.

SARAH

I didn't know if it was supposed to be funny.

JONNY

Didn't know if I was allowed to laugh.

EM

Poems can be funny.

JACK

Oh. Can they?

EM

Shut up.

JONNY

Guys -

SARAH

Give us another.

EM

What?

SARAH

Do you have more?

EM

Yeah. Hundreds.

SARAH

I had no idea you wrote.

EM

You didn't ask.

Sarah thinks about saying something, but doesn't.

JONNY

So? You going to do another one?

EM

Um, ok. I don't know.

JACK

Go on.

EM

Stop it, you're -

JACK

No, please.

EM

Ok.

'When my home is sick
And my heart has heavy boots
Your voice guides me safe'

SARAH

Aw, that's lovely.

Jack's crying.

EM

Jack, are you crying?

JACK

No! Fuck off. You're crying.

EM

It's ok to cry.

JACK

Shut up.

EM

I'm -

SARAH

Come here.

She goes to him and hugs him. Em and Jonny join in. Jack looks uncomfortable.

JACK

This is embarrassing.

They laugh and don't let go.

Guys, you're embarrassing me.

He closes his eyes and gives in.

Thank you.

SARAH

'Hold on to your money. Hold on to your loved ones'. That's what she said on the phone. The insurance woman.

JONNY

Sounds like she's in the wrong job.

JACK

I'm getting a divorce. Isn't that fucked? You know, in the future, divorce proceedings will begin with 'I should've swiped left'.

He laughs weakly.

You know when grieving people, good people, selfless people say 'I wish it could have been me. Why didn't God take me instead? It should have been me.' Is that how I'm supposed to be in a marriage? That I could sacrifice myself for someone else? Cause I don't feel that way. That's not for me. I can't be the good person. I don't know how. I mean, fuck, I wish I could. I've fucking tried. I guess it doesn't work that way. Shouldn't have to try. Shouldn't have to make an effort. Good people just are... good. She was good. She just was. She didn't even know it. She just was. She was so much better than me. She was so much better than me. She was so much better than me.

EM

You make it sound like she died.

JACK

I just...

SARAH

Go on.

EM

Mom, you're not his therapist.

SARAH

No, but I'm his mother.

JONNY

Guys.

JACK

I guess I wasn't ready. And please, please don't fucking say 'I told you so'. I know you think I rushed into it and I was too young and whatever, but please don't say it. Think it, if you want, but don't say it. That'd break my heart even further.

SARAH

It's ok. We're with you. Right here with you, love.

She hugs him again. Jonny goes back to his glass of wine.

EM

Dessert anyone?

SCENE 3

After dinner. Jack and Sarah clean up the table.

JACK

Oh, did I say I'm going to a music festival?

SARAH

When?

JACK

Uh, tomorrow...

SARAH

Oh.

JACK

Is that okay?

SARAH

Um...

JACK

It's not, is it?

SARAH

No, no, it's fine.

JACK

That means it's not okay. I can tell that means it's not.

SARAH

It's fine honey, honestly.

JACK

Honestly?

SARAH

Well...

JACK

I knew it!

SARAH

It's just that you only just got here...

JACK

I know, I know, I should have said.

SARAH

Maybe, yeah.

JACK

I should have said a lot of things, I guess.

SARAH

Yeah. Definitely yeah.

JACK

It's just the weekend.

Pause.

SARAH

Maybe you just need to let off some steam. Maybe it'll be good for you.

JACK

Yeah, I think so.

SARAH

You should go and have some fun. Are you going with the boys?

JACK

Yeah. It'll be good to see them.

SARAH

Well, that's nice.

Maybe you'll meet someone?

JACK

A girl?

SARAH

Yeah, a girl.

JACK

Mom, don't be embarrassing.

SARAH

I'm not, I'm just saying maybe you'll meet a girl and have some fun.

JACK

Mom, what are you implying?

SARAH

You know, some weekend fun. You'll have some fun!

JACK

Are you suggesting I go have casual sex in a tent in a field in the middle of nowhere with a stranger?

SARAH

With a condom.

JACK

With a condom.

SARAH

Yes.

JACK

Okay. Yeah I think I can handle that. One thing, I'm not a big fan of the old rubber -

SARAH

With a condom or not at all.

JACK

With a condom. Got it. Jeez, I feel like an eight year old being offered dessert if he eats his greens. A sexually promiscuous eight year old.

SARAH

Shall we change the subject?

JACK

Yup. Yes, let's definitely do that.

SARAH

Okay. Dishes. I wash, you dry.

JACK

Sure.

SARAH

Okay.

JACK

Then I can feel your hands after, all soft. Wrinkly and soft at the same time.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH

Yes, baby.

JACK

And mom?

SARAH

Yes?

JACK

I'm not ready to love again.

SARAH

I know baby.

JACK

I don't know what I'm ready for.

SARAH

This weekend, just try to forget yourself a little, okay? Sometimes it helps. To forget yourself for a little while.

JACK

What is love, mom? To you?

SARAH

Love? Wow. Love is... when your father takes my book from me when I fall asleep reading it, folds over a corner so I don't lose my place and carries me to bed. Even though he knows that I hate the corners getting creased.

JACK

Twenty-five and divorced. How the fuck did that happen? Convinced myself she was the one. Well, no. Didn't have to. Knew she was. Is. Was. If she is the one for me, I guess I'm fucked. I'm a fuck-up.

SARAH

You're not a fuck-up. You're just a... challenge.

JACK

What's the youngest you can start fucking up at and actually take the blame for it? You know, the point where people stop saying 'oh he's just a kid'.

SARAH

I don't know, babe.

JACK

Me neither.

SARAH

I wish I could've been there for you. When it was all turning to shit.

JACK

You're here for me now.

SARAH

I just feel I didn't teach you. How to, how to be married.

JACK

Do you know how?

SARAH

How?

JACK

How to be married?

SARAH

I... don't know. Probably not.

JACK

Well, you've taught me plenty.

SARAH

Have I?

JACK

Mom...

SARAH

What?

JACK

Do you want me to list the things you've taught me?

SARAH

If you insist...

JACK

Alright...

Mommy, you taught me how to live, how to love, how to remember, how to forget, how to try,
how to fail, how to fall the fuck down and get the fuck back up.

SARAH

I wish I could've taught you more.

JACK

You taught me everything.

SARAH

I don't know everything.

JACK

You taught me enough then.

Okay?

SARAH

Okay baby.

Pause.

JACK

When she left and left me behind, I still slept on the left side of the bed. Every night. She used to wear this old plaid shirt of mine she was cold, which I guess was all the time. When she packed her stuff up, she didn't take it. Turns out she left it under her pillow. I couldn't sleep the first night - any night since, in fact. Just lay there staring at the ceiling for hours. It was way too quiet.

They don't tell you how quiet it's going to be. Whoever they are. I've forgotten how to sleep without you next to me. Her, I mean her. I keep talking to her. Fuck. As if she can hear me. As if she'd want... What was I saying? Ah, yeah, the shirt. Ha. I tossed and turned a while and knocked her top pillow off, I guess, at some point. Saw that fucking shirt. Folded all neat on the bottom pillow. I've never seen her fold anything. Remember all the times she stayed here, what a mess she made? I guess I cried, uh, into it for a while. Ages, probably. Then laid it out flat on her side and stared at it till the sun came up. I slept on the left side every night. Till I couldn't take it anymore. And came home. It's good to be back, mommy. At least my bed here is so fucking tiny it only has one side.

Pause.

SARAH

Yeah, it's the little things. The little things that fuck you.

JACK

Yeah. The unspoken arguments, the silent fights, the unsaid 'fuck you'. Like weights around our necks, you know.

SARAH

Oh, I know.

JACK

You and dad are ok though, yeah?

SARAH

Yeah. Fine, fine.

JACK

You don't sound convinced.

SARAH

We'll be alright. Don't worry about us.

JACK

Right. I'm probably going to worry anyway, just so you know.

SARAH

I know.

SCENE 4

Jonny and Em in the living room. He's pouring a whisky.

JONNY

You good?

EM

Hm?

JONNY

You feeling... balanced?

EM

Oh, yeah I guess. Didn't really have time to think about it today, with everything going on.

JONNY

Yeah. Well I hope you get some rest tonight.

EM

Thanks dad.

JONNY

Would you like to try my whisky?

Em looks at it suspiciously.

EM

Ok. I guess.

She sips it, then makes a face and coughs.

That's disgusting! I hate it.

Jonny laughs.

JONNY

You'll learn.

EM

Learn what?

Her face is still contorting.

Ugh, it's horrible.

JONNY

Whisky doesn't let you off that easy. You don't get to like it straight away.

EM

When do you get to like it?

JONNY

It takes time.

EM

I don't think I'll ever like it.

JONNY

Patience! Everyone's in such a hurry these days. It doesn't have to be about the results, you know. The fun is in the process. That's where the living of it is. Life is in the process.

EM

But what's the point if we never get to the end?

JONNY

There's an end for all of us.

EM

Yeah but not one that we want. I want to know how it all ends. The whole story, not just my story.

JONNY

It doesn't work like that, I'm afraid.

EM

I'm aware of that. Unheard stories. So sad. I think that's the loneliest thing in the world.

JONNY

What is?

EM

An untold story. To think of all those unread books and unheard songs; it breaks my heart.

JONNY

I know how you feel. Hence the collection of obscure records and paperbacks that smell of cigarettes.

EM

I wonder how many of those artists know that you read them and listen to them.

JONNY

Well, I'm sure none -

EM

Yeah yeah. I mean, I wonder how many know that out there somewhere, someone appreciates them. Some weirdo drinking gross whisky in a smelly old armchair.

JONNY

Alright, enough of that!

They laugh a little.

So is that what's holding you back?

EM

Huh?

JONNY

Is that what's stopping you from creating? We always thought you were creative. You have a way with words beyond your years. So why the hidden poetry?

EM

What teenager wants to share poems they write with their parents? You are the exact opposite of my target audience.

JONNY

Fair enough. So who is the target audience?

EM

I don't know. What makes you think I want to share them with anyone?

JONNY

You shared with us earlier.

EM

Yeah well I felt like shit and I thought it'd make things better.

JONNY

It did.

EM

That doesn't mean anyone else would want to read them. You're my family. You have to say it's good even if it isn't.

JONNY

Not true. I'd want to be honest with you. I don't want to treat you like a baby.

EM

Thank you. Could you tell mom that? Sometimes she acts like I'm seven years old.

JONNY

You're always going to be her baby.

EM

Ugh. I don't want to be anyone's baby. I want to be taken seriously.

JONNY

Then have a whisky with me.

She makes a face.

I'm kidding.

EM

I just want to be good, you know. As an artist but also as a person. I want to create something that means something, you know? Then it might make all this mean something. The legacy, the passing down, the letting go. It might make it all easier, you know? Living. Because, death? I didn't sign up for that.

JONNY

You didn't sign up for life either.

EM

Yeah, that's your fault.

Life is a sexually transmitted disease.

JONNY

You don't mean that.

EM

No, I just thought it sounded funny.

Life.

This whole flawed, beautiful thing.

JONNY

Flawed and beautiful? What else can we hope for?

EM

I guess.

JONNY

And you are good.

EM

What?

JONNY

You're a good person.

EM

No I'm not.

JONNY

You are. I know sometimes it's hard for you to see that, but believe me, I've had plenty of time to observe you and it's true. You're so good. It's been my privilege to watch you mature into a talented young woman.

EM

Don't be sappy, dad.

JONNY

I'm being honest. I want to be honest with you. There's not enough of that in this family.

EM

I agree. But why now, all of a sudden? Where's this honesty coming from? What's wrong?

JONNY

Why does something have to be wrong?

EM

Because happy people don't need to change things.

JONNY

Things aren't so good around here right now.

EM

I know.

JONNY

With me and your mom.

EM

I know.

JONNY

Oh, you do?

EM

Yeah, you never talk to each other.

JONNY

We do.

EM

No, you talk *at* each other. Lists, facts. Nothing that means anything. Just words, words, words.

Pause.

JONNY

I don't know what to say.

EM

Clearly.

Sorry.

JONNY

No, you're right.

EM

It'll get better.

JONNY

Do you mean that?

EM

No.

JONNY

Just trying to cheer me up?

EM

Yeah.

JONNY

Thanks, but it's not your job.

EM

Why not?

JONNY

I should be looking after you.

EM

I thought you didn't want to baby me.

JONNY

I don't.

EM

So let me help.

JONNY

You've got your own shit to deal with. How is it, by the way?

EM

My shit?

JONNY

Yeah.

EM

Still shit.

JONNY

Right. Anything I can do to help?

EM

Probably not.

JONNY

Thought not.

EM

But I'll let you know. If there is.

JONNY

Thank you.

EM

Will you play me a record?

JONNY

Sure. Any requests?

EM

Dealer's choice.

JONNY

Music and whisky. What more do we need?

Jonny takes a look through his record collection. Em watches him, gets a little emotional, and hides it as he turns back.

JONNY

Here we go.

He puts on 'Hope She'll Be Happier' by Bill Withers. It plays a while. He sits blankly, drinks his whisky. **Em** gets upset and runs out. The sound of cats fighting outside. He drinks his whisky.

SCENE 5

Late night. We see Sarah sitting in the kitchen, surrounded by receipts and bills. Em stares out a window, unable to sleep. Jack throws clothes into a bag and checks his phone repeatedly, finding nothing. Jonny sits on the porch with the bottle of whisky, smoking a joint, reading 'The Paris Review' and listening to 'Once I Was' by Tim Buckley on an iPod dock. Sarah comes out.

SARAH

I can smell that.

JONNY

Smells good, doesn't it? Want some?

SARAH

I'm trying to work in there.

JONNY

Oh, should I turn the music down?

SARAH

That's not what I'm -

JONNY

Hang on.

He pauses the song, sees the time.

It's late. What you doing working at this time?

SARAH

I'm trying to fix this house, John.

JONNY

Oh, that's not good.

SARAH

What?

JONNY

You said 'John'. When you say 'John', I'm in trouble.

SARAH

Shut up.

JONNY

Sorry. Am I in trouble?

SARAH

Yes you are.

JONNY

Shit.

SARAH

We're in trouble. Our *family* is in trouble. Our kids are struggling. I'm struggling. We're broke. The house is falling to pieces. This *charming, rustic* country pile you convinced me to buy when we married is - surprise surprise - crumbling like a cookie twenty five years on.

JONNY

Wait, we're broke?

SARAH

Are you completely fucking oblivious? Where have you been the past few - well, years, really, *years*. Where are you, Jonny?

JONNY

I'm right here. I've always been right here.

SARAH

Yeah. Here. Smoking weed and listening to your records and drinking whisky we can't afford. While I'm busting my ass trying to put the bread on the table.

JONNY

The sun-dried tomato focaccia with -

SARAH

Not the time. Not the fucking -

JONNY

When were we last caught laughing?

SARAH

Jonny, please...

JONNY

Sorry, sorry! Just trying to lighten the mood.

SARAH

Not happening. The mood is staying pitch black. You can't charm your way out of this one. We're fucked, Jonny. Beyond it. I've been trying to fix it but I can't do it alone. It's too much. And I'm tired. I'm so bone tired, Jonny. This weight on me. All the time. Carrying my tiredness with me, and the stress, and you, and the kids. Carrying you all on my back for too long and I can't do it any more. I'm running on fumes. I've nothing left.

Jonny puts out the joint and gets up to go to her.

JONNY

Babe -

SARAH

Don't, Jonny, don't touch me.

JONNY

Come on, come here.

SARAH

I'm serious, Jonny. Stay the fuck away from me or I will fucking scream and bring the rest of this house down.

JONNY

Hey, hey, we did well tonight, didn't we? Didn't we? Or was it just a show for the kids?

SARAH

I'm trying my best.

JONNY

So am I.

SARAH

Really? Because it doesn't look like you're making any effort at all.

JONNY

It's hard.

SARAH

It's hard for all of us, Jonny. But the rest of us don't get to give up so easily.

JONNY

I'm not giving up.

SARAH

No, you're not. You already have. You gave up when you lost your job.

JONNY

That wasn't my -

SARAH

You can blame others all you like, but what happened next was all your fault. You lay down, like a wounded animal, and you gave up. You didn't stand up for yourself, you didn't stand up for your kids and you didn't stand up for me.

JONNY

So it's my fault? It's all my fault that the house is falling apart and Em is clinically depressed and won't go to school and Jack's marriage is over? It's all my doing?

SARAH

This is the most awake I've seen you in years.

JONNY

Don't fucking patronize me, Sarah. I will fight for my family. Don't ever say otherwise.

Pause.

Look, if I've let you be in charge -

SARAH

Let me?

JONNY

Right. If you've been the one in charge, it's because you're good at it. You were always the strong one. I admit that. I can't be the alpha male providing for his family. But we knew that. We have different strengths. And we're good parents. We're a good team.

There's all this pressure. So much pressure to provide. To be the man. To put the... sun-dried - you know what - on the table. And I just don't think I'm up to it. Was I supposed to be born the hunter-gatherer? Or should I have been conditioned that way? Do I blame my relationship with my father? My mother? With you? I've so many questions and there's not an answer in sight. But with you I can ask those questions. And not be afraid to get the wrong answer.

SARAH

You don't want to hear the answer, but you've got to ask the question.

JONNY

Yeah. Maybe.

Sarah, you make me feel safe.

SARAH

And who makes me feel safe?

JONNY

Don't I?

SARAH

Not lately. Not in a long time. I don't feel very protected. I feel like a little girl. I haven't felt this terrified and... helpless in a long time. I'm completely adrift.

JONNY

Don't let go of my hand, Sarah. Don't let go of my hand.

Pause.

SARAH

We'd go out at first light. And return at sundown. And our parents wouldn't have to worry. The front doors would be unlocked. We would actually speak to our neighbors. They weren't people to be suspicious of. They were people to know, to be friends with, to grow up alongside. I want

to give our kids room to grow but I'm scared to death of letting them live. I don't want to let them out of my sight.

JONNY

What are you on about?

SARAH

I don't know.

Pause.

JONNY

Remember when we -

SARAH

Remember when we spoke in the present tense? Remember when things used to actually happen to us? In the moment? When things weren't so fucking mapped out.

Pause.

When did our childhood friends become just the answer to security questions on our email account? Now we meet these old friends out of some form of duty and listen to the try to justify their bullshit existences and pretend to be happy for their failures.

JONNY

Are you really that unhappy with your life?

SARAH

Yes. I am.

What would our parents say if they could see us now?

JONNY

I know what my mother would say...

Sarah can't bring herself to laugh.

SARAH

We make the same mistakes at them. Can't we at least make them better?

It's not worth the effort. Loving me.

JONNY

That's not for you to decide. We love you. I love you. And I hope that you can learn to love yourself.

SARAH

Oh, spare me...

Will we ever be what the world meant for us?

JONNY

And what was that?

SARAH

I don't know.

JONNY

I don't think the world meant for us to be anything.

SARAH

A long time ago, it felt like it did.

JONNY

Maybe.

Pause.

SARAH

What can you say to a child? What can you say that they will understand, that they can use? As parents, we're supposed to have all the answers, but how do we even know what the questions are until they ask us? They assume that we have any fucking idea, any clue, what we're doing. But we don't know where to start. I'm not sure when it was I was meant to know. Was there supposed to be a time when my parents had passed on all they knew and all of a sudden, I'd

become an adult? When they said, 'Okay, enough now, I've taught you for eighteen years; if you're lucky you'll have a few years on your own to swim free before you put the water wings on a child of your own and try to teach them how not to drown.' Perhaps that's what it is. The child looks at the parent and sees them waving. But we're not waving, we're drowning.

Does this make me a bad parent?

JONNY

Of course not. I'm still a big kid. Obviously.

SARAH

How can we bring a child into this world? It seems so selfish. What can we offer them?

JONNY

Do you regret it? Do you regret them?

SARAH

Is it bad to say 'sometimes'?

JONNY

Uh, well...

SARAH

I know, I know it's bad. I feel awful.

JONNY

No, don't -

SARAH

No. Please. Please don't be nice to me.

JONNY

What?

SARAH

You don't need to be nice and lie to me. I'm not perfect. I think things I shouldn't think. I feel things I shouldn't feel. I'm human.

JONNY

I know, I -

SARAH

Stop being so fucking understanding. Stop it. Let me be a fuck-up. Let me be wrong.

JONNY

I'm on your side. Don't forget that.

SARAH

I feel very alone.

JONNY

I want to hold you and tell you that everything's going to be okay.

SARAH

As nice as that sounds, I don't think I want to be held right now.

Say something. Say something to make it better.

JONNY

You know I always say the wrong thing.

SARAH

Say anything.

JONNY

Would we still be together if we hadn't had kids?

She doesn't say anything.

How close am I to losing you?

Pause.

Tell me how much you need me to love. And I'll do it.

SARAH

That was the wrong thing to say.

JONNY

Then tell me what to say!

Pause.

Sarah leaves.

The grass grows, the trees moan, foxes shriek, owls screech.

SCENE 6

Morning. Jonny is up a ladder trying to remove ivy and fix crumbling brickwork. Em comes out. She's just woken up.

EM

Where's Jack?

JONNY

I don't know.

EM

Where's mom?

JONNY

I don't know.

EM

I don't understand.

JONNY

Neither do I.

EM

What are you doing?

JONNY

I'm fixing the house.

EM

Why?

JONNY

Enough with the questions please!

EM

What am I supposed to do?

JONNY

Don't be a passenger in your own life. Cut your own path.

EM

Um. Ok.

Jonny pulls a brick out and a whole section falls.

JONNY

Fuck!

EM

Dad, you're making a mess.

JONNY

Don't! Just don't, alright?

EM

We should get someone in who knows what they're doing.

JONNY

What? I don't know what I'm doing?

EM

Evidently not.

JONNY

Thanks a bunch, Em.

Go do your homework or something.

EM

I don't have any.

JONNY

Right Of course. Go do... something. Just leave me in peace.

EM

Dad, I want to help.

JONNY

You can't. Like you said, we need a professional.

EM

Let's go inside and call one then.

JONNY

We can't afford one, Em.

EM

What do you mean?

JONNY

We have no money. Less than none.

EM

But - wait - what?

JONNY

I'm sorry. We messed up.

EM

Where's mom?

JONNY

She's gone.

EM

Where?

JONNY

I don't know. We're going round in circles here.

EM

Does she know? About the money?

JONNY

She's the one who told me.

I didn't know.

EM

But how?

JONNY

Jesus Christ, Em! I don't know! I don't know where it all went wrong. I wasn't aware. I've had my eyes closed for a long time.

EM

So what do we do now?

JONNY

Look, Em, if I had any answers, I'd give them to you but I don't, so drop it.

EM

You know nothing, Jonny Snow.

JONNY

All too true.

EM

When did - forget it.

JONNY

I got drunk last night. And high. Your mother and I... talked. She walked out on me. Looks like she walked out on us. Your brother probably went out drinking.

EM

I'm worried about them. This isn't like them. Well, it's like him, but it's not like mom.

JONNY

I think she just needed some space. Things...

EM

Yeah?

JONNY

Things are tough. And I don't see a way out.

EM

You know, I actually slept last night.

JONNY

You did? That's great, love.

EM

Yeah. The whole night.

Well, most of it.

JONNY

The whisky must have knocked you out!

EM

I had a dream.

JONNY

The old one?

EM

No, a new one, actually. One of those ones where you wake up before it ends and you're disappointed you didn't get to see it through.

JONNY

You always want to know the end.

EM

Yeah. People waste so much time. Let's get shit done, you know?

JONNY

I'm glad to hear you say that. It's a long time since you've been motivated.

EM

Yeah, I dunno. I just would rather feel angry than sad and I'd rather feel that I'm using the anger than let the anger use me.

JONNY

So how are you going to use it?

EM

I don't know yet.

Well I want to travel. See the world. Live in a hostel, something like that.

JONNY

I did a bit of traveling, you know?

Living in a hostel, it's quite something. People from all over the world. Different cultures, languages, backgrounds. This great melting pot of people coming and going, everyone on an adventure. And you know what it's like? Shit. Can't understand a fucking word anyone's saying, your stuff gets stolen, everything smells of B.O. and you can never get any fucking sleep. Don't do it.

EM

You're a ray of sunshine this morning, father.

JONNY

I'm not going to stop you going. I think it'll be good for you. Just don't expect me to pay.

EM

Thanks dad.

I don't know where I'm going but things are going to be better when I'm done. While I'm alive, I'll make tiny changes to earth. And I should start now, and do as much as I can as soon as I can. Why walk when you can run? One day you won't be able to run anymore so why live slowly today?

JONNY

Come here, give me a hug.

She goes to him, he holds her.

I'm proud of you.

EM

Is everything going to be ok?

JONNY

I don't know. I hope - I don't know.

Tell me about your dream.

EM

I'm in a treehouse way way up and I'm sitting on a little rug in the middle of the wooden floor and I'm surrounded by all of my memories. It's like they're all playing on a loop, but all of them all at once, simultaneously playing out on screens surrounding me three sixty. But not like they're on TVs or computers or whatever. They're not 2D. They're in the room with me, versions of me, of you, of mom. And...

The music drowns out Em.

SCENE 7

The house creaks, the sound of birds and other animals, nature takes over a little further.

Morning, a couple of days later. Jack, in muddy t-shirt and shorts, a muddy rucksack on the floor next to him, is on the phone in the kitchen.

JACK

No grandma, I won't be seeing her again. No grandma. No grandma... No grandma. Look, when I said red skin I didn't mean Native American. No, grandma, you can't say Ind - you can't say that these days. Well, you should say Native American. No, I'm telling you, that's what you should say. I'm not lecturing you, I'm not. It might sound like I'm lecturing you but I don't mean to. I didn't say you're old enough to know better, those are your words. Well, by red skin I meant... What? No, not burnt... Yes... I know you need to be careful in 'the great outdoors'. No I'm not mocking you. Yes, grandma. Of course I did. No, I don't have sunburn. Look, do you want me to tell you about the girl or not? I'm sorry I raise my voice. Okay then. I said her skin was almost red because it was such a beautiful deep brown... Yes, she had brown skin. Is that ok? Yes, just checking. Her ancestors were Indian. No - no. I don't mean - no, yes, that's right, Native Americans, that's right. I mean India the country. Yes. Yes. You know what, I've actually got to go, grandma, so - yeah, yeah, sorry about that. Talk soon though, yeah? Ok. Love you. Bye-bye.

He hangs up.

Jesus Christ.

Em comes in. He wipes his phone on his dirty t-shirt.

Face-sweat all over my phone. Grandma making me nervous.

EM

You stink. How are you?

JACK

Oh, you know, living it medium, taking it easy.

EM

You really stink, by the way.

JACK

Thanks.

Advice for living? Always clean your account downstairs after making a deposit.

EM

Are you talking about your dick?

JACK

Yes.

EM

That's disgusting!

JACK

Not if you keep it clean.

As long as one is clean in the pants department, one is all good.

EM

Ugh. Welcome back.

JACK

Thanks for having me.

EM

You going to tell me where the hell you were all weekend?

JACK

Isn't it obvious? Music festival.

Em walks over to him and slaps him.

EM

You should have told me. I was worried sick about you.

JACK

Sorry... *mom.*

EM

Oh fuck you.

JACK

I'm kidding. Where is she, by the way?

EM

I don't know.

JACK

Is she out?

EM

She's gone.

JACK

What?

EM

She left.

JACK

Like, *left* left?

EM

Yeah. I think so.

JACK

When?

EM

Same time as you.

I'd hoped she was with you.

JACK

No, she didn't say anything. Did they have a fight?

EM

Yeah. He's a mess.

JACK

Well, have you tried calling her?

EM

Of course I've tried calling her. I'm not a fucking idiot.

JACK

Sorry, just trying to help.

So. What now?

EM

We wait for her to come back.

JACK

Don't count the days, make the days count.

EM

She said that.

JACK

Yeah.

EM

It's dumb.

JACK

Is it?

EM

Yeah.

JACK

Oh. I like it.

EM

You would.

JACK

Alright.

Jack goes to the record player, picks out an LP.

This, little one, is called a 'record'.

EM

I know.

JACK

A 'record', also known as a 'gramophone record' -

EM

I know.

JACK

Or a 'vinyl record' -

EM

I know.

JACK

Ok, well -

EM

Records are what old people and hipsters like you listen to.

JACK

I'm not a hipster.

EM

Yes you are.

JACK

No I'm not!

EM

Look at how you're dressed.

JACK

Fine....

EM

And your hair.

JACK

Fine! Anyway -

EM

And that weird bracelet thing.

JACK

Anyway -

EM

What's this all about? I tell you mom's missing and you play a stupid record.

JACK

If you'd listen... this record is mom and dad's favorite.

EM

What is it?

JACK

I'm going to tell you, if you shut up.

EM

Ok.

JACK

It's called 'I'm Set Free'. It's by The Velvet Underground.

EM

Play it.

They listen to the whole song. Jack looks at her the whole time. She looks away. They don't move.

It's kinda depressing.

JACK

But it's called 'I'm Set Free'!

EM

I dunno, it made me sad.

JACK

Because it made you think of mom and dad?

EM

Maybe. I dunno.

Why are so many great artists depressed?

I'm not saying you need to be depressed to be an artist, or be an artist to be depressed, but so many of the great ones were such damaged people.

JACK

Depression is a sign of intelligence. It's fashionable.

EM

You're an idiot.

JACK

Some people think it's cool. People like signing up for flaws they don't have. It's white, middle-class guilt or something.

EM

Like I said, you're an idiot.

JACK

Yes. I am. And I'm under no illusions that I'm a great artist. I'm a passable DJ. I make a mediocre attempt to play the work of artists and hope that they make me look good so I can somehow appear to be an artist in my own right.

EM

I really can't stress just how much of an idiot you are.

JACK

I admire your tenacity.

EM

Do you think I'm one of those fakers? The white, middle class posers?

JACK

No. Of course not. I didn't mean -

EM

Ok.

JACK

I'm sorry.

EM

It's fine. Thank you. Just try being a depressed teenage girl at high school.

JACK

Yikes!

EM

Yeah.

JACK

Have you, um, have you, you know, been doing ok?

EM

Not bad, I guess. Not had much time to think about it, the past few days, you know? The distraction has been nice. Well, not -

JACK

Yeah, not -

EM

No.

I think too much. I think that's my problem, I think. Um, yeah.

JACK

Yeah.

You should do what I do. I don't think at all. I'm blissfully ignorant and I sail through everything without a care in the world and I'm happy all the time.

EM

Are you?

JACK

No.

Pause.

Did you know that one in seven dwarves is Happy?

EM

What?

JACK

I said, one in seven dwarves is Happy.

EM

How do you know that?

JACK

No, it's a joke.

EM

I don't get it.

JACK

Like the movie.

EM

What?

JACK

Snow White.

EM

Oh. Okay.

She still doesn't get it.

JACK

Forget it.

EM

No wait, tell me again.

JACK

It's not funny. Just a stupid...

EM

Ok.

Why do you think we can speak to the ones we love in such a way, a way we would never speak to others?

JACK

What do you mean?

EM

I don't know. Like, why do we always give each other a hard time? Why do we always take things out on each other?

JACK

Because... we're here. It's convenient. And that's what brothers and sisters do. That's what families do.

EM

It's sad. You know, that we can't be more honest with each other. More like in the movies.

JACK

That isn't real, though. Families don't do that. All families are dysfunctional and fucked up in their own little ways but at the end of the day, they function, and life goes on, and that's all she wrote.

EM

Maybe you're not such an idiot.

JACK

Oh no, I definitely am. Huge.

EM

Yeah. Of course you are. What was I thinking?

JACK

All is forgiven.

EM

What do you want to be when you grow up?

JACK

What? I am grown up.

EM

Right. Yeah. Okay. What do you want to be when you're actually grown up?

He thinks for a while.

JACK

I want to be the boring old fuck propping up the bar, drinking whisky and talking the ear off any poor fucker in spitting distance.

EM

Well, you'll be good at that.

JACK

True.

What about you?

EM

I actually think that I really do want to be a poet.

You know, I type poetry into my phone in case I get in an accident and people search my phone to find out who I am. I want them to think of me as the type of person who has poetry in their life.

JACK

That's so fucking pretentious. Delete my number from your phone. Please.

EM

No!

JACK

I'm serious. Delete me. I don't want to be the sort of person who has a person in their life who has poetry in their life.

EM

You don't want poetry in your life?

JACK

Not angsty teenage musings typed in a phone!

EM

It's not - Ugh, you are such a dick.

JACK

We're arguing again.

EM

Yeah that honesty thing felt weird. Couldn't keep it up.

JACK

Openness and being *nice*.

EM

Ugh. Gross.

JACK

Who wants that?!

They laugh a little.

Well, I should go, you know...

EM

Sure.

He makes to leave, stops.

JACK

Look, Em. Are smart people ever happy? Do you ever see a picture of fucking - Freud - smiling? You're smart, pal. But I want you to be happy. Look, I'll be honest with you. Ok? Are you ready

for this? I know we haven't always seen eye to eye and you think I'm a bit of a fuck-up but - stop nodding, don't fucking nod, stop looking so smug! Look, I know we don't really go in for the whole honesty thing round these here parts. Following this so far? Got it? Good. Just wanted to make sure you understood the complexity of what's going on here between us in this very moment. I'm going to say to you, in words, how I actually feel.. For one night only! - Alright, alright! I'm getting on with it. I love you, pal. I really do. When I say I want you to be happy, I mean it. Right now, I'm fucked. My life is... fucked. Our family is fucked. Our fucking... house is fucked. And this is the important bit. Right here. We're counting on you pal. We're all counting on you. See, the way it should be is that it doesn't matter that our house is falling to pieces 'cause we've all got each other, and that's all we need, but we don't have each other, we've got no one to lean on, 'cause we're also falling to pieces and somebody has to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. And you, my friend, are all the king's horses and all the king's men and we're all looking to you so... whaddya got?

EM

What makes you think I've got the answers?

I don't.

JACK

You're the smart one. I'm the idiot. I just hoped

EM

Yeah, yeah, go ahead.

He picks up his bag, head down, and goes to walk past her, but stops, gives her an awkward hug without eye contact. Then leaves. She smiles. She puts on another record.

SCENE 8

*Night. Outside. **Jonny** is up a ladder, trying to fix the house again. He has a bottle of whisky with him. **Jack** comes out.*

JACK

Dad.

JONNY

Oh, you're back.

JACK

Been back all day.

JONNY

Have you?

JACK

Got back this morning.

JONNY

Didn't see you.

JACK

Yeah, I've been sleeping off the weekend.

You weren't here this morning.

JONNY

I was buying stuff to fix the house. Not that I can afford it.

JACK

And how's that going for you?

JONNY

Shit. It's going shit.

JACK

Yeah, thought as much.

Tea break?

JONNY

Sure.

Jack hands him the whisky bottle. Jonny takes a swig.

So. Where you been all weekend?

JACK

I was at a music festival. I told mom.

A moment.

JONNY

Yeah.

Want a drink?

JACK

I'm fine.

JONNY

Go on.

JACK

I've just slept off a three day hangover.

JONNY

What, are you fucking teetotal? Have a drink.

JACK

Go on then.

They share the whisky.

JONNY

So how was the festival?

JACK

I believe I owe them a new dancefloor after burning theirs up last night.

JONNY

Good weekend then?

JACK

More importantly, how was yours?

JONNY

You go first.

JACK

Well, I had an enlightening discussion with a stranger about my penis while pissing on a fence.

JONNY

Right...

JACK

The lines for the toilets were just stupid so a bunch of guys were pissing on this fence behind the toilets. I joined them, took the little man out and started to piss. This guy on my right turns to me and says "You act like it's a fire hose." I was like, "Excuse me?" and he says "It's like you're unloading a heavy weight there." So I say "Two things: Why were you looking? And thank you." He's like "Why do we do that though, you know? Why do guys put on a show at the urinal? What are we trying to prove?"

And he was right! We do that, we totally do that. And I'm not checking other guys out or whatever, but I've definitely noticed other guys doing that, and I had no idea I did it, but of course I do. And like he says, what are we trying to prove? Is it just some alpha male macho bullshit thing?

You know, I always find it looks bigger from the side? You know, I squat a bit when I take it out, make it seem bigger? Like, looking down on it, I'm kinda like, "oh really that's it huh?" Wishful thinking, I suppose, that it'd be bigger than it is. And maybe this side view, you know, like, in the mirror or whatever, is deceptive. But hey, not worth worrying about really. Nothing you can do about it. "You can only piss with the cock you've got." A wise man once said that. Gandhi... or the Dalai Lama. Winston Churchill maybe. Or maybe I made it up. If I did, stick it on my gravestone. It's a fucking brilliant piece of advice.

JONNY

How illuminating.

The best advice my dad ever gave me was "don't be a dick". The best advice I ever heard though? "One foot in front of the other". That's all I'll give you. One foot in front of the other.

JACK

Not bad.

JONNY

Not bad.

So you had a good time?

JACK

A festival for me is the perfect escape from reality. The real world seems so far away. A weekend in utopia. If utopia was filled with loud music and legal highs and casual sex and alcohol. And illegal highs.

JONNY

Did you partake?

JACK

In which one?

JONNY

Any slash all of the above.

JACK

Hmm.. All except one.

Legal highs are for dicks.

JONNY

I have a high that is legal depending on which state you're in.

JACK

And if you smoke it, you might just end up in a different state!

JONNY

Very good.

Want some?

JACK

Why the hell not?

Jonny goes to his jacket, takes out his stash and rolls a joint throughout the next few lines, which they smoke through the rest of the scene.

Next cool thing that happened. We're seeing... some band. I can't remember who. I was pretty out of it. We're near the front, there's a mosh pit ahead of us. It's lame, obviously, all these asshole teenagers trying to impress their girlfriends. We consider joining in, dig a few elbows in, show them they're playing with the big boys, but we decide to just keep dancing as the music and the drink and the drugs are giving us a peaceful vibe. And I feel this tap in my lower back, turn round, no one there. Go back to the music. Another tap. Turn round, no one there. Turn back. Third tap, turn round, look down. Guy in a wheelchair asks me if he can get by me so he can get to the front. Through a fucking mosh pit! What a legend!

Jonny's attention has wandered off.

Dad?

JONNY

What's that son?

JACK

Were you listening?

JONNY

Yeah.

JACK

What did I say?

JONNY

Wheelchair.

JACK

Brilliant. Thanks dad.

JONNY

Sorry. Drifted off.

JACK

Are you doing alright? You coping?

JONNY

Not really, no.

JACK

So my marriage is over. I hope yours isn't too?

JONNY

I hope not.

JACK

What are you going to do about it?

JONNY

I haven't a fucking clue.

JACK

More whisky?

JONNY

It won't help.

JACK

Is that a no?

JONNY

Give me the bottle.

JACK

Here's something that'll cheer you up.

JONNY

What's that?

JACK

I got laid.

JONNY

Why would that cheer me up?

JACK

Solidarity.

JONNY

I'm sure it cheered you up.

JACK

It did. A bit.

I thought you'd be happy for me.

JONNY

Don't you want to be married anymore?

JACK

I do. Of course I do.

I just think that sometimes you have to admit that you've lost.

JONNY

You're telling me to give up?

JACK

No, I meant me. You've got to sort this out, dad. But my marriage is dead in the water. She doesn't love me anymore and nothing can change that.

JONNY

So you're just giving up?

JACK

Yeah. I am. I lost.

JONNY

You have to stand up for yourself.

JACK

Coming from you? You've let years pass you by without a fight. You lost your job, so you gave up. One thing gave up on you, so you gave up on everything. All you had left was mom and now she's gone, so what you going to do now?

JONNY

Don't lecture me.

JACK

You need it, dad. You need someone to wake you up. Mom tried, and she couldn't do it, so eventually she gave up too. Her giving up on you was only par for the course.

JONNY

Fuck.

JACK

Yeah. Exactly. Fuck.

JONNY

I'll work it out. I will.

JACK

Good man. But let's work it out in the morning. We're in no fit state right now.

JONNY

Agreed. Another drink?

JACK

Sure.

JONNY

I'm proud of you. Whatever happens.

JACK

Thanks dad.

JONNY

Now, tell me about this girl.

JACK

Alright. I can't remember her name and I'll never find her again. I think she might actually have been perfect, but she's probably cruel to animals or in a cult or something. She didn't stick around long enough for me to discover her flaws, if she has any.

JONNY

How did you meet her?

JACK

It was like the red sea parting.

JONNY

Ok...

JACK

Well, I'd just bought another overpriced, underpoured, pissy beer from a bar and then I tried to get back to the guys, which at these things is a nightmare and -

JONNY

Yes, thank you. I was young once.

JACK

Ok.

JONNY

What do you mean 'ok'?

JACK

Nothing. Fine. Ok.

JONNY

You don't believe that -

JACK

Dad, Jesus, I get it. I believe that you were young once. No need to be so -

JONNY

No, I mean you don't believe that I had a life before spawning you little brats.

JACK

Oh, thanks.

JONNY

No, I -

JACK

Fuck, dad.

JONNY

Look, I'm sorry. You know what I mean. It's just the phases you go through, the chapters, you know? It'll be the same when you have kids.

JACK

Well when the fuck is that going to be? Not happening any time soon.

JONNY

Son, I'm sorry. You know what I'm like, never know -

JACK

It's ok.

JONNY

When to shut up, just keep -

JACK

Dad. It's ok. Like, ok ok.

JONNY

Don't know when to stop myself.

JACK

I know you don't. I'm stopping you. Shut up.

Jack checks to see that Jonny isn't going to speak.

JONNY

This is me not speaking.

JACK

Well, keep it like that.

Anyway. Where was I?

JONNY

Pissy beer.

JACK

Thank you. So I'm trying to find the guys, no phone service, people everywhere.

And this gap opens in the crowd and there she is, bathed in golden sunlight, and everything is in slow motion.

JONNY

How many drugs were you on?

JACK

Enough.

And we make eye contact. A beautiful girl. Skin so brown it could be red. Like... scorched desert sand. Like a fucking terracotta warrior.

JONNY

The terracotta warriors are more of a sandy color.

JACK

Shit. Really? I thought that was so poetic, too.

JONNY

Sorry buddy.

JACK

You really don't want me to be happy, do you?!

JONNY

Please, continue with your fantasy.

JACK

It's real! It happened! And it happened exactly how I describe it!

JONNY

Got it.

JACK

Then she starts walking towards me. I'm frozen to the spot. I'm a sitting duck. And she says "Hi" and I say "Sorry" and I don't know why and she laughs and I go bright red -

JONNY

Like a terracotta warrior.

JACK

Like a fucking terracotta warrior, yes. And she asks what I'm drinking and I say "twelve dollar piss" and ask her if she wants some of it and she says no, because I'm a stranger and I might have drugged it and I ask "why would I drug my own drink?" and she says "good point" and we laugh and I'm getting confident now, I've realized she's only human and I offer to buy her one and say she can choose to drug it herself later if she likes and she just kind of stares at me weirdly then says "sure" so we go get her a drink and the line is huge so we just talk and talk for ages and I'm relaxed and I've got this and I'm playing it cool and then some asshole walks into me and I spill my beer on her and she's totally cool about it and I awkwardly try to dry her and she's like "woah, steady there, we just met" and I go red again, fucking terracotta again and I burn a hole in her dress with my cigarette while gesticulating wildly to apologize and she just laughs and her laugh is like music and I just take that in and take her in for a while and that's all I hear and all I need to hear and it's perfect.

Then she looks at me and is like "hello?" and I realize I've zoned out and I'm grinning like an idiot and I've totally not got this and I'm not playing it cool and I'm completely in love with her in this moment and I just say "you're lovely, you're so lovely and I hope you know how lovely you are" and she smiles and maybe she blushes a little, but it's obviously hard to tell and she leans in and kisses me and asks if I want to go back to her tent, so we abandon the drink and go back to her tent.

JONNY

And then what?

Jack raises an eyebrow.

I'm kidding! I don't need any more details.

So, you seeing her again?

JACK

That's the thing, I must've fallen asleep. When I woke up she was gone. Can't remember her name, can just about remember her face. I got up and staggered back to my tent and passed out again.

Maybe it didn't happen. Maybe it was all a dream.

JONNY

Was it worth it?

JACK

I think so, yeah. Felt... cathartic. Or more like an exorcism. I purged something. I won't see her again. It was perfect. And that's all it was.

And I don't know, I feel this kind of sense of calm right now. Maybe I've made my peace.

JONNY

Maybe it's the booze.

JACK

Maybe. But I feel like something in the pit of my stomach has passed.

JONNY

Like you've taken a good shit.

JACK

Like I've done a monster dump and I'm ready for dinner.

They laugh a little.

You know, it got nasty. Towards the end.

JONNY

The marriage?

JACK

Yeah.

She said I was a cloud hanging over her. Why not a scab on her knee or a cancer growing inside her?

JONNY

All valid.

JACK

Thanks.

JONNY

I didn't mean -

JACK

I know.

Weird to think that there was so much love at the start. More than I thought I had in me. I didn't know I could give so much to another person till she came along.

And for that to be gone... To have given it all away and to realize I don't get it back? And that she didn't want to give me any more in return? It gave me this heavy anxiety, a sort of weight in my chest. And I think that's finally gone. And I haven't given anything to this other girl. I feel like we met each other halfway and didn't give any part of ourselves away for free. Just a gesture, you know? This is me, that's you, let's share in each other for an evening, just a little while, then eighty-six Jack, see you later, nice knowing you for a little bit.

JONNY

Would you do it again? Marriage?

Jack thinks for a while.

JACK

I honestly have no idea.

JONNY

Yeah, I guess you're not that far from it yet.

JACK

No.

JONNY

If I could go back, and start again with your mother and try to get it right, and not make all the mistakes I made, I wouldn't do it.

JACK

Why not?

JONNY

Because I wouldn't have my favorite mistake.

JACK

Are you saying I was a mistake?

Jonny looks at him.

Dad!

JONNY

No, I'm kidding. You were planned.

It's your sister who's the mistake.

JACK

Fuck!

JONNY

Don't tell her! I shouldn't have said that.

JACK

Dad?

JONNY

Yes?

JACK

Of course I'm going to tell her.

JONNY

Jack -

JACK

I'm going to save it up and use it at a moment of maximum impact.

JONNY

Brilliant.

JACK

Wow. There was me thinking for a minute you were going to tell me you loved me.

JONNY

I do, Jack. I love you.

A moment.

JACK

Wow.

JONNY

Yup, feels -

JACK

Weird.

JONNY

Yeah.

JACK

Shall we just go back to talking about dicks?

JONNY

Probably for the best.

They laugh.

Come here.

Jonny puts his arm around Jack. Jack does the same. Birdsong. The sun starts to come up.

JACK

It's getting light.

JONNY

Yeah. I should get some sleep. Lots to do tomorrow.

He kisses Jack on the head, gets up.

Coming in?

JACK

No. I'll sit a while.

JONNY

Ok.

Everything's going to be...

JACK

Yeah.

Night dad.

JONNY

Night.

Jonny starts to leave. Jack drinks whisky and watches the sun. Jonny pauses a moment to watch him, then goes.

SCENE 9

Jonny, Em and Jack fix the house, cut back the trees, weed the garden, clean, play records, etc. Day turns to night and to day again and to night and to day. Late afternoon. They stop for a break.

EM

I lie on the path next to the grass because the sign says 'keep off' and I don't want to upset anyone. Especially the grass. That's the kind of person I am.

JACK

You seem pretty happy upsetting me.

EM

Yeah, but that's my job, and most people have jobs they don't want to do, but they have to.

JACK

I thank you for your pains.

EM

Like, I made out - well I say 'made out', I pecked him, like a bird, I couldn't bring myself to make out with him, this poor boy at a school dance thing. I could tell he had never been kissed and he really desperately needed to lose his virgin lips, he didn't just want it, he needed this to happen or he'd simply die, just expire there right in front of everyone, melt like if the Wicked Witch of the West was a gangly, spotty teenage boy. And he came up to me and asked if I'd like to dance. And I said 'Why don't we just get down to business?' and all the color drained from him, and he just started to sweat and his mouth was flapping but he couldn't say anything and I thought I'd maybe killed him right there so I gave him a kiss. The kiss of life.

JONNY

How was it?

EM

I don't remember. You never remember your second. My first though, that I'll never forget. He'd kissed every girl at school, so I was the awkward spotty teenager in this story, *desperate* for validation.

JONNY

And how was that?

EM

Kissing him was like sitting on a warm toilet seat.

JONNY

And how's that then?

EM

Well, you know someone's been there before you and left a trace of their business and you don't feel good about it.

JACK

Ugh, that's disgusting.

EM

You're one to talk. I don't want to imagine the things - in fact, I don't want to imagine any of it.

JACK

Please don't. I don't want to scar you for life. Also, you're my sister. So, again, I don't want to scar you for life.

JONNY

Thanks guys.

Oh, Em, I nearly forgot. I wrote you a poem.

EM

You -

JONNY

It's a haiku in fact. Um, here we...

I'm no acrobat

But I'd bend over backwards

To make you happy'

EM

Oh, dad.

JONNY

Do you -

EM

I love it.

JONNY

Good.

So...

Any boys on the horizon now, Em?

EM

No, they're all idiots.

JACK

Guilty.

EM

I know that girls mature more quickly, but *come on*. Have you seen a modern teenage boy lately?
They're neanderthals.

JONNY

Trust me, we've been that way since - well, since we *were* neanderthals.

JACK

We could all have soulmates and walk past them every day in the street. Who knows when you'll
find the right person. *If* you'll find the right person.

EM

Always bringing down the mood, bro.

JACK

I hope you do.

EM

Well I'm in no rush, and if this family's form is anything to go by...

The sound of footsteps. Sarah walks in.

JONNY

You came back.

A moment. No one knows what to do. Then Em nudges Jack.

EM

Jack, shall we -

JACK

Yeah, that thing -

They make to go inside. Em turns at the last moment, waves and mouths 'Hi mom', then goes in. Silence for a while.

JONNY

Hi.

SARAH

Hi.

JONNY

You came back.

SARAH

I did.

JONNY

The house...

SARAH

You've been -

JONNY

Fixing it -

SARAH

Trying to -

JONNY

Well, yes, trying to -

SARAH

Fix it.

It looks good.

JONNY

Thanks.

SARAH

Better. Looks better.

JONNY

Yeah.

Want to sit down?

SARAH

No.

Not yet.

JONNY

Are you staying?

SARAH

Maybe. I'm not sure yet.

Do you think we've learned too much? We're too aware? The more we learn, the more we know.
The more we feel, the more we hurt.

JONNY

Um, yeah.

SARAH

I want to be innocent again.

JONNY

Were you ever?

SARAH

Is that a joke?

JONNY

No.

SARAH

I want to start again.

JONNY

With me?

SARAH

I don't know.

JONNY

Then why did you come back?

SARAH

I don't know.

JONNY

And why did you leave?

She just looks at him. The sun is going down.

It's quiet out. Really quiet. Like the night's waiting.

SARAH

I don't remember the last day I didn't think about death.

JONNY

Time flies when you're having life.

SARAH

Something like that.

Before we know it, we're soaring six feet under.

It's over so soon, so we try our best to love, and dance when we can.

I spent the past few days wandering. I left the car somewhere, don't know where, doesn't seem to matter. Searching, trying to find something. I saw cities and towns and farms and rivers and mountains and something's coming. There's a vibration in the ground and in the air and in the water. But it's as if the humans can't feel it. Or they're doing their best to ignore it. Worrying over petty concerns. Houses, cars, bills, jobs, diets, politics, TV, the news, the internet. The parts we play to convince others. The animals, though. There's something going on. They know what's happening. They're saying 'We used to run wild. Stop fretting over nothing. Time to make some noise. 'And if there is a god, I think he's running scared. The world is getting too fucked, too fast. Are we even worth saving? Why shouldn't God just jump ship?

So I wandered, barely ate, barely slept. I didn't want to miss anything. I had to take it in. There's a movie playing in my head and it's directed by Terrence fucking Malick. These snapshots of nature, of moments lost in time, fragments of contact and destruction, kisses and violence. And I don't know what to make of it. I don't know what to do with it. All this knowledge, this experience, this learning. It feels like we've been taught the wrong things, or been taught them the wrong way. Nothing makes sense to me the way it did before. I've some idea of where I'm from and only hope for where I'm going. And I wonder if I even have that. Hope.

I don't know what I'm saying.

I need to dance out of time.

JONNY

I'll dance with you.

SARAH

Not tonight. I'm too tired. Exhausted, in fact. I've just realized how tired I am.

JONNY

Let's get you some rest.

SARAH

No. I need to see the sun come up.

JONNY

It's just gone down.

SARAH

It'll be up again soon.

Will you sit with me and watch it come up?

JONNY

Of course.

SARAH

I must sound mad. You must think I've lost it.

JONNY

No.

SARAH

Really?

JONNY

Yeah. It sounds... like you've found some clarity.

SARAH

Some, yeah. Clear as mud though.

She sits next to him. He looks at her as if for the first time.

JONNY

Hey you.

SARAH

Hey.

JONNY

You look...

SARAH

Tired?

JONNY

New. You look new.

Remember when we got lost in our own home? After we got married and we moved into our first apartment. It was all so new and exciting then.

SARAH

It only had four rooms. How could we get lost?

JONNY

You know what I mean.

SARAH

No, I don't think so.

JONNY

It was like an empire to us. It was huge. More space than we ever needed and it all belonged to us.

SARAH

We were renting, it didn't belong -

JONNY

Yeah but it *felt* like it belonged. Like we'd put a stamp on our own little piece of earth. That it was all ours. It was a new start.

SARAH

Yeah.

It felt like that here too.

For a while.

It all just makes me so sad. The passing of things. The passing of everything. The moving forward and the looking back. Life, you know.

JONNY

It is sad. It's sad and it's beautiful and all of it ours.

SARAH

I can't help but think of our parents.

After a while they start to fade. I'm not sure which part went first. Sometimes a smell reminds me. I'll just catch a scent and... it's like waking up. Most of the time they're muted. Volume and colors turned down or out of focus. Blurry. I think the voices were hardest to retain. I tried so hard to hold on to how they sounded, the racket they made when they were alive. But no. It's like trying to catch lightning in a bottle.

This is what they left us. This is what's left.

Did we do the right things with it?

JONNY

Who knows?

I'll never forget what your dad said to me when I asked his permission to marry you. He said 'let your good heart lead you home.'

SARAH

You do.

Have a good heart.

JONNY

'You are strong of heart

And when I see you smiling

I am strong of heart.'

SARAH

What's that from?

JONNY

From me. I wrote it. It's a haiku.

It's supposed to be for Em though, so don't tell her I gave it away.

SARAH

I like it.

JONNY

Are we going to be ok?

SARAH

I just want to believe that things are going to be different.

JONNY

They have to be different. Everything has changed. They can't go back to the way they were before.

SARAH

I want to believe in the great artists. I want to believe in Shakespeare. I want to believe in Paul Simon. I want to believe in humanity. I want to believe that mankind dragged itself up to meet the gods, and surpassed them.

JONNY

We did, we have.

And thank you for including Paul Simon in there.

SARAH

I thought you'd appreciate that.

But all those artists, you know? The great ones and the good ones and the shit ones and the ones we remember and the ones we forgot.

Somewhere at some time they made something beautiful and now no one remembers who they are. Like being one of the musicians in the studio with Brian Wilson on Pet Sounds. I want to create something good. Something that lasts, that matters.

JONNY

You already have.

SARAH

Have I?

JONNY

Those two in there. We made them.

SARAH

Who, them? Yeah, I suppose they didn't turn out too bad.

I just want to be good, I guess.

And I want love. Real love. All of it.

Love unending. Love unsteady. Love unburdened. Love unbroken. Love unknowable. Love unforgettable.

Because... well, because... how can love be wrong?

Pause. He takes her hand. It's the first time they've touched since she took care of his head wound. It feels brand new.

JONNY

Lying with you on the grass in the park near the house I grew up in, in the town I was born in. I wanted to share with you all of this that was mine and is me and could be yours.

I watched how you moved, and how the whole world seemed to move with you. And I couldn't move a muscle. I was terrified that if I even breathed, the illusion would shatter.

If you only knew the times I watched you fall asleep. The times I watched you walk away from me all the way to the horizon, before I'd ever turn my back on you. Let me be the one you're running to.

Sarah, there's no version of my life you're not in. You're mine. Not to possess or own. But to share a life with.

Nearly thirty years and I'm still jealous when someone else gets to share the day with you. I want you all to myself.

SARAH

Give all of yourself to me.

And you can have me for the rest of my life.

JONNY

I'm coming home to you, Sarah. The moment I feel your soil beneath my feet I realize I'm not afraid. That's when I know I'm home.

They look at each other.

What do we do now?

*She kisses him. He kisses back. They stand up, look at their home. The house falls down. It turns into dust. **Jack** and **Em** crawl out of the debris.*

EM

The sun's coming up.

Sarah pulls a bottle of whisky out of the rubble. She takes a drink, passes it along.

JACK

Is everything going to be ok?

They all look at each other.

EM

I've written a poem. It's called 'The Humans'. It doesn't rhyme. Ok.

She looks out to the audience.

'First they moved

And they roared

And then they learned

So they kept quiet

But then they read

And they spoke

And they sang

And they danced

Then they roared again.'

Pause.

Um.

Yeah.

Blackout.

END OF PLAY